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CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES IN SELECTED NEBRASKA
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAMS

by
Charles M. Godwin

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
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For the Degree of Doctor of Education
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Elementary School Social Studies Programs

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of Problem	3
Significance of Study	3
Definition of Terms	4
Scope and Delimitations	5
Procedures	6
Organization of the Remainder of the Study	10
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	11
Definition, Purposes, and Objectives	11
Organizational Patterns	23
Methodology	32
Instructional Materials	42
III. CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES IN SELECTED NEBRASKA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAMS REPORTED BY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS	47
IV. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	109
Restatement of the Problem	109
Review of Procedures	109
Summary of the Literature	111
Summary of the Questionnaires	117
Conclusions	128

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

CHAPTER	PAGE
IV. (Continued)	
Recommendations	134
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	137
APPENDICES	144

PREVIEW

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
I. Total Years Teaching Experience in Present Grade	48
II. Total Years Teaching Experience in Elementary Grades . . .	49
III. Undergraduate College Preparation by Semester Hours . . .	50
IV. Graduate College Preparation by Semester Hours	51
V. Degrees Held by the Respondents	52
VI. Semester Hours of Undergraduate Preparation in Various Social Science Courses	53
VII. Number of Respondents Completing a College or University Course in Methods of Teaching Social Studies in the Elementary School	54
VIII. Number of Respondents Attending a Workshop, Institute or In-service Program on Social Studies in the Elementary School Since 1960	55
IX. Daily and Weekly Time Schedule for Teaching Social Studies	56
X. Definition of Social Studies as Reported by the Respondents	57
XI. Primary Purpose of Social Studies as Reported by the Primary Grade Teachers	58
XII. Primary Purpose of Social Studies as Reported by the Intermediate Grade Teachers	59
XIII. Grouping of Students as Reported by the Respondents . . .	60
XIV. Course of Study Used by the Respondents	62
XV. Numbers and Percentages of Teachers Reporting Social Studies Taught as a Separate Subject	63
XVI. Numbers and Percentages of Teachers Reporting Social Studies Correlated with Other Skill Areas	64

LIST OF TABLES (Continued)

TABLE	PAGE
XVII. Required Topics and/or Areas Selected for Study in the Primary Grades	65
XVIII. Required Topics and/or Areas Selected for Study in the Intermediate Grades	66
XIX. Optional Topics and/or Areas Selected for Study in the Primary Grades	68
XX. Optional Topics and/or Areas Selected for Study in the Intermediate Grades	70
XXI. Chief Source of Information for the Teaching of Social Studies as Reported by the Respondents	71
XXII. Copyright Dates of Textbooks Used in the Teaching of Social Studies as Reported by the Respondents . . .	73
XXIII. Numbers and Percentages of Teachers Reporting the Use of a Social Studies Workbook	74
XXIV. Numbers and Percentages of Teachers Assigning Homework in Social Studies	75
XXV. The Place of Current Events in the Social Studies Program	76
XXVI. Chief Source of Information for Current Events in the Social Studies Program	77
XXVII. Numbers and Percentages of Teachers Observing Local, County, State, or National Election Days With Appropriate Room Activities or Assemblies	79
XXVIII. Special Days or Weeks Observed with Appropriate Room Activities or Assemblies	80
XXIX. Definition of the Unit Method of Teaching as Reported by the Primary Grade Teachers	81
XXX. Definition of the Unit Method of Teaching as Reported by the Intermediate Grade Teachers	82
XXXI. Activities Used by Primary Grade Teachers in the Social Studies Program	84

LIST OF TABLES (Continued)

TABLE	PAGE
XXXII. Activities Used by Intermediate Grade Teachers in the Social Studies Program	90
XXXIII. Evaluation Techniques Used by Primary Grade Teachers in Evaluating the Social Studies	96
XXXIV. Evaluation Techniques Used by Intermediate Grade Teachers in Evaluating the Social Studies	97
XXXV. Instructional Materials Used by Primary Grade Teachers in Teaching Social Studies	99
XXXVI. Instructional Materials Used by Intermediate Grade Teachers in Teaching Social Studies	100
XXXVII. Availability of Audio-Visual Equipment for Teaching the Social Studies	102
XXXVIII. Numbers and Percentages of Teachers Reporting the Use of Various Types of Wall Maps in the Teaching of Social Studies	103
XXXIX. Number of Wall Maps Available for the Teaching of Social Studies	105
XXXX. Number of Supplementary Books that Relate to the Social Studies in Each Classroom and Building	106
XXXXI. Additional Assistance or Services the Respondents would like to have in Teaching the Social Studies	107

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the elementary school, the "social studies" is an area of the curriculum which is concerned with the study of man and his relationships to his physical and social environments. It is in this area that children begin to develop fundamental knowledge and understandings, skills, attitudes, and appreciations of the United States' economic system, its form of government, its history, the rights and duties of citizens in a democracy, the contributions that citizens make to the welfare of the community, and the differences and similarities of peoples around the world--their history, economic system, customs, traditions, and form of government.¹

An informed citizenry is essential to a democratic form of government and "what America does and how well Americans understand and practice democracy may very well determine the worldwide future of the democratic way of life."² No single area of the curriculum can meet this challenge alone; however, because of the nature of the

¹William B. Ragan, Modern Elementary Curriculum (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1960), p. 238.

²John U. Michaelis, Social Studies for Children in a Democracy: Recent Trends and Developments (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 51, citing The Power of the Democratic Idea, Special Studies Project Report VI.

experiences and the materials covered, the social studies program can make a significant contribution to the development of citizens who will be able to cope with the many complex problems facing a society not yet definable. The importance of this contribution is emphasized by the many³ state and national studies and surveys now underway for the expressed purpose of developing new curriculum materials and/or revising social studies programs.

The Nebraska State Department of Education has prescribed the social studies program for many school systems through the state course of study. According to the Nebraska School Laws, ". . . in school districts of the first and second classes, the school boards shall classify the pupils according to a course of study provided by the Commissioner of Education."⁴ Since the majority of smaller school systems do not have the personnel to provide the leadership for developing comprehensive instructional programs, they look to the County Superintendents, the State Department of Education, and the universities for guidance as they formulate curriculum committees and evaluate their social studies programs. In order to provide information that will be helpful to local, state, and university educational leaders as they plan and give direction to the elementary school social studies program,

³John U. Michaelis, Department of Education, University of California, listed forty-four social studies projects and related studies for elementary and secondary schools in a mimeographed report, revised, 1965. Appendix L.

⁴Nebraska School Laws, 1965 (School Laws of Nebraska, 79.443.) (Fremont, Nebraska: Hammond & Stephens Co., 1965), p. 154.

it appeared that there was a need to examine the contemporary practices in selected Nebraska elementary school social studies programs in an effort to determine if the practices reflected organizational patterns, methodology, and instructional materials which were considered desirable by selected authorities in the field of elementary social studies.

An architect would consider it folly indeed to begin planning and constructing a major building without first surveying the site. It is equally foolish for school personnel to blueprint a new social studies program without a thorough knowledge of the existing curriculum-in-action. Obtaining a clear picture of current instructional practices contributes to the quality of the curriculum project. It also provides the school system with a solid base from which to measure future progress.⁵

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The purpose of the researcher was to determine: (1) the contemporary practices in selected Nebraska elementary school social studies programs in school districts that did not employ a full time, designated, curriculum director on the elementary level; (2) the extent to which the practices paralleled those considered desirable by selected authorities in the field of elementary social studies.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

It was anticipated that the study would provide information which would:

⁵Raymond H. Muessig (ed.), Social Studies Curriculum Improvement: A Guide for Local Committees (Washington, D. C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1965), pp. 89-90.

1. Reveal the contemporary practices in selected Nebraska elementary school social studies programs in school districts that did not employ a full time, designated, curriculum director on the elementary level, and to determine if the practices paralleled those considered desirable by selected authorities in the field of elementary social studies.
2. Provide help in curriculum planning in the elementary school.
3. Indicate the direction which local, county, state, and university educational leaders could take in providing services and materials for the improvement of the social studies program.
4. Assist teacher training institutions in providing more meaningful experiences in social studies methods courses, workshops, and institutes.
5. Motivate administrators, teachers, and researchers to evaluate other elements of contemporary practices in elementary school social studies programs which were not investigated in the study.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

Social Studies. The term "social studies" refers to that area of the curriculum which includes units of instruction based on content from the social sciences: history, geography, political science, economics, anthropology, sociology, and related disciplines. It is that area of the curriculum which emphasizes "the study of man and his interaction with his social and physical environments in the past, present, and emerging future."⁶

⁶Michaelis, op. cit., p. 5.

Social Studies Program. Social studies program refers to all structured social studies within a curriculum.

Elementary School. The elementary school refers to the administrative unit consisting of grades one through six in the organizational structure of the school.

Practices. The term "practices" refers to how and what the teacher does in the teaching of social studies.

SCOPE AND DELIMITATIONS

This study was limited to the contemporary practices in Nebraska elementary school social studies programs, grades one through six, in selected school districts that did not employ a full time, designated, curriculum director on the elementary level. The study did not attempt to evaluate or compare individual schools and teachers in any sense.

The scope of the study was limited primarily to identifying organizational patterns, methodology, and instructional materials in selected Nebraska elementary school social studies programs, and, subsequent to the findings, to determine the extent to which the practices paralleled those considered desirable by selected authorities in the field of elementary social studies. The study did not attempt to determine the specific concepts, skills, and understandings taught by each elementary teacher of social studies, nor was pupil achievement a factor in the study.

In surveying the selected professional literature, emphasis was placed on the references published since 1960, and on those authorities who had written social studies methods textbooks and/or elementary social studies textbooks.

The study was further limited by the sample and the instrument. These limitations were:

1. That only those teachers who were in the counties selected were considered.
2. That the responses received would not necessarily represent all the social studies programs in school districts in Nebraska that did not employ a full time, designated, curriculum director on the elementary level.
3. That the sample did not attempt to explore the contemporary practices in selected Nebraska elementary school social studies programs except within the categories specified.
4. That the findings were based to a large degree upon the assumed validity of data obtained from the questionnaire method which assumes the honesty and competency of those responding.

The study was of the descriptive survey type and no statistical treatment of the data was attempted. Only tabular summaries of the information gathered expressed in numbers and percentages were used.

PROCEDURES

Review of Related Literature. Since the study was concerned with contemporary practices in elementary school social studies programs, emphasis was placed on the references published since 1960, and on those authorities who had written social studies methods textbooks and/or elementary social studies textbooks. Some consideration

was given to selected literature published during the 1950's. Information obtained from the review of selected literature was used to establish basic guidelines for the study and for the construction of the questionnaires which were used in the study.

Identification of the Teachers to be Included in the Study.

The elementary schools included in the study were located in fourteen counties⁷ in Nebraska, and the counties were selected in consultation with several members of the professional staff of Teachers College, University of Nebraska. Because the random sampling technique could have selected counties in one general cluster, a selected sample was taken with the following considerations: (1) geographic location of the county; (2) size and population of the county; and (3) cooperation of the county superintendent. After the counties had been selected, the county superintendents were invited to a luncheon meeting where the details of the study were explained by the writer. The Executive Council of the Nebraska Association of County Superintendents went on record as supporting the study.

Once the counties had been identified, all of the names of the elementary school teachers in schools of four or more teachers, grades one through six, and in school districts that did not employ a full time, designated, curriculum director on the elementary level, were listed by grade level. From this list, two teachers from each grade,

⁷Appendix A.

in every county, were selected using a table of random numbers,⁸ and the respective school superintendents were contacted for permission to use their teachers in the study. In those school districts employing less than four elementary teachers, the county superintendent identified seven teachers of varying ability, and from this list, three teachers were chosen at random to participate in the study. A total of 190 elementary school teachers in ninety-six school districts and/or rural areas were identified for inclusion in the study.

In order to obtain specific information concerning the contemporary practices in elementary school social studies programs, a questionnaire for teachers was developed and tested with a number of elementary teachers in Nebraska who were not identified to take part in the study. Their responses and comments, along with suggestions from the advisory committee, resulted in the final questionnaire. The printed questionnaire and a letter of explanation were sent to the selected respondents on January 1, 1967, and on January 22, 1967, a follow-up letter was sent. Three weeks later a second questionnaire and a letter of explanation were sent, followed in another two weeks by a follow-up letter. Of the original 190 questionnaires distributed, 158 or 83.15 per cent were accounted for.

Teachers were requested to answer items on the questionnaire

⁸John G. Peatman, Introduction to Applied Statistics (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), pp. 424-425.

only for a specific grade level and to report only what they actually did in the teaching of social studies.

Validation of the Responses. In an attempt to reinforce the study, a limited validation procedure was carried out. Of the 158 questionnaires returned, 149 were usable and of this number, forty-seven Class II and III⁹ teachers indicated that the researcher had their permission to visit their classrooms to further discuss the items on the questionnaire. Twelve teachers, or 25 per cent of those giving permission, were selected at random and the writer made visits to their classrooms during the school day.

To further validate the responses, a second questionnaire was constructed which paralleled the questionnaire sent to the elementary teachers. This second questionnaire and a letter of explanation were mailed to the county superintendent of schools in each of the counties selected for inclusion in the study. Three weeks after the original mailing, another questionnaire and follow-up letter were sent, followed in two weeks by several telephone calls. Of the fourteen questionnaires distributed, 13 or 92.85 per cent were returned.

The questionnaire to the county superintendents requested information concerning the contemporary practices in the

⁹Class II school districts are those "districts under 1,000 population maintaining both elementary and secondary education." Class III school districts are those "districts of 1,000 to 50,000 population maintaining both elementary and secondary education."

Class I¹⁰ school districts of the counties included in the study. Thirty-six Class I elementary teachers in schools of less than four teachers answered the first questionnaire, and the responses to the county superintendent's questionnaire represented 34 or 94.44 per cent of these teachers. A total of forty-six or 30.87 per cent of the 149 usable questionnaires were validated or confirmed through visitations or questionnaires of a parallel nature.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REMAINDER OF THE STUDY

The following chapters of this dissertation report the findings of the study. Chapter II presents a review of selected literature on: (1) definitions, purposes, and objectives of social studies; (2) organizational patterns; (3) methodology; and (4) instructional materials. Chapter III presents data regarding contemporary practices in social studies programs as reported by 149 Nebraska elementary school teachers. Chapter IV includes the summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

¹⁰Class I school districts are those "districts maintaining the elementary grade from kindergarten through eighth grade, only," which includes one teacher and multi-teacher schools.

Definitions derived from: Statistical Services and School Finance Section, Statistics and Facts About Nebraska Schools: 1965-66, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska State Department of Education, February, 1966), p. 5.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The problem of this investigation was outlined in Chapter I. Chapter II will discuss the literature related to the problem. Material presented in this chapter will pertain to literature and research concerned with organizational patterns, methodology, and instructional materials in elementary school social studies. Any discussion of these areas must be preceded by some consideration to the purposes or objectives of the social studies.

There is considerable overlapping of the areas reviewed, but in order to provide a means of comparing the findings of the review of the literature with the findings of the current practices in Nebraska elementary school social studies programs, it was deemed necessary to organize this chapter as indicated.

DEFINITION, PURPOSES, AND OBJECTIVES

The term "social studies" came into prominence in 1916 when the Committee on Social Studies of the National Education Association defined it as "those whose subject matter relate directly to the organization and development of human society, and to man as a member of social groups."¹ Included in the report were references to

¹Morris Gall, "The Current State of the Revolution in the Social Studies," The Social Studies, 57:242, November, 1966.

geography, European history, American history, economic history, civics, economics, problems of democracy, government, and sociology.² Prior to this time, what is now called "social studies" was referred to as history, geography and civics.³ In 1921 the National Council for the Social Studies was organized and the Council's Yearbook for that year was devoted to social studies in elementary and secondary schools. The Department of Superintendency of the National Education Association discussed social studies in their Yearbook of 1936. The emphasis on social studies and the acceptance of it was a result of the conditions from 1920 to 1955. Gross and Badger writing in the 1960 Encyclopedia of Educational Research indicated that the conditions were brought about by:

. . . concerns over the assimilation of immigrants, and the minority groups, over patriotism, for the inculcation of citizenship, for the common social education of the masses--all stemming from two World Wars and a tragic economic depression⁴

Once the social studies became a part of the elementary school curriculum, it was soon forgotten and most research studies in this area were devoted to the social studies program in the secondary schools.⁵ Other areas of the curriculum received national attention

²Ibid.

³William B. Ragan and John D. McAulay, Social Studies for Today's Children (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), p. 19.

⁴Richard E. Gross and William V. Badger, "Social Studies," Encyclopedia of Educational Research (third edition; New York: The MacMillan Company, 1960), p. 1298.

⁵Ibid., pp. 1296-1319.

when the National Science Foundation was established in 1950 and the National Defense Education Act in 1958. Both programs emphasized science, mathematics, and foreign languages; no mention was made of social studies. Meanwhile, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the National Council for the Social Studies, and other experimental programs continued to study the social studies and finally in 1965, the U. S. Office of Education placed its support behind this change.⁶ This growing importance of the social studies is highlighted by the numerous studies supported by governmental agencies, private foundations, and local school funds that are now being conducted.⁷ Fenton and Good listed twelve centers that have been established under Project Social Studies by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.⁸

The basic definition of social studies has not changed to any great degree since 1916; however, it has been expanded and Michaelis' definition relates this expansion:

. . . the study of man and his interaction with his social and physical environments in the past, present, and emerging future. Human relationships are studied as children investigate ways of living at home and in other lands. Emphasis is given to relationships among people, relationships between people and institutions, relationships between people and goods and services, and relationships between people and the earth. Specific attention is given to ways of meeting basic human

⁶Gall, op. cit., p. 243.

⁷John U. Michaelis, "Directory of Social Studies Projects and Related Studies" (Berkeley: University of California, 1965). (Mimeographed.)

⁸Edwin Fenton and John M. Good, "Project Social Studies: A Progress Report," Social Education, 29:206-7, April, 1965.

needs for food, shelter, and clothing; to social processes, customs, and values; to changes in ways of living; and to the efforts of mankind to solve social problems. In short, the cultural heritage and its dynamic on-going characteristics are of primary concern in the social studies. History, geography, and civics are most important in the program with content also being drawn from economics, anthropology, sociology, and other basic disciplines to deepen and broaden children's understanding of people and their changing ways of living.⁹

Jarolimek stated that the "social studies is an inclusive but highly specific term applied to that area of the elementary school curriculum which has a primary responsibility to help the child develop skill in and understanding of human relationships."¹⁰ Preston defined social studies as "any material from the social sciences selected for teaching purposes, regardless of the breadth of its scope,"¹¹ and Ragan and McAulay referred to it as "that phase of the curriculum in elementary schools which has a primary responsibility for helping pupils develop understandings, skills, and attitudes needed for intelligent living in a democratic society."¹²

In making a distinction between social studies and social science, Ragan and McAulay concluded that both areas dealt with human

⁹John U. Michaelis, Social Studies for Children in a Democracy: Recent Trends and Developments (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 5.

¹⁰John Jarolimek, Social Studies in Elementary Education (second edition; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), p. 3.

¹¹Ralph C. Preston, Teaching Social Studies in the Elementary Schools (revised edition; New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1958), p. 4.

¹²Ragan and McAulay, op. cit., p. 5.

relationships, but social studies did so at the level of childhood and adolescence and social science at the level of the adult. Whereas the social scientist is interested in expanding the boundaries of knowledge in his own area and developing a specialization, the student in the elementary school is not ready for this specialization and it would not be possible to schedule each of the social science courses in the school day. "It is feasible, however, to schedule a class in social studies which uses materials from many sources to acquaint pupils with their social environment."¹³

The terms "goals," "purposes," and "objectives" of education are used synonymously by many authorities in the field of social studies in referring "to the values sought through any organized educational effort"¹⁴ Gross and Badger indicated that the objectives of the social studies have not been the subject of many research studies, because the focus has been on the various disciplines within the social sciences. This lack of research into objectives, especially those at the elementary level, "may reflect the manner in which social-studies objectives are arrived at. Seldom the result of any kind of research, they are generally products of value judgments reflecting social traditions and forces in this country."¹⁵ This is apparent in the frequently quoted list of general objectives by Carr

¹³Ragan and McAulay, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁵Gross and Badger, loc. cit.