

ED291665 1988-01-00 The African Social Studies Programme: An Effort to Improve Curriculum and Instruction across 17 African Nations. ERIC Digest.

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ERIC Identifier: ED291665

Publication Date: 1988-01-00

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Source: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education Bloomington IN.

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TEXT: As African nations achieved independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, they sought ways to change inherited educational systems to make them more suitable to the needs of new nations. "No courses in the curriculum were viewed as more closely

tioned to national aspirations than those dealing with the country, its people, and the responsibilities of citizenship" (Dondo, Krystall and Thomas, 1974, p. 6).

By the late 1960s, new approaches to inherited history and geography courses became known in Africa as "social studies." Eleven nations founded the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP), and continue to monitor the development of social studies curriculum and instruction in the continent. This digest examines (1) the origins and goals of ASSP, (2) ASSP's organization and operation, and (3) ASSP's major achievements and current challenges.

WHAT ARE THE ORIGINS AND GOALS OF THE AFRICAN SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAMME?

The ASSP is a nonpolitical and nonprofit intergovernmental organization of 17 African nations that stimulates, promotes, and monitors innovative curriculum. In September 1967, concerned educators from 11 African countries (Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia) met at Queen's College, Oxford with representatives of the U.S. Education Development Center (EDC) and the English Centre for Curriculum Renewal and Educational Development Overseas (CREDO) to discuss needs and priorities in curriculum development in Africa. Social studies was one of these priorities.

The fledgling organization wanted to promote curriculum development, research, and the development of new materials (Muyanda-Mutebi, 1984). ASSP would provide a core secretariat as a clearinghouse of ideas and would assist member states to organize national seminar courses, workshops, and conferences with both African and non-African educators. In order to work together more closely, the participating nations agreed to meet the following year in Mombasa, Kenya.

Twenty-five African educators, seven British, and six American representatives met at the Mombasa Conference of August 1968. There they addressed questions such as these: (1) What is social studies? (2) What should be the objectives in social studies education? (3) What approach should be used in teaching social studies?

The conference concluded that a new approach based on integration of the traditional subjects (history, geography, and civics), and some elements from economics, sociology, and anthropology, was needed.

Teaching methods were also to change. Inherited methods were criticized as didactic, passive, discouraging "the development of initiative, interest, excitement and joy of learning," and focusing "the attention of the African on a few abstract ideas that are usually unrelated to the economic activities, social aspirations, and political goals of his own people" (Report on a Conference of African Educators, EDC and CREDO, 1968, p. 6).

In describing the role of social studies in a changing society, the Conference articulated three areas where social studies could make a contribution: "national integration," "problems of rapid economic development," and "the promotion of self-confidence and initiative based on an understanding of one's own worth and of the essential dignity of man" (1968, p. 9). An additional benefit of social studies was that children would become capable of coping with social change without despising traditional values and institutions.

The participants agreed that one person from each African country represented would join an "Exploratory Committee," and thought it was advisable to begin with a process for exchanging information and mutual assistance. One year later, the Exploratory Committee became the Coordinating Committee of the African Social Studies Programme, the organization that would take up where the Mombasa Conference left off, and lead the social studies movement in Africa.

HOW IS THE ASSP ORGANIZED AND OPERATED?

The ASSP is organized by a Coordinating Committee composed of one government-appointed representative from each member country. These national coordinators are usually national curriculum developers, national inspectors, or university professors. An Executive Committee of six members is set up by the Coordinating Committee. The Committee works with the Executive Director and makes decisions on behalf of the Coordinating Committee. The Executive Director is responsible for day-to-day operations through the ASSP Secretariat in Nairobi, Kenya. The present Executive Director, Dr. Peter Muyanda-Mutebi, took the office in February 1984.

The ASSP is funded by member states at the rate of \$5,000 per annum in U.S. currency. Grants from private foundations, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and other sources have provided critical monies for conferences, workshops, and publications.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE ASSP?

The major accomplishments of the ASSP center on its role in supporting national efforts within member nations to introduce, develop, and expand social studies education. Perhaps the most significant accomplishments of the ASSP have been its considerable efforts in bringing African nations together to define social studies and articulate goals, content, and methods for Africa. Member nations agree that the "Social Studies Approach," or "ASSP Approach" as it is often called, has certain outcomes and methods.

ASSP stresses the study of the local and immediate before the foreign and remote. This local emphasis is seen as a nation-building tool.

The skills and attitudes which develop through social studies teaching are those

required by citizens in a free society. These skills are those of discovery (question-raising, observing, collecting, recording, classifying, and experimenting); critical thinking (analysis and inference); and problem-solving (planning, innovating, and decision-making). The attitudes expected of citizens are considered to be respect, appreciation, cooperation, and compassion.

ASSP stresses that these skills and attitudes can only be developed through participating in experiences which call for their use. Therefore, according to ASSP, social studies must be taught through inquiry, with students learning to ask and answer questions and solving their own problems.

ASSP also stresses that students need stimulation from a variety of media and the ability to express themselves through these media. Although ability to interpret and use the written word is important, it is also important to interpret interactions between people and the physical environment or the arrangement of a market or town.

The ASSP gives both educational legitimacy and hands-on technical aid to institutions and governments that are interested in social studies. The program has not only managed to bring together a cross-section of Africans to exchange ideas, materials, expertise, and personnel among participating member states, but it has also succeeded in the development of a common language in social studies across the African continent.

The ASSP has sponsored a number of international, subregional and in-country activities geared towards promoting the teaching of social studies. It also produces a variety of informative and useful teaching materials such as learning units on topics that cut across national boundaries in Africa.

As part of a review of ASSP effectiveness which was conducted during the March 1985 Seminar, the Coordinating Committee identified several ways in which the ASSP has influenced social studies in its respective countries. Thirteen coordinators presented evidence that ASSP has directly influenced national planning and policy with regard to social studies education. The methods most frequently mentioned were conferences, meetings, and seminars from which individuals carried back ideas and materials that affected policy and planning at the national level (ASSP 1985).

A variety of informative and useful teaching materials have been produced by the ASSP. Examples are (1) sourcebooks for each member state, as well as teacher's guides which go with each of the sourcebooks, (2) learning units on topics that cut across national boundaries in Africa, for example, "People are the Same" or "The Market," and (3) sourcebooks on "Population Education in Sub-Saharan Africa" (Muyanda-Mutebi, 1984.) The African Social Studies Forum is an ASSP publication which encourages a smooth flow of information among its member states.

ASSP has not been without its problems. Largely dependent upon contributions of its member nations, ASSP is constrained by scarcity of resources. Although ASSP wishes to remain an organization of African states, it is often forced to turn to international donor agencies and Western countries for funding for major seminars, conferences, and curriculum development efforts. The priorities of these donors have influenced the agenda of the ASSP.

Other problems stem from the innate sensitivity of the social studies subject matter. Education in citizenship, politics, and population, and even the teaching of a nation's history, have political implications and ramifications in contemporary Africa. A course on civics may become extremely controversial as leadership changes, a one-party state emerges, or coups d'etat refashion the government.

The ASSP operates under a Coordinating Committee made up of governmental appointees from 17 nations. The current member nations of ASSP are Botswana, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Finding common ground and agreement for action among these nations requires flexibility and broad commonalities (Hawes, 1979; Merryfield, 1985.)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under OERI contract. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.

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Document Type: Information Analyses---ERIC Information Analysis Products (IAPs) (071); Information Analyses---ERIC Digests (Selected) in Full Text (073);

Target Audience: Teachers, Practitioners

Available From: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 2805 East Tenth Street, Suite 120, Bloomington, IN 47405.

Descriptors: Curriculum Development, Curriculum Enrichment, Developing Nations, Foreign Countries, International Cooperation, International Educational Exchange, International Relations, Social Studies

Identifiers: Africa, African Social Studies Program, ERIC Digests

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