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Allan R. Kyle

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The Social Studies Today — Implications for Training Teachers

Allan R. Kyle

David Easton cautions that "history should not try to imitate the other social sciences, it should maintain its unique, narrative, holistic character, in which role it can serve as a fruitful source of insights and hypotheses for the other social sciences...." Howard Mehlinger compares history unfavorably with the social sciences pointing to the "grossly incomplete, highly impressionistic" record of the past that serves as history. Paul Ward gives a special place to history as the discipline that integrates the story of man in the narrative. Malcolm Collier claims a special role for anthropology as "less a subject matter than a bond between subject matters; that anthropology retains a sense of inter-relationships and seeks an integration which meets the needs of the people" and that "anthropology should be considered separately from the other social sciences." Eric Wolf suggests "that most social scientists put a 'strait jacket' on man through the use of 'segmented models' and that only anthropology studies 'the experience of life.'" Susan Wiggins suggests that economics "as the most quantitative of the social sciences" can be particularly helpful to the less enlightened, less quantitative social sciences (1).

So the disputes rage - claim and counter-claim. A detached observer recognizes a clear-cut imperialism on the part of eminent scholars in support of the role of their discrete disciplines. The urgent task of the educator preparing preservice teachers of the social studies to cope with the claims or, stronger yet, the demands of the various social scientists is to somehow creating order out of chaos. If we assume

the claims of the social scientists to be valid, how can we meet the challenge to prepare future teachers who will be competent in meeting the demands of the social studies classroom? To further complicate the problem, how can we prepare teachers to provide learning experiences that will enable students to effectively function in a society of the future which at best is darkly obscured? We can only speculate as to the demands of the future on individual members of the society of the future.

Many changes have occurred in social studies undergraduate certification programs in both subject area and professional education requirements. Primarily, these changes have taken the form of "more of the same" and little attention has been given to real change in the basic structure of teacher preparation.

One of the most promising developments in teacher preparation has been in efforts to integrate the major contributions of the various social sciences. If future teachers are to be prepared to make this integration in courses they teach, more efforts will have to be directed in developing the ability to integrate social science disciplines in learning experiences of a multi-discipline nature into the social studies classroom.

The methodology of each of the social sciences is an important facet in development of skills in integrating knowledge contributed by each of the social sciences. It follows, then, that each teacher must learn the structure of the social sciences being integrated. The teacher can then identify the nature and origin of contributions and understand the process by which they were generated. This understanding will ease the problems of integration.

One such integrative effort has been developed on the topic of "North Dakota in the

Thirties." Historians, a political scientist, an economist, and a social studies teacher educator joined forces in presenting the topic from their point of view. Each social scientist addressed himself to his interpretations of the topic and the methodology by which each interpreted the data available about the topic. The final phase consisted of students preparing classroom learning activities which could be used by the social studies teacher.

This is only one manifestation of change currently taking place. The Report of Secondary Education (2) a Report of the National Commission on the Reform of Secondary Education established by the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, has produced an important report of education in the '70's. It includes thirty-two specific recommendations for reform. All of these have great implications for the social studies, especially those directed toward a new set of national goals, alterations in content, methods and materials of instruction, alternatives in traditional schools, and community participation, among others.

The implications of these reforms for teacher training programs are obvious. Teachers cannot be trained in our existing models if they are to be competent in coping with new and different problems. Perhaps we should de-emphasize the training of teachers and emphasize the role of the classroom leader as a manager of the learning environment, or the facilitator of learning, or any other role which places learning as the primary focus of student activity rather than teaching.

Bibliography

1. Social Science in the Schools: A Search for Rationale. Edited by Irving Morrisott and W. William Stevens, Jr. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1971, preface pp. xi-xiii.
2. The Reform of Secondary Education. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974.