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# Problems of Teaching Social Studies in the Intermediate Grades

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PROBLEMS OF TEACHING SOCIAL  
STUDIES IN THE  
INTERMEDIATE GRADES

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the degree of  
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by Avanella C. Jeffers

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## CHAPTER I

### APPARENT PROBLEMS IN MODERN SOCIAL STUDIES

Every day in many classrooms one may hear such comments as, "I hate geography," "I hate social studies," or "What's the use of it?" Why is this? Why can't the child say, "I like social studies," have some pleasant comments for the subject, or at least be willing to approach it with a desire to learn? Does the trouble lie in the textbooks, the teachers' methods and attitudes, or in the pupil himself? How can the social studies or the methods used in teaching it be improved so that the child may enjoy and understand his subject and feel he is doing something worth-while?

After first stating and discussing the problems as found by educators, I shall attempt to show concrete examples of what is disliked in the social studies as found in one particular school area. Then I shall strive to present suggested methods to remedy the situation in order that the social studies may be presented as a worthwhile course which can be understood and enjoyed by the child. This problem is of growing concern not only to teachers of the grades but also to those of high schools and colleges.

First of all, probably the greatest problem involved in teaching the social studies arises from the fact that social

studies is a reading subject. It is a reading subject as much or possibly more so than reading from the reading text, language, or spelling since the child is expected to retain most of what he has read.<sup>1</sup>

If a child cannot read or is a poor reader, he cannot be expected to read the average daily assignment of from seven to ten pages. One teacher of a seventh and eighth grade American history class actually gave a daily assignment of up to forty or fifty pages to be read for the following day. No study goal was given except to read the lesson from the dull and rambling text. The text was classified on ninth and tenth grade level. How can a poor reader<sup>2</sup> enjoy, complete, understand and retain this material? Probably only the best readers would finish the assignment. The poor readers would become discouraged and say, "I can't read it or understand it. I'll fail anyway so why read it?" If this seems to be an extreme example, it actually takes place.

The very fact that such extreme methods occur at all, indicates that we, as social studies teachers, are not utilizing our available knowledge on reading in teaching our social studies. If such as the particular case cited can be substantiated from the author's

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<sup>1</sup>Young, William E., "Reading in Social Studies of the Elementary School," Social Education, 17:111-114, March, 1953.

<sup>2</sup>There were many poor readers in this group.

personal observation, many more examples can be found through classroom visits and in current literature on social studies teaching.<sup>3</sup>

Children need stimulation to create the desire not only to read their lessons but also to extend their reading to other texts and reference books. The texts and references must be those the children can read. Miss Charlotte Meyer, Decatur Public Schools Elementary Supervisor states,

We find our greatest difficulty in teaching the social studies is to provide for individual differences. That is to find texts and reference material on a lower level of reading difficulty to help the slow learners and poor readers.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that a child can read from his basal reader does not insure that he can read his arithmetic, his geography, or his science textbooks. Each subject field has its own purposes and requirements.

Apart from any question of complexity, the reading is different. His assignment in social studies may involve the reading of many pages from several different books. The pupil may have to skim through twenty or more pages in order to find just the material he wants. He may have to give special attention to nine or ten of those pages. The pupil in his work in social studies must remember the content. He must have at his command various skills such as picking out the main ideas, paraphrasing, outlining, and summarizing.<sup>5</sup>

Homework assignments are of little use to children who are poor readers. There are reading skills which they may not make

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<sup>3</sup>Young, William E., "Reading in Social Studies of the Elementary School," Social Education, 17:111-114, March, 1953.

<sup>4</sup>Personal interview with Miss Charlotte Meyer, Decatur, Illinois, June 18, 1955.

<sup>5</sup>Young, William E., "Reading in Social Studies of the Elementary School," Social Education, 17:111-114, March, 1953.

use of in doing home work. They may make use of these skills at classtime with teacher guidance.

. . . We must teach the reading skills which are most needed in the social studies. These skills must be taught in connection with social studies materials, and usually will be taught during social studies period. Time spent by pupils with social studies materials which they cannot comprehend and appraise is time largely wasted and will result in verbalism rather than in understanding and appreciation.<sup>6</sup>

A second problem of deep concern and directly connected with reading is that of the vocabulary used in social studies. If new and difficult words are not discussed before an assignment is made, the average and below average students cannot possibly understand their lessons. Many of the large words and foreign names used in social studies are above the child's comprehension. Many texts as well as teachers use colloquial expressions which the child does not understand. Many texts give quotations of great leaders. These quotations have hidden meanings and have to be explained and discussed.<sup>7</sup>

A third problem concerns setting up goals to guide study and to create the desire to study. Some teachers depend almost entirely upon the texts to give such goals, which very few texts are capable of accomplishing. It is generally up to the teacher to provide the stimulation. John F. Ohles in "The Curse of the

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

Textbook" published in the February, 1953 issue of Social Studies says that texts are "biased, inflexible, and deficient." They waver between dry, detailed, and wordy treatises to profusely illustrated but sketchy outlines that glory in generalizations and retreat from dates and facts.

I have found in one series of texts for the intermediate grades that mistakes in facts have been made concerning our own region--Illinois. This text stated that: (1) West Chicago, Illinois had a thriving steel industry, (2) fires from the blast furnaces of South Chicago's steel mills could be seen from the lake front in Grant Park in Chicago, and (3) [in the accompanying workbook] Abraham Lincoln lived in the 1830's at Salem, Illinois. When children discover such errors in facts they seem to rebel against the textbooks.

Most texts are written in a vocabulary above the average reading ability of the grades in which they are to be used.

In trying to be all things to all men; the texts end up being nothing to most. In order to serve the average student, the texts prove to be over the heads of the duller, and fail to furnish any challenge to the upper strata. In order to confine themselves to the maximum number of pages, yet include as much material as possible while crowding in an illustration per page, the texts have become reciters of fact without the window-dressing that makes those facts interesting, or all window-dressing and no facts.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ohles, John F., "The Curse of the Textbook," Social Studies, 44:64-66, February, 1953.



Social studies covers a broad scope or area of subjects and materials. It is much broader than just the study of history and geography since, besides history and geography, social studies includes a dash or two of civics, sociology, and economics as well as a bit of science.<sup>9</sup>

Many texts do not adequately cover the broad scope of the social studies nor adequately fit into a prescribed course of study. The texts usually determine what a course of study should be.

Regardless of the judgment of "experts" in the field, the interests and abilities of the teacher, along with the needs of the pupils, should determine the course of study to be followed. Certainly this would put a great deal of responsibility on the individual teacher, but who can honestly question that the responsibility does not belong there? Texts fail to recognize regional interests and tend to become less interesting.<sup>10</sup>

The materials of the social studies are always changing. Texts soon become outdated and have to be replaced at added expense. Supplementary materials can be used to bring texts up to date. This is up to the teacher if she is resourceful.

The rapid outdateding of texts is very distressing. "Since most are a little outdated when coming off the press, they become more so after several years use. This causes confusion." It is

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<sup>9</sup>Wesley, Edgar B., and Adams, Mary A., Teaching Social Studies in Elementary Schools. Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1946. p. 23.

<sup>10</sup>Ohles, John F., "The Curse of the Textbook," Social Studies, 44:64-66, February, 1953.

suggested that textbook companies publish booklets or pamphlets each year to keep the textbooks up to date.<sup>11</sup> Social studies cannot be adequately taught without up-to-date or current materials such as weekly newspapers published for classroom use.

There have been many things written on the subject of teaching social studies on the various school levels; but, none have as yet solved our problems. Many authors have made excellent suggestions; many have written texts; but there is much study yet to be done on the subject.<sup>12</sup>

The problem concerning the teacher's ability seems to enter into almost any other problem discussed. It is through her resourcefulness that the text is fitted to the curriculum, the individual differences in the classroom, and the interests of the children. A teacher can often make or ruin a child's interest in a subject. The teacher can lecture, which has no place in the intermediate grades of the elementary school; she can have group discussions on the problem being studied; or she can provide a fund of various activities. The "putting over" of the subject, no matter if it is social studies or arithmetic, or science, is up to the teacher and her methods. Suggested methods will be discussed in Chapter III.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

Also: McAulay, J. D., "What's Wrong with the Social Studies?" Social Education, 16:377-378, December, 1952.

In 1951 a group of elementary teachers enrolled in a course called "Social Studies Curriculum" in the Fresno State College Extension at Bakersfield College, California, made a study of thirty-five social studies curricula as to objectives, content, and methods. Some teachers did not know of a prescribed social studies curriculum. Many of those that did know of the curriculum made no use of it because it was not adapted to the interests and abilities of the children, it was not harmonious with the community resources and problems, and it did not coincide with the adopted texts. Additional faults found with the curricula studied were:

1. Modern problems of the area were neglected.
2. There was no flexibility where teachers could add to or take away.
3. There was no correlation with other subjects.
4. History was emphasized to the neglect of other fields.
5. Map study was neglected.
6. There were few provisions for training in moral and spiritual values.
7. There was seemingly no pattern of content, methods, and materials through the grades.

The principal conclusion reached from the survey of the thirty-five social studies curricula is that a social studies curriculum should be a continually changing organism, guided and directed in its evolution by the classroom teachers themselves.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>McAuley, J. D., "What's Wrong with the Social Studies?" Social Education, 16:377-378, December, 1952.

The social studies have received many criticisms. One is that we do not teach enough American history.

The trend is toward more American history in the elementary grades. Forty-seven states require it in the schools. Most schools teach it in three cycles-- middle grades, junior high, and senior high.<sup>14</sup>

American history may not be taught as a subject in itself but may be incorporated into a unified social studies curriculum.

This brings us to a

second statement commonly made about social studies. That is we no longer teach subjects. This statement is made as a charge by those who feel that subject organization is sacred. The subject exists but possibly not as social studies until after about third grade level where subject organization becomes typical. --It is necessary to comment that titles are inadequate descriptions of courses, and one must visit a classroom to really know what goes on in it. My experience (Cartwright's) in this regard, both as a teacher of "social studies," and a visitor to many classes in "social studies," leads me to believe that more often than not the change from "history" or "geography" to "social studies" has been a change in name only.<sup>15</sup>

No matter what problem of teaching social studies is discussed, each one seems to reflect on many things: the interests and capabilities of the child, the capabilities of the teachers, the usefulness and flexibility of the text (its up-to-dateness, realism, factuality, fitness for the region in which it is being studied, etc.), provisions for the individual differences in the

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<sup>14</sup>Cartwright, Wm. H., "What Is Happening in the Social Studies I," Social Education, 18:77-79, February, 1954.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

classroom, and the fitness of the text to any prescribed curriculum. These problems have been brought forth in the foregoing paragraphs. In Chapter III I shall try to discuss specific possible suggestions to improve upon the presentation of the social studies after bringing forth a specific study of classroom pupil-teacher problems in Chapter II.

CHAPTER II  
A STUDY OF THE SOCIAL STUDIES IN  
THE INTERMEDIATE GRADES OF THE  
MOULTRIE COUNTY, ILLINOIS SCHOOLS

In this chapter I shall present a concrete picture of some problems of teaching the social studies. A study of the problems was made through the use of questionnaires.<sup>1</sup> These questionnaires were distributed to 544 students and 26 teachers of the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades in all attendance centers in Moultrie County, Illinois. The questionnaires were used to gain information concerning the social studies situation in the county. Though the county is small, the situation found here is possibly typical of many such areas all over our country. The study gives a comparison between social studies and the combination of geography and history. There was no comparison of series of textbooks because all social studies texts were of the same series. A great difference was in the kind and variety of available references. A comparison of using and not using workbooks in social studies was obtained since one large group used workbooks and another didn't. Teacher influence has much bearing on the students' answers to the questionnaires as also does teacher

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<sup>1</sup>A copy of these questionnaires will be found in Plate I and Plate II.

PLATE I

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE FOR GRADES 4, 5, & 6

1. I am in the \_\_\_\_\_ grade. I am \_\_\_\_\_ years and \_\_\_\_\_ months old.
2. Check which you have:  
\_\_\_\_\_ Social Studies  
\_\_\_\_\_ Geography  
\_\_\_\_\_ History
3. If you like it, what do you like about it and why?
4. If you neither like it nor dislike it, what are some things you like about it?
5. If there are things you don't like about it, what are they and why?
6. a. Write here the names of the textbook or textbooks you use in these subjects.  
b. Do you like it? \_\_\_\_\_ If there is anything you particularly do or do not like about your text, what is it?
7. a. Do you have a work book in this subject? \_\_\_\_\_  
b. Do you like to work in it? \_\_\_\_\_  
c. If you do not have a workbook, do you think you would like to work in one? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Do you do work with maps? \_\_\_\_\_ Do you like to work with them? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you use the globe? \_\_\_\_\_ Do you like to use it? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Do you use reference books? \_\_\_\_\_ If so, what is one you like particularly?
11. Do you have any suggestions to make about Social Studies, Geography, or History?

PLATE II  
TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Grade or Grades Taught \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you teach Geography and History or Social Studies?
2. What text or texts are used?
3. What types of references are used by you?
4. Types of references used by the students?
5. Is there a workbook? If so, name it.
6. What method or methods have you found most satisfactory in your classes?
7. Do you, as a teacher, like the subject?
8. What training have you had for teaching this subject?
9. Remarks: (Help you would desire, improvement on texts, etc.)



methods. In giving this type of questionnaire, it is difficult to rule out all outside influences and confine the immature child to his own opinion.

Grade and age were asked because it was thought older students might show a certain tendency toward dislike for social studies. But, after tabulating the results in this study, older students showed little or no difference in the results. Likes and dislikes were tabulated as was an undecided group. Included in the undecided group are those who showed definite reasons for liking and definite reasons for disliking social studies or the combination of geography and history.<sup>2</sup> The results are presented as to percentages of the group on each grade level.

Table I for the fourth grade shows definitely that both social studies and geography are high in pupil likes. The general trend seems to be a decline in the percentage of those who like social studies and geography-history from fourth to fifth grade (Table II) and also a continued decline from fifth to sixth grades (Table III). The undecided group percentage increases as the grade increases. The group who just naturally disliked social studies and geography-history continued to be fairly small through all three of the intermediate grades. Likes, dislikes, and indecision seem to stabilize between social studies and geography-history at the sixth grade level (Table III).

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<sup>2</sup>Here after in this paper the combination of geography and history will be written as geography-history.

## TABLE IA

## GRADE 4

## Had Social Studies: 117 Students

Liked It	Disliked It	Undecided
71%	4%	25%

## Had Workbooks: 117 Students

Liked Them	Disliked Them	No Answer
65%	32%	3%

## Map Study: 117 Students

Liked It	Disliked It	No Answer
86%	14%	0%

## TABLE IB

## GRADE 4

Had Geography: 76 Students.

Liked It	Disliked It	Undecided
87%	8%	5%

Did Not Have Workbooks: 76 Students

Desired Them	Did Not Desire Them	No Answer
76%	19%	5%

Map Study: 76 Students

Liked It	Disliked It	No Answer
98%	1%	1%

## TABLE IIA

## GRADE 5

Had Social Studies: 139 Students

Liked It	Disliked It	Undecided
60%	6%	34%

Had Workbooks in Social Studies: 108 Students

Liked Them	Disliked Them	Liked Them Sometimes	No Answer
59%	33%	7%	17%

Had No Workbooks in Social Studies: 31 Students

Desired Them	Did Not Desire Them	No Answer
74%	26%	0%

Map Study: 139 Students

Liked It	Disliked It	Liked It Sometimes	No Answer
82%	14%	3%	1%

TABLE IIB

GRADE 5

Had Geography and History: 33 Students

Liked It	Disliked It	Undecided
52%	9%	39%

Had No Workbooks in Geography and History: 33 Students

Them	Did Not Desire Them	Showed Teacher Influence	No Answer
4%	70%	30% of the 70%	6%

Map Study: 33 Students

Liked It	Disliked It	Liked It Sometimes	No Answer
79%	12%	9%	0%

TABLE IIIA

GRADE 6

Had Social Studies: 152 Students

Liked It	Disliked It	Undecided
33%	13%	54%

Had Workbooks in Social Studies: 117 Students

Liked Them	Disliked Them	Undecided	No Answer
65%	32%	2%	1%

Had No Workbooks in Social Studies: 33 Students

Desired Them	Did Not Desire Them	Undecided
60%	37%	3%

Map Study: 152 Students

Liked It	Disliked It	Liked It Sometimes	No Answer
90%	8%	1%	1%

TABLE III B

GRADE 6

Had Geography and History: 27 Students

Liked It	Disliked It	Undecided
33%	15%	52%

Had No Workbooks in Geography and History: 27 Students

Desired Them	Did Not Desire Them	No Answer
45%	48%	7%

Map Study: 27 Students

Liked It	Disliked It	Liked It Sometimes	No Answer
78%	19%	3%	0%

Of those who had workbooks the percentages seem somewhat stabilized through all three grades--59% to 65% for those who liked them and 32% to 33% who disliked them. The majority of the pupils who did not have workbooks in social studies showed a desire for them. That is except where geography-history were concerned. There the tendency was toward the negative especially among the fifth graders. In checking one fifth grade group with negative answers on questionnaires concerning geography-history, I found that they showed about a 30% uncertainty on the question concerning likes or dislikes for workbooks. These pupils' answers had been yes, erased, and changed to no.

In the comparison of map work, fifth graders seemed to dislike it more than either sixth or fourth graders. In the fourth grade those who had geography liked map work better than those who had social studies--98% to 86%. In the fifth grade the likes were almost equal between social studies and geography-history--82% for social studies to 79% in geography-history. In the sixth grade map work for the social studies is far ahead of the combination subjects--90% to 78%.

Many and sundry reasons were given for children liking or disliking social studies or geography-history. The tendency was to give more reasons for disliking than for liking the subjects under discussion. The number of reasons as well as suggestions increased with the higher grade levels. Many students gave several reasons for liking or disliking these subjects. Many pupils gave several suggestions also.



Highest in reasons for liking social studies or geography-history was a liking for the study of people and places. Of the 544 students questioned 54% liked these subjects for this reason. Fourth graders constituted 20% of the 544; fifth graders 17% and sixth graders, 17%.

Better readers reported that social studies or geography-history were easy. Only 37% of the 544 students said that they found the stories, the reading, or the subject matter interesting. Interest seemed to decline as groups advanced from the fourth to the sixth grades. Of this 37%, 17% were fourth graders, 12% were fifth graders, and 8% were sixth graders.

Appreciation of map work or map study showed up in 13% of the reasons. The percentage seemed to increase by grades. Possibly this was because of the increase in need for map study to understand the assigned lessons. Fourth graders were just more than 2%, whereas, fifth graders were 4% and sixth graders were less than 7%.

Those who liked social studies and geography-history because of the pictures, maps, and tables in the textbooks were less than 10% of the 544.

Only 9% of the whole group cared for activities such as reports; certain parts of the workbook; making booklets; question and word exercises; giving plays; and art activities. This low percentage was possibly because many teachers have not yet realized the need for activities for pupil learning and do not use much of it in their classrooms. Another reason may be the rigid requirements by some teachers concerning activities.

Other reasons for liking social studies or geography-history are listed below.

1. Because of some historical phase.
2. Because they gained information that helped them understand television programs.
3. Because it prepared them for better living.
4. Because of the film strips or movies. (This group was surprisingly low in percentage--only 3% of 544).
5. Because it was an "invisible" trip.
6. Because of the easy reference books they had.
7. Because he had only one book and didn't have to bother with several. (Only one student).

The reasons for dislikes of social studies or geography-history varied greatly. The greatest reason for dislike centered around the textbook. Dislike for the text because of some defect or fault was 32% of the 544 students. In this group reasons for dislikes tended to increase toward the sixth grade.

In order of mention by the children, faults found with the textbook were:

1. The text was too hard for the grade level.
2. The text was out-of-date.
3. Texts were old and worn out.
4. Texts were too large, too long, or too thick.
5. Texts covered too much material.
6. Texts repeated too much.
7. Texts didn't review enough of the important points.
8. Texts had either no glossary or a very poor one.
9. Texts didn't tell enough on various subjects of interest to the children.

10. The words were too big.
11. The reading was too complicated.
12. Texts didn't have enough pictures in color.
13. The pictures were very poor.
14. The maps were very poor.
15. Maps did not show enough things.
16. The text didn't have enough good colored maps.
17. Textbooks did not stick to "true" facts.
18. The print in the text was too small.

Other reasons for disliking social studies or geography-history are enumerated below. These varied in percentage of the whole 544 students from 5% down to less than two-tenths of 1%.

These reasons are:

1. A dislike for the workbook.
2. Just a dislike for the subject.
3. A dislike for mapwork.
4. A dislike for questions and discussions.
5. A dislike for tests.
6. A dislike for long assignments of more than ten pages.
7. A dislike for homework.
8. A dislike for making oral and written reports.
9. A dislike for learning and writing states and capitals.
10. A dislike for looking up and learning new words.
11. A dislike for memorizing dates.
12. A dislike for the study of modern times, weather, land forms, products, cities, foreign countries, another state, or the past.

13. A dislike for it because he didn't think he'd ever use it.
14. A dislike for it because the teacher took too much time and other periods for the social studies or geography-history class.
15. A dislike for it because the teacher and the class would always get off the subject and not cover enough material in one day.

Among references mentioned by the children were the various encyclopedias, craft books, and atlases usually used in the classrooms of the intermediate grades. The current publications mentioned were the Junior Scholastic, My Weekly Reader, World Almanac, and travel folders.

One group of fifth and sixth graders stated that they liked social studies because they could find so many reference books that were easier to read than their texts. These included World Geography Readers and several sample textbooks in late and revised editions.

Many of the children had very good and useful suggestions. Most of the suggestions were in keeping with the connection of their dislikes and difficulties. About 62% of the 544 students had some suggestion for correcting or improving the textbooks. The number of suggestions increased with the higher grade level. I believe it is best to list the suggestions for text improvement in order of number of times suggested. They are as follows:

1. Bring the textbooks up to date and make them easier.
2. Textbooks should have more and better pictures--especially in color.
3. Textbooks should have more and better up-to-date maps.

4. The materials should be more in story form, so class groups can act them out.
5. Texts should have a good and complete glossary.
6. Texts should give more information on various subjects such as:
  - a. Famous people.
  - b. Peoples and their customs.
  - c. Animals raised in and native to an area.
  - d. Places as states, countries, and cities.
7. Questions in the texts could be improved.
8. Texts should have a better and more complete index.
9. Texts should be kept more true to fact by better proofreading and checking of material before publication.
10. Texts should have more material about our own United States cities and states.
11. Texts should have a supplementary section including a list of places to send for free or up-to-date materials on special social studies subjects.

Less than 20% of the 544 pupils included suggestions for some type of classroom or pupil activities to keep the interest at a high level. These activities included:

1. Having the class plan ahead of time for the units.
2. Writing stories on the unit studied.
3. Reading other stories on the subject studied.
4. Writing letters.
5. Playing games and learning folk dances in accordance with the unit being studied.
6. Having plays about the unit.

7. Making quiz books and boxes for their own review.
8. Making booklets concerning the unit being studied.
9. Having some activity or project from each child for extra credit.
10. Having field trips.
11. Having more map work.
  - a. Locating exercises.
  - b. Drawing.
  - c. Coloring.
12. Having more movies and filmstrips.

Suggestions concerning workbooks were not large in number. Only eighteen of the 544 students suggested more time be spent on the workbooks and more crossword puzzles be put in them. Only seven students suggested that there not be any workbooks.

Of those who had geography and history, eleven suggested both subjects be put in one book as in social studies.

Suggestions concerning teaching procedures were few also, but the list should call the teacher's attention to her mistakes.

These suggestions included:

1. A discussion and careful review of a unit or any part of it before a test.
2. Not having tests.
3. Having open-book tests or study exercises more often.
4. Having fewer exercises and fewer pages in one assignment.
5. Having the teacher keep to the subject and fact.
6. Having the teacher know her subject and her text.

Most of the reasons for liking or disliking social studies and geography-history given by students reflect directly back to the problems discussed in Chapter I. This study definitely shows that the way children feel toward social studies and geography-history is in keeping with the current problems previously discussed.

The teacher questionnaires will be discussed in this part of Chapter II. (See Plate II.) Teachers generally gave a good response to their questionnaires. Only two out of twenty-six did not return their questionnaires. Of the twenty-four returned one did not like social studies, one was undecided, and four definitely loved social studies. This like or dislike for social studies or geography-history may have had some bearing on the teacher's preparation for teaching the subject. There were only two teachers who stated that they had had methods courses in the social studies or geography-history. Ten had had only courses that were required. Two had had no courses in the social studies field at all. Six had taken courses beyond those required, and six had had less than the required courses. Two were geography majors, and two were social science majors. Six had gained knowledge through experience and five had traveled.

As to references mentioned by the teachers, almost all the teachers used the same references as their pupils except the teachers' manuals. Ten teachers made use of other texts besides their basic texts. In general the same type references were used by all teachers and students. These included encyclopedias,

geography readers, My Weekly Reader, films, filmstrips, maps, tourist information, and newspapers and magazines. Teachers with the most training tended to use the greatest variety of references.

Textbooks and courses were extensively commented on by fourteen of the twenty-four teachers. The other ten had no comments at all on the texts or the courses.

Eight teachers had comments on the difficulty and up-to-dateness of the text. Other comments on the text were:

1. Have the text better organized.
2. Have the text more condensed.
3. Have better maps with better print and in color in the text.
4. Have better and colored pictures in the text.
5. The textbooks contained too much material to cover in one year.
6. Those who taught geography-history suggested consolidating them into one textbook.
7. Have workbooks and maps for the text on suitable level for younger children.
8. Improve texts with more intimate description of life of children and families, schools, homes, social customs, foods, dress, recreation, and everything that is of interest to children.
9. Improve texts by putting in a fuller index, a glossary, and more charts.
10. Texts or text manuals should have a list of films or filmstrips to accompany each unit.
11. Texts should definitely have study or review questions at the end of each section or unit.



12. A mimeograph type workbook of exercises and maps, which the teacher can use when she needs it, should be made to accompany the text.
13. Textbook companies should publish folders or pamphlets to improve on maps and keep the information of the texts up-to-date.

Improvements suggested for social studies in general were to have references available which were written on the child's level of interest and ability and to have more time or a more condensed course.

Motivation used in the various classrooms had no definite trend. It seemed all the teachers except four used a variety of motivation for lessons in social studies or geography-history. High in the list of motivation methods were: discussions; oral reading and discussion; map work and map making; acting out stories written by students; using visual aids such as pictures, films, and filmstrips; and oral and written reports. Other motivations listed were:

1. Outside reading.
2. Art activities.
  - a. Maps.
  - b. Murals.
  - c. Booklets.
3. Writing activities.
  - a. Stories.
  - b. Plays.
4. Group activities of various types.
  - a. Stories.
  - b. Plays.
  - c. Study.

- d. Games.
- e. Quiz contests.
5. Retelling stories by topics.
6. Individual and class projects.
7. Self testing.
8. Supervised study.
9. Newspapers.
10. Questions and answers.
11. Workbook exercises.
12. Unit methods.
13. Study guide questions and exercises.
14. Silent reading and discussions.

This part of the study--the teachers' questionnaires--also reflects much the same problems discussed in Chapter I. The two greatest problems presented by the teachers were the difficulty and lack of up-to-dateness of the textbooks and the scope of material covered by social studies and geography-history.

CHAPTER III  
SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE  
TEACHING OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN THE  
INTERMEDIATE GRADES

Many are the volumes that could be written on suggested solutions to all the problems arising in the teaching of the social studies in the intermediate grades. I shall not attempt to discuss all of them by any means. I shall try to discuss just those which seem most important to me in accordance with the problems presented in Chapters I and II.

First of all, I believe, the greatest problem is the textbook. How can we obtain an ideal textbook? Probably there may never be the one ideal text for all the students. The teacher can choose carefully and provide for individual differences on her own initiative. We need to make the authors and publishers aware of the need for the improvement of the texts and what things need to be improved. This awareness can be obtained by carrying on more studies such as this. A teacher may even write a new and ideal (as she may think) textbook. Publishers and authors should make a detailed study of the needs, abilities, vocabulary, and courses of study at the various grade levels and try to provide for those things in revising the texts. Most of all there should be some way provided to keep the textbook material up-to-date.

Current pamphlets published by the authors or publishers have been suggested.<sup>1</sup>

Improvements in courses of study can be provided in the classroom by the teacher and used along with any basic text and correlated into her daily work. She should make a study of the problems of the community so she will know what problems the children may have. These needs and problems should be incorporated into the curriculum. Teachers of all grades should meet and attempt to correlate the content, materials, and methods more closely between the grades. If the teacher has a good social studies program, it will evolve and change to meet the needs, problems, and requirements of the teachers (her and others) and the children.<sup>2</sup>

In providing for students' desires and individual differences, a program cannot be planned very far in advance. Two different groups in two different years may be as unlike as night and day. Therefore, neither plans used one year nor the methods used in that year are much good with the next year's group except as reference. The teacher has to find out what her new group can do, what they like, and what methods will work best with them. Some of this can be done by teacher-pupil planning. Partly it may be trial and error on the part of the teacher. What may work with a slow group may be too elementary for a fast group.

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<sup>1</sup>Ohles, John F., "The Curse of the Textbook," Social Studies, 44:64-66, February, 1953.

<sup>2</sup>McAulay, J. D., "What's Wrong with the Social Studies?" Social Education, 16:377-378, December, 1952.

Teacher-pupil planning can be carried on as successfully with slow learners as with average or superior learners.

The satisfaction which results from the cooperative efforts of class and teacher need not be denied to the slow learner groups. These pupils are in greater need for school success than their more intellectual classmates. Compensation for lack of academic accomplishment can, to a large measure, be obtained through the achievement of goals which pupils and teachers have set up. Mutual planning enlists the interests of the pupils. ---By meeting needs which they recognize and which they have helped define, their work has greater meaning for them. The teacher recognizes, however, that slow learners will not be able to carry on the same kind or degree of planning which might be expected of rapid learners. His (the pupil's) understanding of group limitations helps the teacher make her own plans accordingly.<sup>3</sup>

Planning should not be confined to subject matter learnings alone but should include many activities connected with the social studies. Some child who cannot read may be skilled in art, crafts, or map making. Activity experiences help provide for the interests and abilities of these children. To provide for the poor reader or slow learner, give him "success experiences," a short term project, allow him to use his simple judgment, and eliminate excessive formal homework. The child may assist in planning by obtaining outside materials. Routine procedures as well as proper preparation in planning on the part of the teacher help slow learners. Teachers should use outlines, simple directions, rules, questions, and other criteria in their preparation of assignments to guide slow learners.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Fruman, Dorothy W., "Teacher-Pupil Planning with Slow Learners," 18:249-250, October, 1954.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

Because of lack of available references written on a lower level of reading ability, it is largely up to the teacher to carefully select various library books of high interest and low level difficulty for her group. If she has a few outstanding readers she needs books on an advanced level of difficulty also. Many publishing companies are now putting out a biography series on high interest level and low reading level.<sup>5</sup> Sample textbooks of social studies, geography, and history may be used not only for interest but to gain different authors' views on the subject under study. Some of these samples may be written in a simpler vocabulary than the basic text in use.

As has been said in the beginning, I do not expect to solve the apparent problems or to outline a detailed lesson plan. I can only write suggestions that may help the resourceful teacher plan for her individual differences and therefore solve a part of her problem. Much of this will depend on her methods and classroom situations. With the proper methods, proper classroom situations, and reference materials any social studies or even other subjects could be taught without a basic text if the teacher has done careful planning.<sup>6</sup> The instructional resources that could be used in this type of teaching are the community resources,

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<sup>5</sup>The American Adventure Series by Wheeler Publishing Company, Chicago, Illinois and The Childhood of Famous Americans Series by Bobbs-Merrell Company, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana are two of this series.

<sup>6</sup>Michaelis, John U., Social Studies for Children in a Democracy. New York: Prentice Hall, Inc. 1950. pp. 203-217.

a wide variety of audio-visual materials, activities, and a variety of reading materials.<sup>7</sup>

Teachers are becoming increasingly conscious of the need of pupils for enriched social experiences through activities and by means of conditioned learning.<sup>8</sup> The most fundamental condition of learning is interest. "Teachers can stimulate an interest by providing new experiences that have a real connection with the proposed material."

The second condition is need or purpose. "The children must sense the need for learning and be convinced that the proposed materials will meet that need."

Meaning is the third condition of learning. "This condition is met when the pupil can understand how social studies ties on to what he already knows and when it contains materials that he recognizes as useful."

Fullness is the fourth condition of learning.

Relatively long and detailed narratives are easier to understand than brief summaries. Five pages are easier and more learnable than a summary of one-half page. A paragraph on the products of Spain is more meaningful than a catalogic list. A generalization or an insight can be acquired only by deriving it from relevant details.

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<sup>7</sup>Michaelis, op. cit., p. 201.

<sup>8</sup>This idea and these quotes on conditioned learning are from Wesley, Edgar B., and Adams, Mary A., Teaching Social Studies in Elementary Schools. Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1946. pp. 63-66.

The fifth condition of learning is a grading of content.

The key element from the standpoint of the pupil is maturation or readiness; the key element in the content is difficulty. The pupil should be mature enough to match the level of difficulty in the materials and have the prerequisites of necessary skills and understandings.

This task is difficult enough to challenge the most resourceful of teachers.

A sense of freedom on the part of the child is the sixth condition of learning.

Repeated studies have shown that compulsion, ridicule, and punishment, or the fear of them, interfere with or prevent learning. The teacher must provide an atmosphere in which the pupil can be natural, free from self-consciousness and constraint. He must be free to make at least some choice of the materials which he learns, to discover methods and procedures, and to make his own interpretations and generalizations. Under proper guidance he will make few fundamental errors, and what he does learn in an atmosphere of freedom and with a sense of his own responsibility will contribute far more to his mental development than the wisdom of the ages imposed upon him by a taskmaster.

A seventh condition of learning, which is almost always present in the social studies, is awareness of time and place. Social studies materials depend upon and involve time and places. "The significance of persons, events, inventions, trends, and movements depend upon their being located in both time and place." This condition does not mean that these two factors must continually be stated in respect to every particle of content. It does mean that the significance of realities in social studies



depends upon the setting and the time sequences. Time and place must be implicit or explicit in all social studies materials.<sup>9</sup>

The teacher has the responsibility of seeing that as many as possible of the conditions described in the preceding paragraphs are provided to the pupil. "Directing the pupils through these learning processes is the function of the teacher."<sup>10</sup>

The qualifications for the teacher in the learning processes are several. Chiefly, she should be qualified and competent. She should have a pleasant personality with a high stimulus ratio. She should teach by presence as well as by efforts. She should be able to explain things clearly, to analyze and correct defects and errors, and provide an atmosphere of freedom, naturalness, and purposefulness. It is her function to see that the room is attractive, that materials are ready, and that a reasonable degree of order and system prevail.<sup>11</sup>

The teacher can assist the learning process by understanding and knowing how to apply the whole-part method. It seems fairly well established in the social studies that pupils learn by first grasping the whole and then studying the part. "Segments" to oldsters are a "whole" to youngsters.

Teachers can promote pupil learning by merging study and discussion. Time should be devoted to a judicious blend of

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Wesley and Adams, op. cit., p. 66-67.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

reading and activities. During the activity-discussion period, the pupils will have the opportunities to talk, to work in groups, to express their ideas, and to receive the stimulation which naturally arises from a social situation. Thus pupils will learn during the recitation; they will receive help at the time it is needed, and not after erroneous associations have already been established.<sup>12</sup>

The teacher can promote learning by repeating and expanding the materials at hand.

The repetitions should seldom be outright duplications; new points, new illustrations, new aspects should be added, not only for the sake of interest, but because they promote an understanding of the concepts, generalizations, or principles which are at the heart of the material.<sup>13</sup>

The teacher can promote learning by drill. The basic facts, skills, and methods should be reviewed at spaced intervals, and utilized if possible in new settings. The teacher can promote learning by the frequent use of praise. Normal human beings desire commendation; they are even willing to learn in order to secure it. The teacher should see that the pupils achieve success. The taste of success seems to leave an abiding flavor and a strong desire to repeat the experience. Success tends to become a habit. Papers should be read and returned immediately, if possible. Since success and the knowledge of it are such powerful

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<sup>12</sup>Wesley and Adams, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

incentives to learning, the teacher should see that every pupil succeeds as often as possible.<sup>14</sup>

The teacher can promote learning by providing for individual differences, by seeing that pupils of varying abilities have challenging assignments. The slow, backward pupil and the bright, versatile one are both entitled to special consideration. Each should be led to achieve up to the level of his capacity; each should have materials which utilize his whole ability. The teacher should provide for socialized, varied group activities. She should help each pupil to be himself and also to be a cooperating and unselfish member of his group, his class, and his school.<sup>15</sup>

On pages 75 and 76 in Wesley and Adams, Teaching Social Studies in Elementary Schools are listed seventy characteristics peculiar to good social studies teachers. Besides scholarship and professional conduct, the characteristic practices of a good social studies teacher are that she:

- |                                     |                                  |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Detects errors                   | 10. Is efficient                 |
| 2. Analyzes defects                 | 11. Stresses social objectives   |
| 3. Gives explicit directions        | 12. Utilizes pupil committees    |
| 4. Explains clearly                 | 13. Promotes cooperation         |
| 5. Tells what she knows             | 14. Promotes desirable attitudes |
| 6. Is ingenious                     | 15. Promotes tolerance           |
| 7. Likes to be with people          | 16. Is democratic                |
| 8. Works hard                       | 17. Uses democratic procedures   |
| 9. Has a touch of missionary spirit | 18. Is courteous                 |
|                                     | 19. Stresses map skills          |

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<sup>14</sup>Wesley and Adams, op. cit., p. 68-69.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

20. Stresses study skills
21. Develops concepts of time
22. Develops concepts of place
23. Teaches respect for the past
24. Develops respect for our government
25. Selects useful information
26. Builds up generalizations
27. Sits down with pupils
28. Moves about the room
29. Smiles encouragement
30. Laughs with pupils
31. Creates interest
32. Shows the value of what is studied
33. Utilizes pupil experiences
34. Chooses purposeful activities
35. Selects meaningful problems
36. Has variety in her procedure
37. Helps pupils
38. Allows for individual capacities
39. Utilizes situations outside of school
40. Devises drill games
41. Creates her own units
42. Utilizes extant units
43. Uses visual aids regularly
44. Uses varied types of visual aids
45. Uses recordings
46. Uses the radio
47. Directs the making of scrapbooks
48. Directs gathering pupil materials
49. Directs pupils in making pictures
50. Makes field trips
51. Hands out written assignments
52. Outlines the work far in advance
53. Stresses assignments
54. Gives pupils opportunities to talk
55. Asks original questions
56. Answers pupil questions
57. Appreciates pupil contributions
58. Creates favorable conditions for work
59. Responds when pupils ask for help
60. Uses punishments regularly
61. Gives frequent tests
62. Utilizes test results
63. Explains nature of tests
64. Employs progress charts
65. Keeps conduct records of pupils
66. Informs pupils of their progress
67. Bases marks on many aspects of achievement
68. Recognizes obligations to colleagues
69. Cooperates with parents
70. Knows her material<sup>16</sup>

Almost all of these points could apply to a teacher of any other subject. If a teacher follows these seventy points in her methods or techniques, she is considered a good social studies teacher.

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<sup>16</sup>Wesley and Adams, op. cit., pp. 75-76.

If improvements are made on textbooks in accordance with the needs of pupils, teachers, and courses of study and if teachers are resourceful and live, up to the points suggested in this study, the picture of the teaching of the social studies should change for the better. That is, more children should have created in them an interest in and a liking for the social studies and other related subjects. I cannot see why at least a part of the current problems discussed in Chapter I cannot be solved. We have better teachers--better trained according to more rigid requirements and better through voluntary study, committees, workshops, meetings, publications, field trips, etc., so why can't our problems be solved?<sup>17</sup>

Before the problems of social studies teaching are completely solved (if they ever are) many more studies such as this will have to be made. These studies should cover larger geographical areas and extend from the primary grades through senior high school. This is an ever widening field of study and can afford a great opportunity for the researchers in time to come.

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<sup>17</sup>Cartwright, W. H., "What Is Happening in the Social Studies II," Social Education, 18:115-116, March, 1954.

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