

**CURRENT TRENDS**  
**in**  
**SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM**

**AN ABSTRACT OF**  
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**MASTER OF SCIENCE**

**by**  
**Sydney Adam**  
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The past ten years have been marked by a profound re-appraisal of American education. The general concern was brought to a head when the United States was hurled into the space race by the Russians' launching of Sputnik I.

Effective competition in the space age requires specialists of every kind--expertly trained. The schools were asked to produce United States citizens who could answer our national needs. Whereas the primary need of the first half of this century was a social one--hence the emphasis on life adjustment--now it was thought to be intellectual--excellence was the order.

It is not surprising that the scientists and science teachers were the first to respond with suggestions for profound changes in curriculum. The mathematics curriculum was also found to be inadequate and revision proceeded apace. The social sciences and humanities were slower to respond although the role of the social scientist in "the new order" was considered by many to be of fundamental importance.

The pattern of shifts in educational philosophy and consequent adjustment of the schools is well established in the history of American education. From Horace Mann through John Dewey we find a series of philosophers each responding to the national needs of his time. Since adjustment or socialization was so important at the turn of the century the teaching of social studies received much attention from the progressives. The present clamor for change with its emphasis on the sciences fits neatly into the pattern. However social

scientists now have finally raised their voices for curriculum reappraisal, pointing out the importance of their field in contributing to the well-being of mankind in general.

A review of what the aims of the revised social studies curriculum should be reveals the consensus that the world oriented citizen, cognizant of his relationship to and obligation to society must be the goal. To achieve this social scientists believe that students must be led to an understanding of certain basic generalizations or concepts as regards human society, past and present. The scientific method of inductive reasoning is the preferred method of approach since it facilitates comprehension and retention and allows for the learning of a larger body of information.

Educational psychologists support the position that we can and should present our youth with more content earlier which the new curriculum builders recommend. Jerome Bruner, eminent student of cognition and educational psychologist, propounds the theory that any concept can be taught at any age if the appropriate means of communication can be found. The readiness theory upon which so much of our educational philosophy has rested for so long has thus been challenged.

Recently there have been many groups at work on updating the social studies curriculum. The writer has had the opportunity to acquaint herself with the Educational Services Incorporated social studies program. Since this program is based on current educational philosophy and psychology, it is here considered in some detail.

An outgrowth of a meeting of social scientists at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Endicott House at Dedham, Massachusetts, in 1962, the ESI elementary social studies program was put into effect at a summer workshop in Newton in 1965. The curriculum was organized around the three questions: (1) What is human about human beings? (2) How did they get that way? (3) How can they be made more so? In order to answer the basic questions five units or subjects are presented-- tool-making, language, social organization, the management of childhood, and man's urge to explain his world.

With heavy emphasis on games, films, discussion, observation, the highly trained staff attempted to guide the students towards an understanding of their own humanity and some of the underlying principles of human society.

Jerome Bruner, who was the director of the summer workshop, said the following in relation to the ESI program, and indeed the same might be said of social studies curriculum revision in general:

If we were totally successful in planning and teaching the course, we would have achieved five ideals:

1. To give our pupils respect for and confidence in the powers of their own mind.
2. To extend that respect and confidence to their power to think about the human condition, man's plight, and his social life.
3. To provide a set of workable models that make it simpler to analyze the nature of the social world in which we live and the condition in which man finds himself.

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4. To impart a sense of respect for the capacities and humanity of man as a species.
5. To leave the student with a sense of the unfinished business of man's evolution.