

The Effects of Life Adjustment Education on the U.S. History Curriculum, 1948-1957

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IN A 2003 STUDY funded by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, a group of researchers asked the question: Where did the U.S. history curriculum go wrong? Their answer was the 1916 Committee on Social Studies report, which, according to Diane Ravitch, had a “devastating impact on the teaching of history.”¹ Previously, Ravitch and numerous other scholars had also identified the 1916 Committee on Social Studies report as the major turning point in which the history-centered sequence of courses was allegedly replaced by the utilitarian, anti-intellectual, trans-disciplinary social studies.² Employing what Christine Woyshner calls the “struggle metaphor” of history-versus-social studies, these historians argue that the transition from history to social studies during the 1920s and 1930s was sudden, pervasive, and detrimental to the centrality of “straight” history in the U.S. secondary curriculum.³ For example, regarding the effects of the 1918 *Cardinal Principles*, Diane Ravitch writes, “Neither history or geography survived as a subject; both were submerged into the new field of the ‘social studies.’”⁴ Likewise, Patricia Albjerg Graham asserts that with the reforms of the Committee on Social Studies report “came the disappearance of history and government as separate subjects and the emergence of social studies which was intended to integrate past and present behavior.”⁵

In this historical study, I argue that the impact of the 1916 Committee on Social Studies report on the disciplinary integrity of the U.S. history curriculum in secondary schools has been greatly exaggerated. Although the history curriculum was refashioned during the 1920s and 1930s as a result of the 1916 report, many of these changes were superficial, and the academic disciplines (specifically history) remained at the core of the curriculum during the years preceding the Second World War. However, a more substantial reformation of the history curriculum took place in the postwar years as a result of life adjustment education. By shifting the turning point in the history curriculum from the 1916 report to the life adjustment education movement of the 1950s, I demonstrate that the utilitarian and interdisciplinary reforms of the history curriculum that emerged during the 1940s and 1950s. These cannot be attributed to the founders of the social studies, but more significantly to the external ideas of the curriculum specialists who engineered life adjustment education. Thus, I offer a defense of the recommendations of the 1916 social studies report and suggest that the revisions to the history curriculum during life adjustment education were a betrayal, not a continuation, of this tradition.

My study builds upon the work of several historians who have questioned the accuracy of the history-versus-social studies interpretation.⁶ They have defended the Committee on Social Studies report by arguing that the reformation of the history curriculum after the First World War was gradual and involved the cooperation of historians and social studies educators. However, these historians focus almost exclusively on the intellectual discourse of committee reports and the ideas of prominent history/social studies educators. The impact of these ideas and recommendations at the state and local level is often assumed rather than demonstrated. Similarly, historians who have studied life adjustment education and scholars who have traced the effects of life adjustment education specifically on the history curriculum have also mostly focused on the professional discourse and/or have relied on non-subject-specific reports.⁷ As a result, the impact at the state and local level is often assumed.

My narrative moves beyond this previous research by drawing upon local, state, and city curriculum guides in addition to national reports, surveys, and proposals to gain a more accurate, nuanced picture of the overall effects of the Committee on Social Studies and life adjustment education on the American history curriculum. Of course, these local curriculum guides are themselves suggestive, and not necessarily reflective of what was actually going on at the classroom level, but they certainly get us closer to the classroom than personal correspondence, journal articles, and national proclamations—upon which previous studies have

exclusively relied. These curriculum guides were distributed throughout their respective constituencies and often included the cooperation of classroom teachers. By drawing upon these curricula, I center my inquiry on the interaction between the professional discourse and curriculum design at the state and local level.

Reforming History for the Progressive Era

The Committee on Social Studies report was published in 1916 as part of the larger reform effort, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, commonly referred to as the *Cardinal Principles*. The 1916 report recommended a new scope and sequence of history courses meant to replace the existing curriculum, which most schools had based on the recommendations of the National Education Association's (NEA) 1893 Committee of Ten and/or the American Historical Association's (AHA) 1899 Committee of Seven. The Committee on Social Studies refashioned the history curriculum "to meet the needs of present growth," an objective the committee members lifted from the work of John Dewey. In place of the four-year history sequence recommended by the Committee of Ten and Committee of Seven, the 1916 report recommended a Community Civics class for eighth or ninth grade (after which many students dropped out of school) and a senior course called Problems of Democracy (POD). Both of these proposed classes were interdisciplinary explorations into current issues facing U.S. society. For the rest of the curriculum, the Committee on Social Studies recommended history coursework, specifically two courses in European history and one course in U.S. history. This sequence reflected the personnel of the Committee; most of the Committee was made up of educators, including school principals and education professors, but the most influential members—James Harvey Robinson, Thomas Jesse Jones, and Arthur Dunn—were professors trained in the Arts and Sciences. The members of the Committee steered a moderate course between the more traditional professional historians and social scientists who wanted to protect their recent curricular gains, and the demands of educational specialists who wanted the curriculum to be functional, relevant, and progressive.⁸

Prominent Teachers College (Columbia University) professor, Harold Rugg, was one the most influential members of the latter group of educational specialists. Although Rugg's work is often portrayed as a direct descendent of the ideas of the Committee on Social Studies report, he actually considered the personnel and recommendations of the 1916 report as too conservative and subject-centered. Rugg believed that the Committee on Social Studies had not gone far enough in incorporating more

civic education and focusing more explicitly on Americanization. Rugg argued that the 1916 report had been based upon “armchair philosophy” and “the opinion and apriori judgment of a small group of specialists in subject-matter.”⁹ He saw little to no distinction between the reports of the Committee of Ten, the Committee of Seven, and the Committee on Social Studies, because they all had “not been based upon investigation, measurement of results attained in current instruction, objective determination of desirable content, or upon experimentation”¹⁰ Harold’s brother, Earle Rugg, a curriculum specialist, also viewed the social studies report as a conservative document. According to him, the years 1892-1922 were characterized by the dominance of history professors. Their influence was manifest not so much by the flood of committee reports, but by their dominance over the writing of textbooks. Like his brother Harold, Earle Rugg complained that these texts were written “without contact with the elementary or high-school classes for which they were intended” and they ignored “the steps of scientific procedure in curriculum-making.”¹¹ The Rugg brothers were united in their faith that scientific curriculum-making would usher in an era of problem-based, interdisciplinary instruction in the social studies. However, they overestimated the degree to which school teachers and administrators were willing to whole-heartedly adopt their ideas.

Harold Rugg served as a consultant for the revision of the history curriculum in Denver, Colorado in 1924—in one of the first attempts to revise the curriculum in light of scientific curriculum-making. The Denver schools were headed by progressive superintendent and future Teachers College professor Jesse H. Newlon. The Denver curriculum revision project would become a prototype of progressive educational reform for the entire nation. During the 1920s, over 13,000 copies of the printed Denver curriculum monographs were purchased by other districts.¹² Newlon was an innovator, not only for incorporating many progressive educational ideas into the curriculum, but also for including teachers in the revision process. The presence of these teachers, perhaps, explains the conservatism of the curriculum document they produced, especially when contrasted with the more ambitious objectives of the Rugg brothers.

If we take a close look at the Denver social studies curriculum, we can see how the district adopted much of rhetoric of curriculum reform, but left most of its history content intact. The adopted Denver social studies sequence for grades seven through nine included a balance of content from history and the social sciences, including units on: Community Life, The Industrial Life of the American People, The Interdependence of Modern Industrial Nations, The Changing Agricultural Nations, Westward Expansion and Growth of Transportation, History of the

Industrial Revolution, Growth of American Democracy, Forms of American Government, Waste and Conservation of America's Resources, Immigration and Americanization, and International Relations. This list reflected the civically-informed, industrial, and social history suggested by John Dewey, James Harvey Robinson, and the Committee on Social Studies report. The curriculum was broken down into unit objectives, pupil activities, and problems. These "problems," however, did not emerge from current events or real world issues, as recommended by Rugg; instead, they emerged from the content of the academic disciplines. For example, the "problems" listed for the unit on Westward Movement included: How does America compare in historical age with other countries of the world? Why did white men come to America? Why did the English begin to settle in North America?¹³ The answers to these questions were not to be found in the context of the students' social world; they were to be found in their history textbooks.

Furthermore, many of the pedagogical suggestions for Denver were driven by the need for increased efficiency. For example, essay questions were discouraged in light of true-false questions, which were considered more efficient, less subjective, and capable of covering "a wider field of subject matter."¹⁴ In other words, despite the rhetoric of student-centeredness and the development of citizenship, the primary focus of the curriculum remained covering traditional history content in the most socially efficient way. As Rugg later reflected, the Denver curriculum project was only a partial success. "Although the Denver program was carried on by 'subject' committees," he concluded, "advances were achieved by the merging of a number of traditional subjects." However, for Rugg, the Denver reformers never viewed the curriculum as whole, nor did they relate it fully to "how people live."¹⁵

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, many practitioners and education-minded professors continued to use the term "social studies" in reference to the newly revised history curriculum recommended by the 1916 report. National and regional survey data from the period confirms that many—if not most—of the schools continued to follow the disciplinary lead of professional historians by implementing the "new" brand of history. For example, in 1926, the social studies curriculum in St. Louis based its scope and sequence on the recommendations of the AHA's Report of the Second Committee of Eight. Like the Denver program, the reformation of the St. Louis curriculum included the input from 147 classroom teachers who served as committee heads representing 441 teachers from across the district. Despite the adoption of the progressive term "social studies," the recommended scope and sequence of the curriculum was history-centered. For example, the World History course, which had been condensed into a

single year, covered units on the Orient, Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages, and Modern History—a sequence which could have been found in many schools two decades earlier.¹⁶

Despite the fact that the St. Louis curriculum ignored the recommendations of the Committee on Social Studies, it still made reference to citizenship and incorporated some of the modern elements of curriculum design. For example, each unit was broken down into specific objectives and suggested activities, which on the most superficial level were problem-based. The curriculum asked, “Problem: What did primitive and Oriental man contribute to modern civilization?” and “Problem: How did the Greeks advance civilization?” As we can see, these objectives and questions merely presented the chronological historical overview of the past in a slightly less-traditional manner. They were in no way based upon interdisciplinary exploration, student issues, or current events. Likewise, even though the guide declared that “through history, [the student] will be able to interpret the present by a knowledge of the past, and as a result become a better citizen,” the curriculum guide included very few references to any current events or issues. In most cases, students were simply asked to compare some element of the past with that of the present.¹⁷ In fact, a study of social studies reform in over forty schools between 1925 and 1932 confirmed that many of the revisions were superficial and contained “slogans and catch phrases which cannot be defined with precision and accuracy.”¹⁸ Overall, changes to the scope and sequence of actual courses during these years were minimal, and the history curriculum remained at the heart of study.

However, the Committee on Social Studies report did have an effect on the rhetoric of the history curriculum. As we have seen, many schools made at least some reference to citizenship training and offered some kind of elective course in Civics during the eighth, ninth, or senior year. However, the two most frequently enrolled—and, in many cases, required—courses throughout these years were World History and American History.¹⁹ Such requirements were often dictated by the state legislature. California, for example, mandated at least ten semester hours “in American history and civics, including the study of American institutions and ideals and the Constitution of the United States.”²⁰ In some cases, there was a divergence of requirements based on tracking, with higher-tracked students enrolling in “straight” history courses and lower-tracked students enrolling in fused Civics courses, but, as the Denver and St. Louis curriculum guides demonstrate, even the latter type of courses were content-rich and often history-centered.

History would actually gain, not lose, enrollments during the Second World War. Survey data for 1948-1949 from over 200,000 schools reported

an increase in enrollments in history, especially U.S. history, as a result of increased and better-enforced history requirements.²¹ Although the catastrophic events of the World Wars and Great Depression inspired calls for “relevant” and “issued-based” curriculum material, these events also inspired surges of patriotism and loyalty, which undermined these innovative approaches. Since these impulses ran counter to one another, the curriculum in most schools steered a moderate course between these extremes. Based on data from almost 24,000 high schools from across the U.S., Anderson concluded, “About half of the courses at the lower level and about two thirds of the upper level are classified as history rather than as fused, correlated, or integrated courses.”²² Although “fused” courses had made considerable gains at the expense of “straight” history, history classes remained at the center of the curriculum throughout this period. Overall, the primary focus for curriculum reformers prior to the Second World War was on how to reorganize traditional content in a more progressive and civic-minded way, not to replace history content with interdisciplinary, problem-based courses.

Curriculum Specialists and the Life Adjustment Movement

Although Harold Rugg’s interdisciplinary ideas gained popularity among reformers throughout the 1930s, it was not until the postwar years that the interdisciplinary, “real world”-based ideas of the curriculum specialists truly took hold. The reform movement that had the most significant effect on the rhetoric and, to some degree, practice of the history curriculum was neither the writings and textbooks of Rugg nor the recommendations of the 1916 Committee on Social Studies; it was life adjustment education, which began with the Prosser Resolution of 1948. This movement was designed to address the portion of the student population, believed to be about sixty percent, that did not benefit from either college preparation or vocational training. Concerns about general education had already been expressed by the American Youth Commission and the Harvard Committee in *General Education in a Free Society*.²³ However, unlike these reports, which merely issued recommendations, the life adjustment movement involved a mobilization of resources towards the rapid implementation of its goals that dwarfed previous efforts at systemic curriculum reform. Proponents of life adjustment education supported curriculum flexibility; student guidance; and attention to previously neglected areas of social living such as hygiene, family living, drivers’ education, and social relations with peers. Emphasis was upon increasing the holding power of American high schools by presenting students with a more meaningful and relevant curriculum.

A national conference on life adjustment was held in Washington D.C. in October 1951, which was attended by more than 200 representatives from thirty-eight states. The conference focused on two fundamental issues: 1) that many youth of secondary age were not in school, and 2) that those who were in school “were not in programs well adjusted to their interests, efforts, and probable future activity.” The following year, another conference on life adjustment was attended by over 200 representatives from thirty-six states. The Second Commission of Life Adjustment estimated that more than 200,000 local teachers and administrators participated in workshops and conferences sponsored by State committees between 1951 and 1953, and twenty-nine states had either appointed committees or designed programs on life adjustment. Between the issuing of the Prosser Resolution in 1948 and the 1951 conference, twenty-five different educational periodicals published a total of 116 articles on life adjustment education, and forty bulletins were written in support of the movement. Supported by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, life adjustment reformers were driven by an unprecedented sense of mission.²⁴

Life adjustment education aligned with previously existing curricular arrangements such as curriculum fusion, curriculum correlation, and core curriculum, which had roots in the Herbartian movement of the 1890s, but had continued to gain popularity in some schools the 1930s and 1940s. Fusion referred to the integration of several related disciplines into one course, such as the Community Civics and POD courses recommended by the 1916 Committee on Social Studies report. Correlation, on the other hand, respected disciplinary boundaries but related bodies of knowledge to one another, especially the contents of English and history courses. Finally, the core curriculum integrated all the subjects of the school and focused upon a real world issue or problem.²⁵ History was the subject most affected by the core curriculum movement because, as educational researcher Edwin Carr explained in 1956, “the goals of the core curriculum demand a social studies framework or at least the teaching of a large number of social studies concepts.”²⁶ In fact, a survey of schools that had adopted core programs confirmed that seventy-two percent of courses established through a core framework included social studies content.²⁷

However, prior to the Second World War, many core curricular organizations often were tried and then eventually abandoned. In fact, one of the most successful experiments in all of progressive education, the Progressive Education Association’s Eight Year Study, failed to get its experimental schools to adopt the fusion model fully and faithfully. The Eight Year Study traced the achievement of students from over two dozen selected secondary schools (public and private) through their high school years and into college. Having convinced universities to overlook the

required subject and unit admission requirements, the selected high schools were free to experiment with more progressive curricula and techniques. Although a few schools found successful ways to fuse English and history content, most abandoned the scheme because English was often subsumed with the “obvious and accustomed chronological organization of history,” which was “deemed worse than the evils which fusion sought to eliminate.” As Wilford Aikin related in the overview of the Eight Year Study, “The visitor would have found in 1933 enthusiasm for fusion of subjects, but had he come again in 1936 he would have found doubt, discouragement, and search for something better.”²⁸ In other words, free from the top-down dictates of the college entrance exams, and given the freedom to provide an education that best fit the developmental and social needs of their students, most of the progressive teachers of the Eight Year Study ultimately chose to stick with the “straight” chronological approach to history.

The life adjustment, core, correlation, and even, to large extent, fusion movements all developed independently of the mainstream social studies discourse and establishment. A 1959 bibliographical review of research on social studies curriculum and methodology for the previous decade demonstrated a continued concern and focus on subject-centered instruction. For example, the review listed only nineteen articles on “Fusion and Correlation,” but offered a greater number of more traditional material, including twenty-eight articles on “World History,” eighty-three on “International Understanding,” and 151 on “Geography and the Social Studies.”²⁹ Although certain social studies educators supported the goals of life adjustment education, as we shall see, the reform movement was primarily an external, top-down curricular initiative engineered by the second generation of curriculum specialists—that is, professionals with doctoral degrees in curriculum design. In their doctoral programs, these specialists were trained specifically in the kind of scientific curriculum-making recommended by the Rugg brothers (although, stripped of its ideological explicitness), and they applied this expertise to the curricula of state and local districts across the U.S. “If the first thirty five years [of curriculum reform] were the day of the liberal arts professors,” Rugg explained in 1947, “the last twenty have been that of the professors of education and the public school curriculum-makers.”³⁰

However, even though Rugg was a self-professed scientific curriculum designer, he was not entirely antagonistic to academic content, just its traditional arrangement. His issue-centered textbooks contained substantial academic content arranged thematically. As Rugg explained in the introduction to his 1940 textbook *Citizenship and Civic Affairs*, his interdisciplinary approach “has not caused a reduction in the amount of history or of geography in the course. Rather it has produced a sharp

increase in the amount of these subjects in the curriculum and, in addition, had added to the curriculum a wealth of new material.”³¹ On the other hand, the next generation of curriculum specialists was less deferential to the expertise of professional historians.

What exactly was the new scientific curriculum-making? In 1948, the Waller High School of Chicago, Illinois hired Dr. Ralph Tyler of the University of Chicago as a consultant to update its curriculum. After the publication of his classic text *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* the following year, Tyler would become the most influential curriculum specialist in the country; his overall influence would even exceed that of Rugg.³² As Tyler explained, curriculum design involved four steps: selecting the objectives, determining the learning experiences, organizing activities, and planning for evaluation. Regarding the determination of objectives, Tyler explained, “recognize the fact that, fundamentally, education means changing the way human beings behave: the way students think, feel and act and that the ultimate success of any education enterprise must be judged in terms of individual growth in good living.” Furthermore, Tyler suggested that teachers select “learning experiences in response to real needs ... when [the student] comprehends his personal relationship to the problem, the more probable it is that he will show changes in his behavior.” When organizing activities, Tyler explained, it is crucial to connect the material to the lives and occupations of students. He insisted that teachers should ask, “How can the school connect democratic practices and real living so that citizenship can be practiced in students’ actual behavior?”³³

According to Tyler and the curriculum specialists, course objectives were not listed in terms of intellectual growth, but rather in terms of acquired or modified personal behaviors and attitudes that could be applied directly towards present social problems. On this point, I. James Quillen of Stanford University was explicit: “Social studies objectives should: (a) be stated as descriptions of behaviors (b) be related to each other so as to focus on the development of the total personality of youth.”³⁴ The dozen social studies curriculum guides and programs published during the years of life adjustment education that I reviewed are virtually all organized in the manner described by Tyler and Quillen. They listed objectives in terms of observable behaviors and attitudes, listed possible learning activities, and suggested ways to evaluate the acquisition of the desired attitudes and behaviors. Although academic content was still included, the curriculum specialists emphasized the importance of organizing content around present and interdisciplinary problems instead of the academic disciplines. As we shall see, the effects of these curricular reorganizations, in conjunction with the overall goals of life adjustment education, had a substantial effect on the actual substance of the curriculum guides.

Life Adjustment Education and the History Curriculum

As a result of the new curriculum specialists, there was an explosion in the production of curriculum guides in the years following the Second World War, especially in the fields of language arts and social studies. These guides demonstrate the acceptance of the overall goals of life adjustment education. In an exhaustive review of these new curricular materials published between 1951 and 1953, researchers reported that, instead of taking a chronological approach, eighty-eight percent of the newly designed history/social studies courses were organized around learning units, “over half of which were based on combinations of aspects of social living, themes, and concepts.” The reviewers also noted “a tendency to fuse history, geography, civics, and economics . . . in the study of state, city, or community.”³⁵

The immediate effects of life adjustment education on the rhetoric of the history curriculum were present in Edwin Carr’s 1956 assessment of current trends in the curriculum. In his review of the field, he identified increases in “matters of personal adjustment,” “emphasis on better family living,” “emphasis on improving intergroup relations,” “emphasis on community study,” and “pupil-teacher planning.” Regarding the encroachment of such issues and approaches into the curriculum, Carr offered the following defense: “The legitimacy of dealing with personal-social topics in social studies is evident . . . The question is not as to their propriety—the question is the provision of a greater amount of time for the social studies so that the teacher can do justice to individual and social needs.”³⁶ Carr not only failed to express reservations about the abandonment of the traditional academic arrangement of content, but he wholly endorsed the revisions that sought to replace it. He was not alone in his enthusiasm about these reforms; his ideas were present in the numerous state, city, and local curriculum guides and programs, many of which were authored by or with curriculum specialists and consultants. In fact, all the guides and programs I reviewed made some reference to the language of adjustment.

Before we proceed with an overview of these curricula, I want to make an important distinction between curriculum guides and programs. Curriculum guides were designed and distributed by local and state curriculum developers and represented the *intended* curriculum, not necessarily what was being implemented in schools; they were prescriptive. However, the curriculum programs were reports of what had already been implemented in some progressive schools; they were descriptive. In other words, unlike the curriculum guides, the programs reflected ideas that had in fact been implemented in the schools. Both the guides and programs reflected similar characteristics, but we must be careful not to conflate

them lest we confuse what was proposed with what was actually adopted at the ground level.

Overall, the suggested secondary social studies curriculum as demonstrated by these curriculum guides was aimed at flexibility and responsiveness. Topics were to be derived from student interest and/or concerns, and all material was to be related directly to student needs. For example, the social studies program at the Ohio State University School (Columbus, Ohio) boasted how its core class employed such cooperative planning with students in choosing their topic: "For instance, immediately after the Korean War began, a tenth grade class undertook a study of 'The World Today' in the fall quarter, a unit which was not on the list and which has not been seriously considered since." Accordingly, a social studies guide for Seattle, Washington proclaimed that the "guiding aim of the social studies is to make the present age understandable to high school students. Units are selected which have significance in light of the present."³⁷ For these curriculum specialists, most subject-based textbooks represented a stagnant curriculum based on the accumulated knowledge of the disciplines. Instead, these curriculum guides and programs explained, textbooks should be used as resources for the exploration of current events and issues. The curriculum should be dynamic, responsive, and broadly conceived to include all areas of living. Even the content of the traditional history-centered classes was reformulated, not necessarily to be fused with other disciplines, but to be made immediately relevant to the concerns of the present.

Once the curriculum was freed from the restraints of academic knowledge, many perceived social deficiencies, such as personality adjustment and family living, became the focus of curriculum content. In many instances, social studies teachers coordinated their efforts with guidance counselors, who administered personality and ability tests to students. In some cases, history teachers *were* the guidance counselors. Issues of how to make and maintain friends became the substance of social studies instruction, not just a topic for the hallway or guidance office. As a result, history content was aimed towards addressing personal, but not necessarily intellectual, deficiencies. For example, the social studies program in Milford, Connecticut explained how its senior POD course was focused upon "basic psychological needs, adjustment mechanisms, personal maturity concepts, and utilization of problem-solving methods for their own problems." The program concluded that "a well-adjusted personality is the key to consideration and cooperation." A social studies program for a high school in Port Arthur, Texas was focused on meeting "the needs of the child for living in his social world." The list of course objectives included "making a home," "getting a living," "protecting life and health," and "engaging in recreation."³⁸

In some schools, the senior POD course—originally designed by the 1916 Committee on Social Studies to combine history and the social sciences in light of present-day problems facing the U.S. democracy—morphed into an exploration of problems facing the social life and adjustment needs of individual students. In other words, in many schools, the term “problem” was reinterpreted from a collective, social science-based issue facing the nation (as recommended by the 1916 Committee on Social Studies) to a potential emotional challenge facing a student in his/her daily routine. Accordingly, the seventh grade social studies objectives for the Course of Study (curriculum guide) for the State of Alabama listed the following: “To develop through guidance in suitable work, observation, reading, conference, and participation in home, school, and community life social attitudes and understandings.” Activities listed under citizenship development included “Making school lunch period a sociable one; and planning for recreation during the lunch period.”³⁹

Perhaps no state adopted the rhetoric of life adjustment more wholeheartedly than Florida. The curriculum guide issued by the Department of Education proclaimed that the social studies should address “social needs, including how to get along with people, how to participate effectively in home and family life, and how to participate in community life.” The guide recommended a core curriculum that fused history and English aimed at dealing with “personal problems, social activities, the development of work-study habits, and adjustment to the school environment as well as major problems of social life.” Traditional subject and academic boundaries, the guide explained, were impediments to student learning. Instead, subject matter should be focused on real world issues:

In fusion, the broad fields of the social studies became unified for purposes of developing desired understandings and attitudes. Subject lines are broken down ... then organized around a large problem, which has immediate psychological value in the life situation of the pupil ... irrelevant content should be eliminated.⁴⁰

Like Florida, the State Curriculum Commission of California also attacked the chronological organization of historical content. “The weakness of the chronological approach,” the California guide explained, “is the likelihood that the student will study only the past with no attempt to relate the past to the present.” On the other hand, the thematic approach to history, the California guide explained, will lead to a “constant emphasis on knowledge of the past as the means of more fully understanding the present.”⁴¹ Studying the local community, the Florida guide insisted, would make history “less abstract and academic than the usual procedure.”⁴² As we can see, during life adjustment education, “academic” history came to mean shallow, chronological, outdated, and irrelevant, while “problem-

based” came to mean relevant, scientific, and progressive.

For many, the transmission of the facts and understandings of the academic disciplines were not only considered unnecessary, but also impractical. “The complexity of American culture,” the social studies guide for San Francisco, California schools explained, “makes it impossible for our students to remember all the facts.”⁴³ Instead, teachers should focus on ensuring that students “can participate effectively in realizing, maintaining and improving individual and group well-being.” Not surprisingly, the city of San Francisco guide listed Stanford professor I. James Quillen as a consultant. As Quillen had prescribed, the program objectives for the San Francisco curriculum were listed as behaviors related to the “total personality of youth”⁴⁴

Along these lines, the curriculum guide for Iowa asserted that, “the main emphasis must not be upon facts alone but upon behavior patterns. The attitudes, habits, and skills developed in accordance with the ideals of democracy are more important than the content covered.”⁴⁵ Accordingly, similar attacks on traditional subject matter were explicit in the social studies curriculum guide for Dallas, Texas as well:

Knowledge of subject matter ... is not the primary emphasis. The end goal ... is on the development of the abilities that help the individual adjust to group living, to become skilled in utilizing sources of information ... in attacking a problem, and to engage in the processes of civic action.⁴⁶

The listing and description of history and social science content in such purely behaviorist terms is striking. Although the term “social efficiency” that appeared so often in the curriculum literature in the early part of the twentieth century (including the Committee on Social Studies report) rarely appeared in these guides and bulletins, references to narrowly conceived behavior modification were common. Instead of moral, cognitive, and intellectual growth, learning outcomes were listed as attitudes, actions, and dispositions. For example, the State of Kansas Study of Citizenship guide described education as the “systematic effort to change or develop behavior in desirable directions.”⁴⁷ Likewise, the responsibility of the social studies, according to the California State Department of Education was to conduct “formalized training in citizenship.”⁴⁸ For these curriculum writers, the goal was socialization and training, not necessarily the development of disciplined reasoning.

Overall, life adjustment education had four major effects on the history curriculum as expressed in the local and state curriculum guides (although not necessarily practice). First, these curricula employed the language of student “adjustment” and “needs” and often included direct attacks on the idea of academic subjects. Objectives were listed in terms of observable behaviors, not intellectual engagement and/or growth. Second, these

curricula emphasized that teachers should include students in planning the substance of study and that teachers should make direct connections to the local community. The history curriculum, life adjustment educators argued, should be responsive and flexible. Third, these curricula included numerous examples of core, fusion, or integrated social studies courses and units. Beyond combining history with the social sciences, history was often combined with English. Finally, these curricula demonstrate that in many states, the definition of the social studies was expanded both internally and externally. Internally, the subject matter was broadened to include life adjustment topics that went well-beyond the narrow limits of the academic disciplines, including social and marriage counseling, drivers' education, family living, and intrapersonal relations. Externally, the entire school and curriculum often pursued the objective of "citizenship education" by linking community projects and student involvement to this broader goal. In the process, the discourse of the social studies at the state and local level diverged from the recommendations of the Committee on Social Studies and instead followed the dictates of the scientific curriculum-makers. During the life adjustment education movement, in many schools, the history curriculum became more of a process than a body of knowledge, and more of a list of narrowly conceived, observable behaviors than a path towards intellectual development. Although many schools probably resisted these trends, teachers were often involved in the design process and so many of these ideas were likely adopted at the local level—at least in the programs cited above.

These characteristics and trends of life adjustment education were confirmed by historian Barry Franklin in his study of curriculum reform in Minneapolis, Minnesota between 1935 and 1960. Franklin traced how rhetoric of scientific curriculum-making first entered the local social studies discourse in the late 1930s, but did not really take hold until the 1940s. The two greatest manifestations of the effort to modernize the history curriculum in Minneapolis were the introduction of a Modern Problems senior course and the attempt to fuse English and history in the earlier grades. Both attempts were tried and ultimately abandoned due to resistance by teachers and parents. The Modern Problems course was first introduced as an elective in 1939. It only differed from the usual American Government course in that it included a unit on occupational adjustment; most students still referred to the new course as "Civics." The Modern Problems course was not required for seniors until 1944, and even then, it did not replace the American Government class, but rather was added as an additional requirement. Further revisions were attempted with the scope and substance of the Modern Problems course, until it was abandoned in the mid-1960s. As one Minneapolis principal reported

in 1963, his teachers had given up on the integrated problems approach and instead reverted to teaching their social studies courses as “straight” American and world history. In addition, numerous parents complained about the reorganization of traditional subject matter, and state universities discouraged the introduction of these experimental courses by not accepting the classes for their entrance requirements.⁴⁹

The curriculum programs and guides I reviewed provide only a small window into the varied classroom practices and offerings of the nation, and so they must not be taken as entirely representative. However, they do reflect what curriculum theorists, designers, and some teachers considered state-of-the-art progressive education in the years following the Second World War. They were designed and distributed to schools throughout entire states such as California and Florida and potentially reached tens of thousands of teachers. They reinforced emerging beliefs about the need to address the emotional and social deficiencies of adolescents, the need to focus on observable behavior modification, and the irrelevance of traditionally arranged content. Perhaps what was in these programs and guides was not as significant as what was missing—direct references to John Dewey, the 1916 Committee on Social Studies report, or even Harold Rugg. By the 1950s, the behaviorist rationales of Quillen and Tyler as well as the therapeutic rationales of life adjustment education had become what was considered state-of-the-art history education.

The Social Studies in the Educational Imagination

The life adjustment movement must be understood in the context of the 1950s Cold War paradigm. The U.S. had emerged from the Second World War as the democratic world power, and the nation was experiencing unprecedented economic growth and prosperity. The democratic way of life as embodied by the norms of suburban life went largely unquestioned. Socializing students to such a life seemed logical and just. In fact, the desire to use the schools to create a complacent middle class was an explicit objective of Harvard President James Conant. In the widely read *General Education in a Free Society*, Conant and his associates argued on behalf of the shared values and “binding experience” of a general education grounded in the humanities and social sciences. Conant viewed such an education as an antidote to the intellectual encroachment of “Russian hordes,” who preyed on class antagonisms and moral relativity.⁵⁰ Likewise, life adjustment education directly aimed to make the middle class well-adjusted, socially mobile, and satisfied with American life. Second, the fear of totalitarianism—a term applied to both fascism and communism—led many scholars to shy away from the espousal of specific

political and cultural ideologies. The avoidance of secular “relativism” on one hand (e.g., Nazism) and state indoctrination on the other (e.g., Bolshevism) led many scholars to focus on pluralism, rights, processes, and values as a safe middle ground. As a result, attention shifted away from the kind of ideological content espoused by Harold Rugg, towards the democratic, reflective decision-making and value-formation process itself. The content of the life adjustment curriculum, by being descriptive instead of prescriptive, reinforced the idea of procedural neutrality.⁵¹ Third, the growth of developmental psychology helped to cast adolescence as time of great difficulty and emotional turmoil. In particular, psychologists such as Erik Erikson argued that the schools needed to recognize and address this important developmental period by helping students adjust to the adult expectations they would soon be adopting.⁵² Finally, life adjustment education was an outgrowth of the broadening social and communal function of the schools. Survey data demonstrate that high schools gained their greatest enrollment increases during the late 1930s. As a delayed result, the American high school, with its sports teams and senior proms, became an increasingly significant part of postwar social life of the middle class, and the curriculum adjusted to meet the expectations of its expanded population.⁵³

However, as many critics pointed out at the time, schools of the 1950s were serving a custodial rather than an educative function.⁵⁴ For critics of the social studies, the 1916 Committee on Social Studies would quickly be conflated with life adjustment education, and the moderate proponents of the social studies would find themselves on the defensive. However, the accusations commonly hurled at the Committee on Social Studies report by professional historians and critics—that a new breed of “educationists” suddenly replaced the academic history curriculum of U.S. schools with an anti-intellectual, amalgamated, utilitarian one—is more valid for the years 1948-1957 than it is for the years 1916-1948, if this reformation even took place at all at the classroom level, since teachers often ignored the recommendations offered by these reports and curriculum guides.⁵⁵ In the years following the Second World War, local and national curriculum specialists had a more substantial effect on the rhetoric of the history curriculum in a shorter amount of time than the founders of the social studies. The reformers responsible for the functional and therapeutic aspects of the history curriculum in the postwar years were not the Dewey-inspired founders of the social studies who authored the Committee on Social Studies report, but, more accurately, the numerous local and national curriculum specialists who administered life adjustment education.

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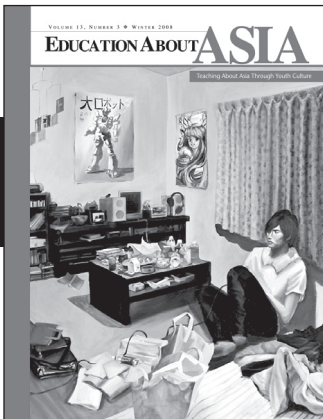
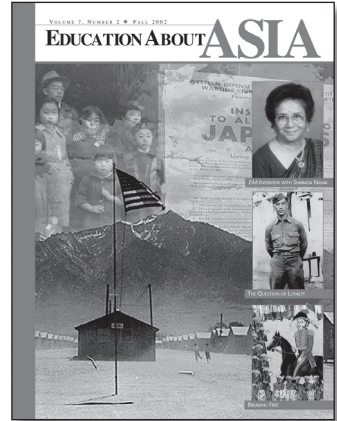
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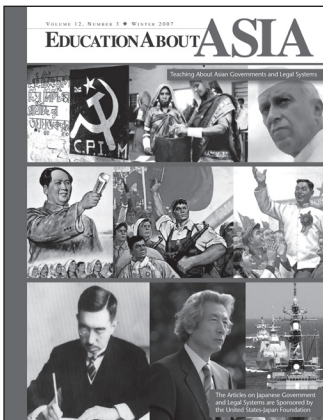
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