

## A Commentary

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# Is Citizenship Education Obsolete?

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*What kind of person is the "good citizen"? In answer to this query, social studies teachers now attempt to look beyond traditional citizenship education and the "new social studies" of the 1960's for more meaningful content and instructional strategies.*

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**C**ITIZENSHIP education has been the primary concern of the social studies since the term, "social studies," was introduced more than 50 years ago. This has not meant that we have been clear as to what citizenship was or how it was to be accomplished. Is a good citizen a person who complies, is orderly and law abiding? Or is it a person who questions, inquires, criticizes, and engages actively in the reform of the system? Can an accommodation between these different ideas be made? Is there a person who "fits in" and who at the same time "speaks out"? Are we really faced with a choice between a society characterized by dynamism, change, and pragmatic flexibility and a society characterized by static

institutions, resistance to change, ritualism, bureaucracy, and mechanistic organization? Certainly, our ideal citizen depends upon what kind of society we wish to have.

In 1969, a Commission on the Social Studies was appointed for ASCD. Its charge was to review the situation in social studies education and to develop a position paper concerning the place of the social studies in the curriculum as a whole. This effort was carried out by the members of the Commission, who wrote a number of short papers on different aspects of the social studies; then two writers took these short papers and developed a position statement from them which was acceptable to the total membership of the Commission. This report, *Social Studies for the Evolving Individual*, was published by ASCD in the summer of 1973.<sup>1</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> Francis P. Hunkins and Patricia F. Spears. *Social Studies for the Evolving Individual*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1973. 78 pp.

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article identifies the principal ideas of the position paper.

## Goals of Social Studies

Should the comprehensive social education of citizens be the uncompromised goal of the social studies? While the social sciences are instruments for the effective development of the evolving citizen, the social studies are not based primarily on the separate social sciences, however simplified or organized they are for purposes of teaching. The "new social studies movement" put a stress on the place of the social science disciplines which detracted from the original goal of the social studies, citizenship education.

Social studies is part of general education and is specifically concerned with the preparation of citizens for participation in a democratic society.<sup>2</sup> In support of this position, it should be emphasized that increasingly children learn more of their social behaviors from the informal education outside of the regular course structure than they learn within organized education.<sup>3</sup>

## The Evolving Individual

The traditional concept of the "good citizen" just is not adequate as we move toward the year 2000; likewise, some very negative implications have been attached to this concept over the years. Toffler<sup>4</sup> advocated that the schools must develop in youth the skills for learning, relating, and choosing. This implies that education is more than either socialization or the development of rationality. There are emotional and value components which must be included in the education of youth. The citizen of the future must carry out the comprehensive act of thinking, feeling, valuing, and doing. This

<sup>2</sup> James P. Shaver. "Social Studies: The Need for Redefinition." *Social Education* 31: 588; November 1967.

<sup>3</sup> Shirley H. Engle. "The Future of the Social Studies Education and NCSS." *Social Education* 34: 778-80; November 1970.

<sup>4</sup> Alvin Toffler. *Future Shock*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1970. p. 414.

is broader than the old term, "good citizen," and implies the importance of ongoing change.

Hence, the Commission coined the term, "evolving individual," as the primary concern of the social studies. Here, the real self is to be uncovered and actualized and, thus, self-definition, clarification of identity, and response to one's inner self are fostered. In order to achieve a sincere involvement in one's society, the student must find and know his intimate self. In the process of getting to know himself better and of becoming a more knowledgeable and responsible person, the student must confront the current problems of both an individual and social nature. This is suggested as the primary methodological strategy for the social studies.

## Purposes of the Social Studies

If the goal of the social studies is the social education of the evolving individual, then certain basic purposes must be included in social studies programs. These are:

1. *Socialization* which is aimed at helping the evolving individual to become an effective member of social groups.
2. *Decision Making* which is aimed at assisting the evolving individual to make effective use of his intellectual skills in reaching decisions about his social concerns.
3. *Values and Valuing* which are aimed at aiding the evolving individual to identify, examine, formulate, and evaluate his own values and to act in accord with his considered values.
4. *Citizenship* which is aimed at helping the evolving individual to use more effectively the processes of a representative-democratic government.
5. *Knowledge Acquisition* which is aimed at helping the evolving individual to acquire and utilize information and intellectual skills provided through the social sciences together with other organized disciplines in dealing with social concerns.

While it is not easy to criticize those exciting and stimulating days of the 1960's when great efforts were being made at curriculum reform, hindsight indicates that all was not well with the curriculum work accomplished in that period. Criticisms of the "new social studies" include the following:

1. The "new social studies" were subject centered. The number of possible disciplines offered in the public schools has been increased and the treatment of each expanded. However, little has been done to meld these separate disciplines into a social studies program which provides a total unified education for the evolving individual.

2. The "new social studies" ignored or minimized the position of values and valuing. Values were either taken for granted or treated in a shallow, sentimental fashion out of context with social problems and without any real recourse to the factual basis which the social sciences might supply.

3. The "new social studies" stressed the mastery of social science content which cannot alone guarantee an effectively functioning citizen. If the social science disciplines are to play a part in shaping the beliefs of citizens, then they must be put to practical use by the evolving citizen in meeting his real life problems. The probability of this utilization taking place is nil if the social sciences are taught as separate entities which are removed from any practical application to the social problems of youth and society.

## Problems of Traditional Programs

Civics has been the course in the social studies curriculum responsible for promoting "good citizenship." Civics education has been poorly conceptualized and at the secondary school levels has attempted to:

1. Bring the students a body of knowledge about the American political system.
2. Improve on the interpersonal skills of students.
3. Inculcate in students certain normative political values.

In order to survive, all societies transmit political orientations from one generation to the next. Coleman<sup>5</sup> has defined political socialization as "that process by which individuals acquire attitudes and feelings toward the political system and toward their role in it." This educational process involves all institutions in the society so the school is only one agency, but it has been hypothesized that the school is the most powerful institution in the socialization about the political system.<sup>6</sup>

There are those who hold that the school is an agent for maintaining sociopolitical orthodoxy and enforcing mass conformity.<sup>7</sup> The present school environment tends to emphasize authority and conformity. If we agree that the concomitant environment of the school is its most prevailing influence and that formal civics courses are not positively correlated with political beliefs, the task of the school would be:

1. To reshape the school environment into one which has the capacity for contributing favorably to the socialization of children.
2. To replace the present superficial and frequently irrelevant civic education courses with ones that are responsive to the needs of today's students.

## Implications for Change

If we are to reverse the negative impact of civics courses on the political socialization of youth, we are going to have to do more than instruct them in the methodologies of the political sciences. Our new program must be reality oriented in the following ways:

1. We must advance the student toward affective goals as well as cognitive objectives. Schools operate as if the student's access to

<sup>5</sup> James S. Coleman. "Introduction." *Education and Political Development*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965. p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Robert D. Hess and Judith V. Torney. *The Development of Basic Attitudes and Values Toward Government and Citizenship During Elementary School Years, Part I*. Chicago: University of Chicago Cooperation Research Project No. 1078, 1965. p. 377.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 377.

knowledge is through formal and informal experiences at school. Today, students come to school with a great range of experiences so that at times they are better informed and more experienced than those who are teaching them.

2. We must reshape the school environment into one where the total development of the student is fostered. Schools need to experiment with learning environments which place more responsibility for learning on the student. Frequently, social studies teachers have not utilized the human resources within the classroom and have not used the diverse cultural perspectives which ethnic-group students have brought to the learning situation. Ignoring the real resources available within the learning situation, we have presented social and political models which are inappropriate and counter-productive for some of our students.

3. We must use learning environments outside the formal schoolroom. Instruction in civic education should build on the life models learned by the students in their unstructured experiences. The teacher's task is to use the resources of the classroom to aid students in refining and improving their life models so as to broaden and deepen their understanding of them.

4. We must use the political and social system of the school as a model for study. Usually the student is well aware of the factors in this model and has an understanding of it. Not only are we to be concerned with what the student knows, but what he values and how this is related to what he knows. The school should be concerned with both knowledge and values.

5. We must provide the student with the opportunities and tools for thinking reflectively about his beliefs. He needs to examine critically traditional practices within an atmosphere conducive to reflective thinking. We must provide the student with the opportunities for testing cognitive and affective models of the political world. He needs data about how individuals participate in

politics; how information is communicated; how decisions are made; how leadership is exercised; how conflicts are managed; how prejudices are institutionalized.

6. We must provide the student with experience in dealing with conflict. Activism is a part of our social scene, and the social studies curriculum must deal realistically with effective decision making in a pluralistic society. Conflict, compromise, and consensus are all important elements to be included. Because of this, the social studies teacher must have a new freedom in which to teach. Instruction cannot be limited in its alternatives by tradition and the "system." Both students and teachers must have the freedom to consider new and novel approaches to the solutions of problems.

7. We need a teaching situation in which the teacher can be self-actualizing. The bureaucratic structure within which the usual teacher works discourages innovative behavior, for our hierarchical reward system promotes ineffectiveness and docility. The "system" rewards compromising behavior which threatens the teacher's personal integrity.

## **Is Citizenship Education Obsolete?**

Yes, the traditional citizenship education responsible for promoting "good citizenship" is obsolete, but the comprehensive social education of citizens remains the primary goal of the social studies. While the curriculum reform movement of the "new social studies" of the 1960's did much to upgrade the content of the social studies, it did not establish a new set of goals. As we move into the middle 1970's, it is evident that one task is to incorporate the many worthy contributions of the "new social studies" to social education, but our goals for social education go beyond the "new social studies." Social studies for the evolving individual require that we look beyond both traditional citizenship education and the "new social studies" of the 1960's for more meaningful content and instructional strategies. □

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