

A STUDY OF THE TEACHING OF CONTEMPORARY
AFFAIRS IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

by

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B. S., Black Hills State College, 1961

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1966

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer wishes to express sincere appreciation for the guidance and direction given by Dr. Herbert E. Kaiser, Assistant Professor of Education, Kansas State University, in the completion of this report.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of contemporary affairs is an important and essential part of the curriculum of any secondary social studies program. We are living in a rapidly changing world and it is significant that our young citizens attain the greatest possible understanding of the environmental conditions which affect them. Needs and conditions of a few years ago may be of little importance today. One of the satisfactions of education must rest in the curriculum's provision for contributing to individual social and economic competence designed for living in a volatile and challenging world.

Background and New Focus

The last noteworthy general survey of the teaching of contemporary affairs in American schools was a study sponsored by The New York Times in 1950. Those who made that survey found that there was almost an equal division in numbers between the schools in which teachers and pupils reported exciting and rewarding experiences and those which reported a boring, mechanical activity unrelated to the rest of the curriculum. Many teachers felt that contemporary events were not of sufficient importance to warrant their inclusion in any systematic manner and that they did not have time to deal with them in regular course material.¹

In 1957 the city of Glen Falls in upstate New York undertook

¹Edwin R. Carr, The Social Studies. (New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education, 1965), p. 60.

a research study in the teaching of world affairs. This was initiated and sponsored by the National Council for the Social Studies. The project called for a full-scale effort in one selected school to improve and develop a pilot program. The purpose of the project was to improve instruction so that students would acquire better understandings about the complexity of our world and feel a deep sense of personal obligation toward these complexities and toward the general welfare of intercultural relations.²

It is becoming increasingly clear that if social studies education is going to play a more vital role in the educational process, a new dimension of contemporary affairs must be made a part of every school program. Such a program should lead to a better understanding of ourselves and our own nation. This, in turn, should foster a deep commitment to the values of our own society as we seek to understand other nations and their cultures.³

At one time in our earlier history we could afford to be detached and isolated from the events of the world, or even from other regions or sections of our own hemisphere. This is no longer true. Today, the world has become an economic unit; it is moving toward some measure of political unity; and the more enlightened minds of mankind are directed toward creating a greater social unity.

The focus is very much on the present. We are confronted daily with wars, famines, atomic arsenals, man-made satellites, and space

² Harold M. Long and Robert N. King, Improving the Teaching of World Affairs. (Washington D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1964), p. 2.

³ Ibid., p. 6.

explorations. These are of concern to individuals as well as nations. Wesley emphasized that whether we have peace and prosperity rather than war and poverty depends markedly upon the degree and the quality of an informed citizenry together with dedicated and understanding leaders.⁴ Thus, if education is to play such an outstanding role in world affairs, a new approach and emphasis needs to be made a part of the curriculum in every educational program.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to point out (1) the importance and objectives for teaching contemporary affairs in the secondary school, (2) some of the methods and materials applicable to this teaching, (3) the extent and degree to which this area was taught in South Dakota's accredited high schools, and (4) a suggested syllabus and procedure for a definite and specific course of this nature.

It was not the purpose of this study to develop a curriculum or to make an exhaustive or detailed study of course procedures in South Dakota schools. The emphasis was to show the merits and needs for such a course in the curriculum or, at least, a better implementation of current affairs teaching in other courses.

This study was primarily proposed to assess the program and, if necessary, to create an awareness of the need to upgrade the teaching of contemporary affairs and make it a more integral part of the social studies curriculum.

⁴Edgar B. Wesley and Stanley P. Wronski, Teaching Social Studies in High School. (Boston: Heath and Company, 1958), p. 303.

Scope and Procedure

This report was primarily library research and a survey of the North Central Accredited High Schools in South Dakota for certain data.

The descriptive method of research was used. According to Frederick L. Whitney this method allowed for interpretation as follows:

It has been shown that, in dealing with problems isolated for attack, the hypothetical solution should be examined in terms of data of evidence, so that a judgment may emerge on its final value. . . . To characterize it briefly, it may be said that descriptive research is fact-finding with adequate interpretation. . . . The true meaning of the data collected should be reported from the point of view of the objectives and the basic assumptions of the project underway.

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The survey, according to recent social science terminology, is an organized attempt to analyze, interpret, and report the present status of a social institution, group, or area. It deals with a cross-section of the present, of duration sufficient for examination - that is, classified, generalized, and interpreted data for the guidance of practice in the immediate future.⁵

The first part of the study was a survey of the literature written on the subject of contemporary affairs, particularly in the last several years. Both books and periodicals were used. The facilities of the Kansas State University Library and the Black Hills State Library in South Dakota were used.

The scope of the survey questionnaire included the eighty North Central Accredited High Schools in South Dakota. A letter⁶ was sent to the superintendent in each of these schools asking for cooperation in compiling pertinent information for this study. Enclosed with the letter

⁵Frederick L. Whitney, The Elements of Research. (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950), pp. 159-61.

⁶Appendix A.

was a questionnaire⁷ designed to determine the existence and scope of contemporary affairs teaching in each system. This data was obtained during May, 1966.

Definition of Terms

The various terms of the subject matter have been defined according to their usage in this report.

Contemporary affairs and current affairs have been treated as one and the same. They consist of recent developments of national and international scope that are social in nature and significant.⁸

World affairs is a broader concept which includes the present but embraces the totality of mankind's experiences and focuses on inter-cultural relations.⁹

Current events is a term referring to present happenings and developments in all fields of human interest and activity.¹⁰

Method, according to Edgar Wesley, is "a formalized or systematized procedure for carrying on instruction; more inclusive than devices and more general than technique."¹¹

⁷ Appendix B.

⁸ Jonathon C. McLendon, Social Studies in Secondary Education. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), p. 391.

⁹ Long and King, op. cit., p. 46.

¹⁰ Carter V. Good, Dictionary of Education. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1945), p. 113.

¹¹ Edgar Bruce Wesley, Teaching Social Studies in High School. (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1950), p. 574.

Technique is a "general word used to indicate a procedure, method, or manner; sometimes used as a synonym for method."¹²

Device is defined as "a particularized way of teaching a word, idea, or process. . . . less inclusive and formal than method."¹³

Secondary school is used to indicate grades seven through twelve, inclusive.

Syllabus is a work which gives the material necessary for a brief view of the whole course and an understanding of its design or pattern.

Fusion is a disregard of subject matter lines and a bringing together of knowledge to aid the understanding of a problem or issue.

¹² Ibid., p. 576.

¹³ Ibid., p. 571.

SURVEY OF LITERATURE

In this study the literature relevant to the teaching of contemporary affairs was carefully perused with emphasis upon (1) importance, (2) objectives, (3) approaches, techniques, and devices, (4) controversial issues, (5) materials, (6) evaluation and (7) teacher competence. A brief summary of that part of the reading which was very closely related to the subject was given in this work.

Importance and Place of Contemporary Affairs in the Curriculum

It is ironic that the discipline of social studies, of which contemporary affairs is such an important part, should be one of the last segments of the school curriculum to get careful and systematic review. It is the nature of a democracy that there should be widespread interest and understanding of problems, issues, events, situations, trends and concerns. The capacity to bring adequate knowledge to bear upon these problems and issues is of critical importance in our American system. We have a fateful lag between situations in which people live and their preparation to do so, wisely.¹⁴

At the present time there is a search for the common principles of human behavior. Prominent social scientists feel that there are increased possibilities of prediction. This brings within the range of

¹⁴James M. Becker, "Emerging Trends in the Social Studies," Educational Leadership, XXII (February 1965), 317.

the secondary school the opportunity to create new and improved curricula which will help students to become more familiar with human behavior and the nature of our complex and troubled world.

The preponderance of contemporary affairs is largely socially significant. During the last twenty years it has received increasing attention, especially at the secondary level. Recent studies show that presently about one-fifth of social studies class time is devoted to current affairs. The study and knowledge of this area requires an awareness of the steady flow of new information in contemporary society. Of major concern is the discernment of topics to decide whether they are significant and lasting or ephemeral with little meaning for present or future learning.

Flexibility must be the watchword. Isolated events and topics should be avoided. All selections of concern should be geared to the particular students' abilities.

The California State Department of Education made this suggestion:

. . . A program is needed in which pupils are guided carefully in their study of a wide range of contemporary affairs over a period of time. Their study should enable them to recognize how events in the current scene affect the present and future welfare of people; how current developments stem from decisions made earlier; how current happenings reflect the basic values held by people; how changing circumstances lead to modifications in policy; how local, state, national, and world news reflects the beliefs of various groups of people; how study of current affairs can improve the skills of analysis, interpretation, and judgment; how current happenings in the arts, science, technology, politics, and government reveal changes throughout the world; and how important it is for citizens in a democracy to be alert always to their civic responsibilities.¹⁵

¹⁵California State Department of Education, Report of the State Control Committee on Social Studies (Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1959), pp. 17-18.

Edgar Dale, Professor of Education at Ohio State, said in one of his lectures, "There was never a time in our history when ignorance of current affairs could be so dangerous.¹⁶

The Public Opinion Research Center at Princeton University took a poll in 1955 which presented much evidence of the adult ignorance of current affairs. Of the ninety million adults in the United States at that time, eighty-five million did not know what was meant by a reciprocal trade treaty. Nearly fifty-four million did not know what caused inflation and many of the seventy million who didn't know what a subsidy was thought that it was a cover crop used in farming. This suggests and indicates that there is a decided lack of knowledge about current affairs in a nation which is continually making world-shaking decisions.¹⁷

If there is such a decided need for improvement, it can only come about through good teaching and learning situations. Only ideas can enter the mind and change the behavior of the human race.

Objectives of Contemporary Affairs Teaching

The objectives of teaching contemporary affairs are very similar to those in other social studies fields. Because they are achieved through use of current and timely materials they seem more tangible. Contemporary affairs without the rest of the curriculum would be definitely insufficient and the rest of the curriculum would be dull and

¹⁶ William H. Connor, "When Teaching Current Affairs: Nine Suggestions," Social Education, XIX (November 1955), 306.

¹⁷ Ibid.

insipid without contemporary affairs.

Wesley and Wronski have presented a list of objectives which might be achieved through current affairs study. They are as follows:

1. To expand popular information.
2. To develop skill in locating reading materials on particular topics.
3. To promote the critical appraisal of information obtained from the radio, television, newspapers, magazines, etc.
4. To promote discrimination in the choice of authors and sources of information.
5. To develop skill in resolving inconsistencies, contradictions, and errors.
6. To increase the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion, between a major and a minor fact, between a permanent principle and a temporary trend.
7. To develop the ability to distinguish the significant from the trivial.
8. To develop the ability to make valid generalizations.
9. To broaden and deepen sympathies.
10. To evaluate conflicting beliefs and value patterns.
11. To promote understanding and toleration.
12. To provide opportunities to participate in the democratic process.
13. To vitalize citizenship.
14. To appreciate the interdependence of people and nations.
15. To promote the cause of world peace.¹⁸

In regard to the last two objectives formulated by Wesley and Wronski, Peter Oliva, a professor in education at the University of Florida, expressed his concern for the American high school graduate who assumes that people of other lands think as he does and hold the same values that he holds. After considerable study while traveling from continent to continent Dr. Oliva proposed what he termed "essential understandings in American living." In the face of United States leadership of the free world and the constant threat to world survival he projected several objectives for understanding which he postulated as essential to America's youth.

¹⁸Wesley and Wronski, op. cit., pp. 304-05.

He stated that America's youth needed to understand:

1. That the world's population is rapidly outstripping its resources.
2. That there is more poverty in the world than riches.
3. That more than one-third of the world's population is illiterate.
4. That there are more "colored" people in the world than white.
5. There are more non-Christians in the world than Christians.
6. That our actions at home are sources of propaganda abroad.
7. That nationalism is on the march as never before.
8. That most of the nations of the world are struggling for technical advances.
9. That you can reach by air any point on the globe in thirty-six hours.
10. That in spite of our problems at home, thousands of foreigners abroad want to migrate to the land of the free and the home of the brave.¹⁹

Approaches Applicable to Teaching Contemporary Affairs

Actual methods of instruction about current affairs have no specific base within the general areas of social studies instruction. Special courses wherein students study to develop understandings of current issues have been rare or, at least, unusual to date. Much more generally current affairs instruction is the responsibility of all social studies teachers. A twenty per cent allotment of time is adequate in most programs but care should be exercised to keep this from being one isolated block of time. Rigid separation of social studies subject matter is both unnecessary and undesirable. Whenever current affairs is incorporated with other subject matter teaching the teacher needs to capitalize on events and circumstances as they arise.

There are several varying approaches which can be used effectively in teaching contemporary affairs. Most teachers use at least two of these approaches. Each approach involves some degree of variation in

¹⁹Peter F. Oliva. "Essential Understandings for the World Citizen," Social Education, XXIII (October 1959), 266-68.

objectives, methods, and materials. Jonathon McLendon very ably outlined these three approaches as (1) the direct approach, (2) the indirect approach, and (3) the inclusive approach.

The direct approach. This approach stresses the procedure of keeping up with the current happenings and developments. It constitutes a process of (1) selecting and interpreting reports on current problems and (2) making a decision or evaluating the issue in terms of information gained in the here and now. This usually results in one-fifth of normal social studies class time being allotted to contemporary affairs, either during one entire class period per week or a few minutes each day.

This procedure very often develops into a "current events class" which too often results in spending significant class time on trivia with little or no discrimination in selecting events of social importance.

There is little substantial evidence that students develop much real understanding of current affairs from this approach. The best that may be said is that students probably develop reading skills and habits while becoming involved in keeping up with current news. Despite its weaknesses many teachers employ and defend this method. It continues to reflect much popularity at the secondary level.

The indirect approach. This is a converse of the direct approach as it uses current events rather incidentally. Current affairs are treated as subsidiary with a present event or issue facilitating the transfer of the students' interest from the present to the past. The present provides illustrations and examples which make the past more comprehensible to students. By way of comparisons and contrasts, recent counterparts of current developments help to develop better understandings.

This approach serves to clarify the more meaningful principles in all of the social studies courses. Extensive use of this method greatly facilitates the learning of basic concepts and generalizations. Brief mention or a short explanation of a current happening is designed to encourage supplementary reading, motivate class discussions, and spice lectures.

The indirect approach has another worthwhile use. It is the enrichment of the subject matter by means of special projects or activities which concern related current affairs. Both the above-average and the slow learner can benefit along with the average student from such activities, each at his own level and speed. The opportunity exists for all students regardless of achievement ability to relate current affairs to the basic subject matter of social studies.

The inclusive approach. A third general approach to current affairs teaching is centered on the objective of understanding the present-day world, local, national, and international. Full application of this method would yield a curriculum in which all topics of study would consist of aspects of present-day society. This approach need not neglect basic subject matter drawn from the social studies curriculum. It requires extensive reorganization of the selected subject matter and its application to contemporary affairs. A significant current affairs issue would involve utilization of appropriate subject matter from at least history, geography, economics, sociology, and probably political science or anthropology.

McLendon supported this approach fully. He admitted that while it sounded idealistic, it did exist in reality. The secondary school often

has a problems course taught at the twelfth grade level with the inclusive approach. Some schools are beginning to introduce courses entitled contemporary affairs or current affairs. Occasionally in the ninth, tenth, or eleventh grades a course in civics, world history, or American history employs a comparable approach. Schools are developing this type of approach in making the transition from the elementary school to the secondary school. At seventh and eighth grade levels current affairs materials furnish much of the reading as well as discussion materials. Thus, the use of the inclusive approach ranges from occasional to extensive coverage of current affairs materials. This approach recognizes the basic subject matter as a background or framework for contemporary affairs. Even though the school system may not apply the inclusive approach to its entire social studies curriculum, the competent teacher can make profitable use of the underlying idea.²⁰

Regardless of the method of approach, Connor gave nine factors for teacher consideration as a means of realizing greater success as follows:

1. Determining the importance of the issue
2. Defining the issue to make it specific
3. Putting issues in perspective
4. Persisting nature of the issue
5. Relating the current issue to the curriculum
6. Readiness of students to handle current issues
7. Background and knowledge of the teacher
8. Adapting methods of instruction to the use of current issues
9. Materials available for adequate study of the issue²¹

²⁰ McLendon, op. cit., pp. 391-96.

²¹ Connor, op. cit., pp. 306-08.

Techniques of Instruction in Teaching Contemporary Affairs

The techniques used by teachers to arouse interest and help students to gain knowledge and understandings of basic issues are, for the most part, the same basic methods used in teaching any social studies content. Teachers may mingle these techniques in a variety of ways with a variety of materials. The outstanding characteristic of current affairs teaching seems to be the students' development of independent study, both in research activities and in their contributions to the class.

There was no attempt to survey all of the various techniques and devices used for instruction in this area. Rather, it was designed to consider briefly those techniques and devices which lend themselves most readily to the unlimited scope of this type of subject matter. All of them are certainly beneficial at one time or another, depending upon the subject matter at hand and the interests and abilities of the students.

Informal lecture. The technique of the informal lecture has been proven as one of the less effective ones for contemporary affairs instruction. Students need to be constantly participating. While informal lecture allows for interruption as students express their reactions it is one of the more ineffective means by which secondary students acquire and criticize information. When information needed by and appropriate to all members of the class is not otherwise available, a well planned informal lecture may be beneficial. This might involve explanations of an economic or sociological nature, needed for background, which would not be adequately explained in normal materials. Very often lively discussions

will follow which open avenues for future investigation.²²

Discussion. Frequently discussion is interpreted as a form of "socialized recitation." Purposes and procedures must be defined by the class and each student must accept the responsibility of making a valuable contribution. Discussion has merit in various ways in current affairs. It is useful in defining and analyzing as well as in interpreting and evaluating so as to arrive at some degree of conclusion. Some writers suggest that discussion tends to stray from the main point and consumes excessive time. However, it is probably not the method but its abuse which is in question. Most authorities agree that if leaders and participants are sufficiently prepared it is an acceptable technique, especially in contemporary affairs. It safeguards the right of every individual to his opinion even if he is a minority of one.

Project method. A form of activity directed toward some particular achievement or learning skill is called the project method. Projects may vary from brief areas of interest to inclusive undertakings. Areas of significant and fairly constant interest should be selected for study. The project needs to be closely related to the current situations which initiated it. Devices such as panels, mock sessions, and dramatizations may be developed in this way. The project method lends itself well to modern concepts of evaluation in which pupil growth may be readily measured.

²² Gerald Leinwand, "A Course in Problems of American Democracy," Social Education, XXVII (February 1963), 82.

Problems approach. Scientific application to the study of issues that might be resolved in various ways is the essence of the problems approach. Critical and reflective thinking becomes very necessary in this technique. The problem provides for a logical procedure, but, in the final analysis, the conclusion is usually open-ended. These long term assignments lend themselves well to tracing current affairs of long standing significance, applying the factual information, and attempting to understand and partially evaluate the problem in its local, national, or world setting.

Unit method. Large blocks of time are available during which the students read widely and purposefully in the unit approach. The students try to confine their reactions to a particular problem within a specified framework. This is usually outlined by the teacher. This method is less widely accepted in contemporary affairs than it is in other areas of social studies. The scope of the subject matter within the unit is usually broad and variable. Occasionally the areas of interests and the motivation of the class lead to a unified and encompassing approach.

Source method. Current issues lend themselves well to a study of primary source materials by able students. This technique provides the opportunity for the students to acquaint themselves with actual speeches, writings, original texts of bills and documents, statistics, and other historical documentations. Students need to be encouraged to develop inductive reasoning. This approach to original sources should help them form first hand conclusions with acceptable supporting statements.

Devices Used in Teaching Contemporary Affairs

The number of devices for providing situations of interest and learning in contemporary affairs is virtually unlimited. If the teacher and his class tax their creative powers they can discover some devices which are suitable instruments for everyone. Variety of procedure in contemporary affairs has the same interest motivation that it has in many of the other social studies courses. Brief mention of some of these devices will perhaps be beneficial.

Oral reports. Individual oral reports which are short and to the point tend to be most stimulating. Each student does his own research, whether it is background material or current information. The presentation may be either informative or argumentative. All class members normally become involved by means of questions or brief comments.

Panel reports. The device of panel reports provides for the presentation of pertinent materials of a topic by selected students who have thoroughly studied the issue. Both the panel members and their listening audience question and discuss what has been reported. Students need to discuss contemporary issues and learn how to base information on authoritative materials. An opportunity is available for students to interchange ideas and conclusions. The teacher may participate on the same basis as the class members.

Round table discussions. Informality characterizes the round table discussion. A general question is discussed. Both the definition and nature of the problem is usually defined during the discussion. The aim is to limit the areas of disagreement after much examining of facts and

refuting the statements of others. Participants should be able to think and speak about the problem with significant degrees of competency.²³

Debates. The informal debate is a device which can be used effectively in dealing with many controversial problems. It lends itself well to stimulating a desire to search for facts. This may be instituted upon proper occasion and the facts thus discovered may aid in development of conclusions which may be readily retained in the students' storehouse of knowledge. Quillen warned, however, that debate sometimes leads to a one-sided approach rather than to a fair and impartial consideration of the issue.²⁴

Sociodramas. A variety of viewpoints may be found within each problem on the current scene. Students need to develop background information and then dramatize and delineate it by assuming the roles of the chief protagonists. Discussions exemplifying United Nations debates, labor-management negotiations, Congressional debates, and a variety of experiences lend themselves well to this device. Many thought provoking issues from the local to the international scene can be studied in this way.²⁵

Mock conventions and sessions. Participants play the different roles as they impersonate various people in this special form of role

²³ Morris R. Lewenstein, Social Studies in Junior and Senior High Schools. (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1963), p. 398.

²⁴ James I. Quillen and Lavone A. Hanna, Education for Social Competence (Chicago: Scott Foresman and Company, 1961), p. 264.

²⁵ Philmore B. Wass, "Improving Current Event Instruction," Social Education, XXV (February 1961), 80.

playing. This device calls for considerable research on the part of students as they study positions, compromises, and decisions within the framework of an imaginary convention or meeting.²⁶

Guest speakers. The use of guest speakers provides a close link with the outside world. It involves the local community whose members usually welcome the opportunity of speaking to student groups. It is generally accepted that few politicians and well-known civic leaders hesitate to speak to the voters of tomorrow if they have a convenient opportunity. Much valuable and current information can come to the students first hand when the class employs this activity.

Essays. Original compositions or essays give opportunity for students to express their points of view. Their contributions lie in requiring the students to formulate standards of value and understandings of issues and then communicating the study in written form. It gives students experience in organizing ideas, expressing them clearly, and in writing interestingly and convincingly.²⁷

Research papers. The device of the research paper is beneficial to the advanced students. They learn to evaluate written material, organize it, and present it in a prescribed form. Library skills can be highly developed and students learn to research in both books and periodicals. This activity lends itself to continued development and completion at a

²⁶ Quillen and Hanna, op. cit., 275-76.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 267.

future time. It is an excellent opportunity for correlation of skills and subject matter for the contemporary affairs and English classes.²⁸

Community histories. The advanced students can undertake community histories. Printed materials about a local community are usually scarce and fragmentary. If new projects are undertaken within the school district or community and old institutions and landmarks are being removed, students might well preserve some of the current information. This current resource material could be useful for future classes and even for the community as a whole.

Whatever the needs of the particular situation, this kind of data has an important place in local issues and affairs. It may become the history source at a future time.

Materials Which Are Available and Effective

Subject matter as well as the equipment used in presentation of the subject matter is listed as materials. The materials which are especially pertinent and available are practically unlimited. Some are prepared especially for school use. These include weekly publications with levels of readability and with emphasis on current affairs. They may be used in all of the method approaches; for the direct approach, in covering current news; for the indirect approach, by being filed and used when related to appropriate topics; and for the inclusive approach, as current national

²⁸ Alice Bubriski and Alpha Myers, "Assignment: Research Paper," Social Education, XXVII (February, 1963), 76.

and world issues are continually studied and traced.²⁹ A major advantage is that usually enough copies of one selected material are available for an entire class group.

This type of weekly publication meets many of the characteristics of a basic text.³⁰

1. They are compact.
2. They are selective.
3. They are objective.
4. They link the past to the present.
5. They organize and grade content carefully.
6. They incorporate selected visual aids.
7. They offer supplementary services.

Some teachers feel that weekly publications really are a basic text. This idea, in itself, gives a measure of security to some teachers and to many students.

Current affairs filmstrips, designed for course teaching, are a comparative new source of material. Some are edited weekly and deal with recent current events over a short time span. Others deal with particular contemporary issues which are significant and continually in the news over longer periods of time.

The newspapers are of primary importance. Every child has an opportunity to familiarize himself with these at a local level. At a national level there are several good ones noted for unbiased reporting. Newspapers not only provide information but develop issues which demand critical and reflective thinking on the part of the students. "News-

²⁹ McLendon, op. cit., p. 396.

³⁰ William J. Shorrock, "A Case for the Classroom Periodical," Social Education, XXIII (October, 1959), 260-62.

papers are living textbooks that will help readers of today prepare better for tomorrow."³¹

Perhaps the most widely used materials in the indirect and inclusive approaches are periodicals. These may be weekly, monthly, or bi-monthly, depending on the scope and purpose of the publication. Periodicals usually give considerable importance to perspective and background information. Very often they are directed toward presenting social or political viewpoints. However, these probing analyses and forthright statements add depth to the information and stimulate reflective thinking and interpretation.

Communication media serve as valuable sources of information. Television and radio are the most common. Newscasts and informational programs which deal with specific problems and issues are noteworthy. Specialists and panelists deliver addresses and discuss controversial affairs and their viewpoints toward them. Documentary films are becoming increasingly available. Each comprehensive broadcast probes into a current problem or issue.

Tapes, recordings, and recent films can add much to contemporary affairs study. If they are recent they bring reality in meaningful focus for the students.

Ordinary classroom materials such as globes, maps, charts, atlases, almanacs, and reference books are useful and ready materials. Regardless of the issue at hand, its study usually involves geography, history, economics, sociology, and other disciplines. Audio-visual aids such as opaque

³¹ Jonathon C. McLendon, "Using Daily Newspapers More Effectively," Social Education, XXIII (October, 1959), 264.

and overhead projectors lend themselves well to flexibility in presenting subject matter. Provocative transparencies capture the interest of a class and often stimulate a socialized discussion. Recent relationships and interrelationships can be delineated in this manner.³²

Controversial Issues

"Almost everything we teach is controversial or has elements of controversy in it. The more we emphasize the present, the more we are likely to encounter controversial issues. But there is also disagreement over 'facts' from the past and interpretations of men, events, and movements."³³

Issues such as atomic testing, integration, and national political campaigns are here to stay. A high degree of interest in them is displayed by the general public. Whatever decisions are reached on these problems will profoundly affect most individuals and society as a whole for generations to come. Since emotionally charged economic, social, and political issues generate controversy within each community, the school has an inherent responsibility to objectively examine the pertinent data available.³⁴

There must be careful definition of the problems, construction of alternate solutions, and an objective search for evidence. A deliberate

³² Franklin R. McElwain, "Stimulating Interest in Current Affairs," Social Studies News, XI (Spring, 1966) 1.

³³ Leonard S. Kenworthy, Guide to Social Studies Teaching (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1962), p. 238.

³⁴ Magdalen Eichert, "Controversial Issues in the Classroom? Certainly!" National Association of Secondary School Principals' Bulletin, 43:120, December, 1959.

effort to find a common ground among opposing views, in order to develop thought and interpretation acceptable to all students, is at the heart of the democratic process when teaching current affairs. Unpopular beliefs should not be censored as our freedom depends upon effective choice.³⁵

Every American has the right to select his own position on each and every controversial issue. Yet, no one has the right to force another to accept any given position. Persuasion is the instrument that one individual is permitted to use in changing another's opinion. Students must have every opportunity to think and reflect about the great controversial issues of our time.³⁶

The teacher needs to inform the parents of the intent of his instruction in contemporary affairs. He can do this within the framework of the school policy. He will encounter some opposition and criticism of the course in contemporary affairs and will need to cope with them as successfully as possible. One of the greatest contributions that the public school can make toward the social ills of the day is to assist the students to become aware of the problems and issues and some alternate solutions which may be available.³⁷

Zeleny and Gross presented an interesting procedure which they termed "dyadic role-playing." As a means of presenting and studying about contemporary issues of a controversial nature, they suggested that two

³⁵ John Lunstrom, "Controversial Issues, School Policies, and Reflective Thinking," Social Education, XXVI (May, 1962), 246.

³⁶ Edwin C. Oakes, "Discussograph," Clearing House, 28:524, May, 1954.

³⁷ Claude W. Fawcett, "Teaching About Controversial Issues," C.T.A. Journal, 60:26, March 1964.

pairs or pair groups could adequately achieve the presentation of many "hot" issues with the teacher acting in the role of a consultant. Each group could present a defense of its position and introduce processes of accommodation. This develops insight into the deeper and hidden meanings of specific controversies. No one is obligated and respect for other viewpoints is encouraged.³⁸

The public needs to understand that through judicious use of challenging controversial material one of the prime objectives of education may be readily achieved. This objective is the development of responsible, self-directing individuals who will exemplify their lives by exhibiting understandings and insights gained through critical analysis and impartial evaluation.³⁹

A sound and intelligent policy for teaching contemporary affairs should be formulated by the administration and faculty in every school system. This protects both teachers and administrators from unwarranted attacks by pressure groups. Thus, we are insuring our youth a better balanced school preparation for American citizenship. Moffat explained this philosophy in the following manner:

For the public schools, policy on controversial issues is defined in terms of the rights of pupils rather than in terms of the rights of teachers. In the study of controversial issues in the public schools, the pupil has four rights to be recognized:

- a. The right to study any controversial issue which has political, economic, or social significance and concerning which (at his level) he should begin to have an opinion.
- b. The right to have free access to all relevant information, including the materials that circulate freely in the community.

³⁸

Leslie D. Zeleny, "Dyadic Role-Playing of Controversial Issues," Social Education, XXIV (December, 1960), 354.

³⁹

Eichert, op. cit., p. 131.

- c. The right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.
- d. The right to form and express his own opinions on controversial issues without thereby jeopardizing his relations with his teacher or the school.

The study of controversial issues is objective and scholarly, with a minimum emphasis on opinion. The teacher approaches controversial issues in the classroom in an impartial and unprejudiced manner, and must refrain from using his classroom privileges and prestige to promote a partisan point of view. Good teaching of subjects containing controversial issues requires more skill than most other kinds of teaching, and, so far as possible, only teachers of superior ability are assigned subjects in which a large body of material involves controversy.⁴⁰

Evaluation in Teaching Contemporary Affairs

Evaluation is an important phase of the teaching of any subject matter. There are numerous and variable measures of pupil growth. The students should be judged in many ways. Among these are (1) progress in ability to acquire certain skills, (2) progress in ability to select and evaluate materials, (3) progress in critical thinking, (4) progress in using and interpreting aids such as maps, charts, and tables, (5) progress in study habits of reading newspapers and periodicals, (6) progress in selecting constructive radio and television programs, (7) progress in the communication of evaluations to others, and (8) progress in attitudes and behavior toward other world cultures.

Evaluation on the part of the teacher of contemporary affairs has to be subjective to a great extent. Many of the areas of evaluation are difficult to access. Behavior which develops from this type of study may

⁴⁰ Maurice P. Moffat, Social Studies Instruction (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 276.

become evident in the future as well as in the present. For the objectives to be reached many of the behavioral patterns need to become permanent and continual traits.

Growth may be measured by paper-and-pencil tests published by some of the mass news media. Follow-up quizzes which are teacher made are very often adequate to measure the students' apparent interests and achievements. Self-evaluation is an effective tool in teaching contemporary affairs. Each student should learn to evaluate his growth in interest, knowledge, and attitude. The skillful teacher can judge growth through reports, projects, panels, and other numerous devices. If the objectives are broad, the evaluation must be broad; if the objectives are more narrowly limited to recall of facts, the evaluation must be based on this criterion. Neither the presentation of materials nor the evaluation can be the same with successive classes. The subject matter must be evaluated in terms of the needs and abilities of the students in any given class.

There are no constants.⁴¹

Citizenship values are a sound basis on which to predicate a current affairs course. The results of what such a course can do to insure the transmission of our democratic heritage cannot be based on absolute standards. Certainly knowledge from this type of course can have varying degrees of usefulness. Measurement becomes a value judgment. However, all that we can teach about our civilization and mankind in general is

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 280.

an objective aimed at transmitting our heritage in a changing world.⁴²

To be informed is to be prepared.

Teacher Competency

Teacher competency is the same in contemporary affairs as it is in other courses and disciplines.

The competent teacher is, first, an effective citizen; second, a student of society; and third, a guide in the educational process. As an effective citizen he seeks to participate in the solutions of his nation's (and his locality's) problems, one important aspect of which is the formation of sound public opinion. As a student of society, he seeks to analyze social behavior and draw generalizations and conclusions about behavior. As a guide in the educational process, he seeks to find ways to develop the understanding, skills, and social attitudes of the students with whom he works.⁴³

The teacher shares his responsibility of citizenship with all intelligent persons but he does have a major responsibility for guiding the educational processes. The skill of method and technique becomes noticeably complex and controversial in teaching about current issues. From the standpoint of the teacher, arousing an interest is the first basic principle. Interest is an objective which is "caught" not "taught." If the teacher exhibits interest coupled with scholarly knowledge he usually has little difficulty in developing real enthusiasm and concern in his classes.⁴⁴

⁴² Edwin Fenton, Teaching the New Social Studies in Secondary Schools (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), p. 71.

⁴³ John C. Payne (ed.), The Teaching of Contemporary Affairs. Twenty-first Yearbook of the National Council of Social Studies, (Washington D.C.: National Education Association of the United States, 1950), p. 174.

⁴⁴ Lewenstein, op. cit., p. 447.

The contemporary affairs teacher has to be world-minded. It is not enough for him to be a patriotic American well inculcated with the ideals and characteristics of American citizenship. Leonard Kenworthy described the attributes of the world-minded teacher as follows:

An integrated individual, skilled in the art and science of human relations, and conscious of the wide variety of behavior patterns in the world to which he may have to adjust.

Rooted in his own family, country, and culture, but able to identify himself with the peoples of other countries and cultures.

Informed about the contemporary world scene and its historical background, and concerned about improving the conditions of people everywhere.

Convinced that international cooperation is desirable and possible, and that he can help to promote such cooperation.

An intelligent participant in efforts to improve his own community and nation, mindful of their relationships to the world community.

Clear in his own mind as to the goals of education for international understanding, conversant with methods and resources for such programs, and able to help create world-minded children and youth.

Buttressed by a dynamic faith or philosophy of life whose basic tenets can be universalized.⁴⁵

It has been pointed out that people learn best and teach best when they can translate their beliefs into actions. There is no more fertile field for good, alert, significant teaching than in the area of contemporary affairs.

⁴⁵ Howard R. Anderson (ed.), Approaches to an Understanding of World Affairs, Twenty-fifth Yearbook of the National Council of Social Studies (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association of the United States, 1954), p. 397.

SURVEY OF THE NORTH CENTRAL ACCREDITED
HIGH SCHOOLS IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Purpose

The premise has been accepted in this paper that the teaching of contemporary affairs and its place in the curriculum should be of prime importance in the curricular area of social studies. In developing the study it was felt that the results of a survey of the program within the state of South Dakota would be valuable in determining what was being done at the present time and what proposals, if any, might be offered.

Serious social studies curricular planning is taking place at both state and local levels. On the national scene the National Defense Education Act of 1958 has been amended to include the curricular area of the social studies.

Within the limits of the secondary program this survey was designed to show (1) the existence or non-existence of contemporary affairs as a subject offering in the social studies, (2) the extent of its fusion in other courses, (3) the approximate amount of time devoted to it at various grade levels, (4) the types of materials used, and (5) the evaluation processes.

Method

The survey was conducted by means of an open-ended questionnaire⁴⁶ which was sent to the superintendents of the eighty accredited high schools.

⁴⁶ Appendix B.

These were to be answered by the superintendent or someone whom he designated. Sixty schools or seventy-five per cent responded. The questionnaire was original and there was no awareness of any similar survey or the results of any similar survey in the state of South Dakota.

Results

Separate course. The sixty reporting schools were given wide latitude in answering the survey. Fifteen schools or twenty-five per cent reported a separate subject in their curriculum entitled either contemporary affairs, world affairs, world events, or world problems.

Fusion. These fifteen schools and the forty-five others that took part in the survey reported fusion with other subjects as shown in Table I. There was a wide range of fusion from one per cent in psychology to forty-seven per cent in American government which is a required subject for grade twelve according to the state requirements.

At grade twelve fusion was greatest. It was closely followed by grade eleven which again is subject to the state requirement of American history. Fifty-eight per cent of the schools reported fusion within this subject. The next highest rate of fusion was at grade seven which was closely followed by grade eight. The figures were forty-six and thirty-nine per cent, respectively. At grade ten twenty-five per cent reported fusion while at grade nine the figure dropped to eleven per cent.

Time. Estimates of the time devoted to contemporary affairs teaching is shown in Table II. This table shows the number of schools at the various grade levels reporting the length of the time period and the hours per week.

TABLE I

FUSION OF CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS WITH OTHER COURSES IN THE
 SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM OF THE ACCREDITED
 HIGH SCHOOLS OF SOUTH DAKOTA, 1966

Subject	Grade	Fusion		No Fusion		Not Reporting	
		Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
American Government	12	47	59	13	16	20	25
Economics	12	13	16	47	59	20	25
Psychology	12	1	1	59	74	20	25
Sociology	12	7	9	53	66	20	25
American History	11	46	58	14	17	20	25
World History	10	20	25	40	50	20	25
World Geography	9	9	11	51	64	20	25
Social Studies	8	31	39	29	36	20	25
Social Studies	7	37	46	23	29	20	25

TABLE II

NUMBER REPORTING ESTIMATED TIME DEVOTED TO CONTEMPORARY
AFFAIRS TEACHING EACH WEEK IN THE SIXTY REPORTING
HIGH SCHOOLS OF SOUTH DAKOTA, 1966

Grade	Period of 36 Weeks					Period of 18 Weeks				
	Hours per Week					Hours per Week				
	1/2	1	2	3	4	1/2	1	2	3	4
Twelve	5	16				2	19	3	2	15
Eleven	4	36	6							
Ten	2	16	2							
Nine		9								
Eight	5	21	3	2						
Seven	5	28	3	1						

Grade twelve was represented by the greatest number of hours. Fifteen schools with a separate current affairs course reported five hours per week over a period of eighteen weeks. The range of hours expended in the area of fusion of subjects ranged from one-half hour to three hours per week for eighteen weeks and from one-half hour to one hour per week for thirty-six weeks.

The rest of the grade levels were represented by a thirty-six week period of time. The hours per week varied from one-half hour at most of the grade levels to as much as three hours in a few schools at grades seven and eight. One hour was the most frequently reported time figure in all of these grades with a sharp decline in numbers to either more or less hours.

Published materials. The survey provided for a voluntary identification of published materials used in contemporary affairs teaching. Table III includes a complete listing of the materials reported and the number of the sixty reporting schools that reported each publication.

Eight schools reported using a bound text. The materials which are published weekly and prepared especially for school use found much favor. Junior Scholastic and Senior Scholastic were used in about thirty per cent of the schools reporting. The American Observer was used in twenty-three per cent of the schools.

Thirty-six schools reported usage of local newspapers. The National Observer, a weekly newspaper, was the most widely used specific publication in its category.

Of the periodicals cited, Time led the listing with seventeen users. Newsweek and Life followed very closely. Reader's Digest and U. S. News

TABLE III

PUBLISHED MATERIALS IDENTIFIED AS BEING USED IN TEACHING
 CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS IN THE SIXTY REPORTING ACCREDITED
 HIGH SCHOOLS OF SOUTH DAKOTA, 1966

Published Materials	Number Using
Bound text	8
<u>Current Events</u>	11
<u>Junior Scholastic</u>	21
<u>Our Times</u>	2
<u>Senior Scholastic</u>	18
<u>The American Observer</u>	14
<u>World Week</u>	5
Local newspapers	36
<u>Christian Science Monitor</u>	1
<u>New York Times</u>	3
<u>National Observer</u>	6
<u>Congressional Record</u>	1
World affairs program of <u>Minneapolis Star</u>	2
<u>Business Week</u>	2
<u>Current History</u>	3
<u>Foreign Affairs</u>	1
<u>Harper's</u>	2
<u>Life</u>	11
<u>National Geographic</u>	3
<u>Newsweek</u>	15
<u>Reader's Digest</u>	7
<u>The Atlantic</u>	2
<u>The New Republic</u>	1
<u>The Progressive</u>	1
<u>The Reporter</u>	1
<u>Time</u>	17
<u>U. S. News and World Report</u>	7

and World Report were each represented by seven schools. The number of users of the other periodicals listed were at a minimum, ranging from one to three users.

Evaluation. In the area of evaluation five different methods were reported. The most common evaluation was teacher-made tests. Fifteen schools or twenty-three per cent reported teacher evaluation of reports, discussions, and readings. Twenty-two per cent relied upon the tests which appear in each of the weekly publications designed for school use. Eighteen per cent reported no separate evaluation with the evaluation being done incidentally with the other subject matter in the social studies. Three per cent made use of a debate or panel each week upon which the evaluation was based. Only nine per cent reported no evaluation procedures.

Most of the schools reported that the evaluation procedures were the same for all grades. In the few instances in which a different evaluation procedure was reported it was largely a difference between grades seven and eight as opposed to the four upper grade levels.

Appraisal. Thirty-seven per cent of the sixty schools reporting stated that they were satisfied with their present program. However, of the sixty-three per cent that were not satisfied, twenty-five per cent expressed a desire to teach contemporary affairs as a separate subject because there was not enough time for fusion with other subjects. Two per cent commented that fusion was a problem, both in teaching and in evaluating. Thirteen per cent suggested that their greatest need was for an adequate resource center, while seven per cent commented that teachers were unprepared to teach this subject. As many as seven per cent suggested

that it should be a full year subject and eight per cent gave no reason for their dissatisfaction.

Very few schools made any recommendations. Three commented that contemporary affairs as a separate subject had great possibilities and should be expanded into more grade levels and for longer periods of time. One school stated that grades seven and eight were too immature for this subject and that it should be taught only in the upper grades. Several reported that the upgrading of most library facilities within the state was essential in order to improve this teaching. One school suggested a course of this kind as a sort of orientation course to be given to all students in grade nine. Two schools cautioned about using fusion with other courses at the expense of the traditional subject matter which they thought was extremely valuable.

SYLLABUS OF A SUGGESTED CONTEMPORARY
AFFAIRS COURSE

In the light of the literature researched and on the basis of the survey of the South Dakota secondary curricula in the area of contemporary affairs, the following syllabus of a suggested contemporary affairs course for honors credit is presented.

Introduction

Contemporary affairs is that part of the social studies curriculum in which the study of man's present tends to illuminate the past and anticipate the future. The emphasis is primarily on America's growth and responsibility as a democratic nation in a world setting. Recognition of the political, economic, and social values of the society in its relation to other cultures is a worthy academic task.

Knowledge by itself is meaningless and unrewarding. It needs to be integrated with proper attitudes and behaviors toward people and life. Responsibility and leadership should be the watchwords of all nations.

Students who are participating in a contemporary affairs course should recognize the worth of the individual, the equality of opportunity, the benefits of cooperation and understanding, and the power of critical thinking and reasoning. The goals of lasting peace and economic prosperity rest upon the individual responsibility for national security and world leadership.

Contemporary affairs was designed for an honors class in the social studies curriculum at grade twelve. Admission to the class was dependent

upon a strong social studies background, a high level of reading ability in both comprehension and speed, and a genuine interest in contemporary issues. The potential ability to study independently and to function smoothly as a member of a seminar type class were also criteria for admission. The class was limited to an enrollment of twelve students due to the method of presentation, the materials selected, and the level of performance expected.

Objectives

As a result of the year's experiences students will grow in:

Understandings.

1. Knowledge of background material, both national and international, which is necessary for evaluating current issues and problems.
2. Appreciation of the American and other world cultures.
3. Knowledge of basic concepts and generalizations of trends at local, national, and international levels.
4. Knowledge of the interrelationships of people and the influences of environment.
5. Awareness of America's increasing influence and place of leadership among nations.
6. Awareness of America's problem in projecting a favorable image in relation to her world leadership responsibilities.
7. Recognition of the worth of being a productive and participating citizen.
8. Knowledge to distinguish between fact and opinion.

9. Appreciation of the other social studies subjects and the fusion of contemporary affairs with them.
10. Appreciation of the correlation of current affairs with the sciences and other disciplines.
11. Development of interest in research for its own worth.

Skills.

1. Development of reading skills with emphasis on rate of comprehension.
2. Techniques of choosing and interpreting materials needed for problem solving.
3. Thinking creatively and developing conclusions by analyzing materials.
4. Working effectively as a member of the group.
5. Note-taking ability and effective summarization of content materials.
6. Using library materials and community resources effectively.
7. Interpretation of maps, charts, tables and graphs.
8. Improvement of oral and written expression.
9. Ability to use both primary and secondary resources discriminatingly.
10. Ability to accept suspended judgments when conclusions cannot be reached on controversial issues.
11. Ability to reconsider an issue or problem when new evidence appears and revising conclusions accordingly.

Attitudes.

1. Respect for individuals and groups of individuals as participating citizens in the nation.
2. Respect for the rights, privileges, and opinions of others.
3. Respect for all nations and all creeds.
4. Willingness to cooperate and at times accept concensus.
5. Willingness to contribute both in leadership and fellowship.
6. Belief in the power of intelligence and education to solve social, political, and economic problems.
7. Respect for basic documents and laws of the nation.
8. Respect for the record of mankind's experiences in light of his various levels of knowledge.
9. Development of a democratic international outlook.

Behavior patterns.

1. Continued interest in reading newspapers and periodicals.
2. Discrimination in selecting current reading materials.
3. Respect for all kinds of labor and professions.
4. Self-respect and respect for all other people and nations.
5. Expressing courage in personal convictions.
6. Expressing opinions without manifesting prejudice or unlimited radicalism.
7. Listening habits in regard to other persons and to audio materials.
8. Desire to take part in community and government affairs.
9. Desire for voting privileges and ability to exercise them efficiently.

10. Respect and wise utilization of human and natural resources.
11. Continued desire to select, research, analyze, and project relevant information.

Materials

Newspapers and periodicals were selected as the basic materials. Books may be used for background material when desirable. Many paperbacks present significant material. Films, recordings, charts, maps, and other pertinent materials may be used as needed.

Time magazine was selected as the focal point for weekly news reading because of its reading level, wide coverage, and mature style. More than one point of view on controversial issues is imperative. The periodical selection ranges from fairly liberal to fairly conservative.

Fairly Liberal	Fairly Conservative
<u>New Republic</u>	<u>Current History</u>
<u>The Nation</u>	<u>Newsweek</u>
<u>The Progressive</u>	<u>Time</u>
<u>The Reporter</u>	<u>U. S. News and World Report</u>

A more complete listing of newspapers and periodicals which were designated for classroom library sources is as follows:

Christian Science Monitor

Local and state newspapers

The National Observer

The Wall Street Journal

Business Week

Current History

Ebony
Foreign Affairs
Harper's
Life
National Geographic
New Republic
Newsweek
Reader's Digest
Saturday Review
The Atlantic
The Nation
The Progressive
The Reporter
Time
U. S. News and World Report

Methods of Approach

A current affairs class may be organized in several ways. There are a variety of approaches which may be used according to the interests, needs, backgrounds of students, availability of material and preference of sequence.

The direct approach is the method of studying a topic which is current and has immediate interest for students.

The indirect approach is characterized by utilization of materials from the files when a particular unit or area of interest is under consideration.

The inclusive approach is centered on the study of significant topics which are currently in the news and seem likely to be in the news for a period of time. A contemporary issue of any significance usually poses a problem to be analyzed. The aspects of the learning experiences are developed by utilizing materials within a framework of activities. For purposes of contemporary affairs study, this approach will be the most widely used.

Controversial issues need to be studied as they arise in a natural and orderly manner. Students are obligated to strive toward an objective point of view in an effort to create sound judgments. Respect for the rights and privileges of all members of the group is probably the most essential attitude. Reasonableness and common sense must prevail.

Devices for Presentation of Materials

The number of devices for presentation of contemporary affairs materials is variable and adequate. Some of the more frequently used are:

1. Oral reports
2. Written reports
3. Panel reports
4. Round table discussions
5. Debates
6. Sociodramas
7. Mock conventions and sessions
8. Guest speakers
9. Research papers
10. Community histories

Suggested Activities

Many opportunities are provided for activities in terms of the content material to be studied. A partial listing of worthwhile activities, to be developed according to the issues and topics, is as follows:

1. Maintaining news bulletin boards and tackboard displays
2. Organizing participants into an assembly, congress, or legislature
3. Preparing letters to congressmen and other officials stating opinions of the class or seeking information
4. Comparing accounts in two or more publications for accuracy and objectivity
5. Analyzing radio and television broadcasts
6. Debating current issues
7. Gathering opinions of representative citizens by means of community surveys or polls
8. Reporting on lectures, forums, or other programs
9. Drawing cartoons which interpret current issues
10. Obtaining current materials from government agencies
11. Maintaining an active current events map
12. Keeping a notebook of information to serve as a reference
13. Securing guest speakers within the community who possess significant information
14. Participating in pertinent and worthwhile discussion
15. Selecting a geographical or cultural world area and reporting significant developments over an extended time span

16. Reading daily newspapers and periodicals, keeping in mind that Time is the focal point of required reading
17. Analyzing editorials and viewpoints of columnists
18. Following the proceedings of the United States Congress and the United Nations when they are in session
19. Researching a particular subject matter in a scholarly manner
20. Selecting particular areas of interest and issues for study
21. Participating in dyadic role-playing of important controversial issues

Subject Content

Content of contemporary affairs depends upon the time span in which the course is offered. Current problems and issues of significance at local, national, and international levels are relevant. Pupil-teacher planning in a cooperative manner is an excellent approach for selecting the areas and issues for study. These may be drawn from the current news media to which the school subscribes.

Assignments

Assignments are made at intervals as a guide for students. Many of these develop as a result of teacher-pupil planning. Contemporary affairs provides for individual responsibility and challenge in preparation. The assignments are generally a continuous activity or activities on a particular issue or problem combined with current information.

Evaluation

Students share in and benefit from evaluation of growth and development. Growth is measured according to the objectives set forth for the

course. How has each student developed in understandings, skills, attitudes, and behaviors?

Testing is not the heart of the evaluation. Teacher-made tests and tests published by Time and other mass news media may be used. Observations of reports, discussions, panels, dyadic role-playing, and many other activities form a substantial part in evaluating student growth.

Self-evaluation by each student in an honest and straight-forward manner is an important critique.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Contemporary affairs is that particular subject matter of the social studies curriculum which is now receiving thorough and continued attention. Because democracy flourishes better in an environment wherein each individual uses his potential to become informed on the problems and issues of our modern society, the inclusion of contemporary affairs in a secondary curriculum is of major importance.

Students need to be guided carefully by competent teachers in order to make current affairs study meaningful. The content is best taught when it covers a wide and variable subject matter over a considerable period of time. The past is the cornerstone, the present is the heart of the subject, and the future challenges both thinking and conjecture. Good teaching and learning situations are the basic conditions for the growth and development of attitudes and behaviors which are directed toward benefiting mankind.

The study of contemporary affairs can be enhanced by good teaching techniques and devices. Students need to analyze information, extend the study into time and space, and then develop generalizations through which they can arrive at applications and conclusions. The techniques and devices which are used for contemporary affairs teaching are those which can be readily used in other social studies classes. The significance of their use lies in the manner and skill with which they are implemented.

Much needs to be done in the development of social studies curricula which will incorporate the idea of emphasis on current affairs and stress

its importance. If international understanding and cooperation are desirable within our society, then intelligent participants must be developed to improve these relationships. Schools need to operate within the limits of their philosophy and structure, yet, by the very importance of contemporary issues and problems they become a part of the day-by-day investigation of life.

On the whole the American schools are not oriented enough toward the present and the anticipation of the future. As curricula change, some bits of knowledge must be deleted, others retained, and finally some added. There should be in the curriculum of each and all secondary schools provisions for teaching current affairs. It may be in the form of a separate subject or as a fusion in other subjects of the social studies area.

Researchers report that the study of contemporary affairs has been widely adopted in today's curriculum. There probably will be expansion instead of regression. Over sixty per cent of the schools participating in the survey expressed concern for improvement in the teaching of contemporary affairs. The placement of the subject in the school's curriculum and the time to be allotted to it were of major concern. Thirteen per cent of the reporting schools suggested that their greatest need was for an adequate resource center. Several reported that teacher competence was a problem. It is no longer a question of whether it will be taught but rather how it will be taught, to whom, with what materials, and by whom. It needs to be pursued in an intelligent and demanding manner. If it is taught inexpertly and half-heartedly it can leave students insecure and confused. Correlation and fusion with other courses and subjects tend to develop

worthwhile and significant learning activities. Contemporary affairs leads to a study wherein the past, the present, and the future have social meaning and significance for all students at all levels.

The review of the more recent literature showed an increasing tendency on the part of the writers to concentrate more effectively and competently on contemporary affairs as a basic part of a growing and developing social studies curriculum. The extent to which contemporary affairs becomes of vital significance depends on curriculum specialists, administrators, teachers, lay people, and students as each group and every individual recognize the need for upgrading which calls for appraising, deleting, maintaining, and adding as the need occurs.

The syllabus was designed to suggest a guideline around which a contemporary affairs course might be developed. Many objectives, materials, and activities were listed. The number of these suggestions to be used and the possible combinations of their use depend upon each individual classroom situation.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

White Gates
Piedmont, South Dakota
May 4, 1966

Mr. Robert R. Spelts
Douglas School System
Ellsworth Air Force Base
South Dakota

Dear Mr. Spelts:

As the area of study for my master's paper I have chosen contemporary affairs with emphasis on its implementation in the curricula of the North Central Secondary Schools of South Dakota. The scope of the survey is to include grades seven through twelve. Dr. Herbert Kaiser of the College of Education, Kansas State University, is the major instructor in this study.

I am enclosing a questionnaire which I feel will be worthwhile in this study. Perhaps it may be of some benefit in the current curricular planning in the social studies which is taking place in South Dakota at the present time. Would you please answer this inquiry or channel it to the proper authority in your school system?

My thanks and appreciation are extended to you for your cooperation in this project.

Sincerely yours,

Elvira J. Stoll

APPENDIX B

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

SUBJECT: TEACHING CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL, 7 - 12

1. Does your school system provide for a separate course in its curriculum such as contemporary affairs or current affairs?

2. Do you provide for this area of instruction in some other course or courses. Would you explain briefly?

3. Could you give an estimate of the time per week devoted to this area in each of the grades, 7 - 12?

7th -

8th -

9th -

10th -

11th -

12th -

4. In relation to question 3, over how many weeks does this extend?

5. Do you use a bound text or texts? If so, would you list by name?

6. In regard to question 5, would you please identify or describe other published materials which you use?

 7. How do you evaluate the progress of your students?

 8. In relation to question 7, are the evaluation processes the same for all grades, 7 - 12?

 9. Are you satisfied with your present program? If not, what are some recommendations you would like to make? (You may use the reverse side of this sheet for any comment or comments which you feel would be applicable and helpful to this study.)

A STUDY OF THE TEACHING OF CONTEMPORARY
AFFAIRS IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

by

ELVIRA JEANNETTE STOLL

B. S., Black Hills State College, 1961

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Manhattan, Kansas

1966

This report was primarily a review of literature using the facilities of the Kansas State University Library and the Black Hills State College Library. In addition a survey was taken of current teaching practices in South Dakota and a suggested syllabus for a class was included. The study was limited to the secondary school, grades seven through twelve. The major purpose was to survey the literature to ascertain the place and the extent of contemporary affairs teaching in today's schools.

During the last two decades the social studies curriculum has been carefully reviewed and continual efforts toward improvement have been made. Researchers have pointed out that the problems and issues which are continually occurring in society are of critical importance to the American system.

Contemporary affairs as a school subject has become socially significant. About one-fifth of the social studies time has been devoted arbitrarily or functionally to the study of contemporary affairs. It has been developed as a separate subject but more often as a fusion with the on-going social studies program.

Educators and researchers have demanded improvement in keeping our citizenry better informed. Long term effects can only come about through good teaching and learning experiences. Increased concern is evident today of the interdependence of peoples and nations. Efforts have been made to promote world peace and understandings. Students need to study and to interpret the true situations of the world in which they exist and coexist.

Various authors reviewed the method approaches, the techniques and devices, and the materials available. The inclusive approach was given the most emphasis. It has been designed to yield a curriculum with all topics based on aspects of present-day society. Basic subject matter has not been neglected. Reorganization and utilization are demanded as it fuses with significant current affairs. This approach has proven valuable in making the transition from elementary to secondary school. Techniques and devices have much the same usage as in any other social studies curriculum. Newspapers and materials published for school use were widely accepted sources of content material. There was a tendency toward greater scope as students turned more and more toward interpretive periodicals.

Almost all subject matter is controversial or has elements of controversy in it. The school has a responsibility to examine these issues objectively as they will undoubtedly affect society for generations to come. Critical evaluation and impartial analysis aid in developing responsible, self-directing citizens. Researchers have shown that skill of method and technique has become noticeably complex in teaching about contemporary affairs on national and world levels.

According to the survey much contemporary affairs teaching is fusion with other courses. Variable and scattered amounts of time were reported. The materials reported were definitely limited in scope. Over one-third of the schools reported satisfaction with a program which, in reality, is never static but always growing and expanding.

The syllabus was written as a guide for a selected honors class at a grade twelve level. Objectives, method, techniques, materials, activities, and evaluation procedures were included.

The need and scope of contemporary affairs has been presented in various ways. No effort has been made to sight hard and fast procedures. There are none. One of the answers to the problem, and the premise has been made that one exists, is that teachers, consultants, administrators, lay people, and students need to continually strive toward this newer tendency of giving more emphasis to the importance of teaching contemporary affairs. It has earned its place in the secondary social studies curriculum.