

SOCIAL STUDIES FOR STUDENTS OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

By S. L. Myklebust

Living in constant crisis as many people do in third-world countries, with perennial threats of starvation or malnutrition and exploding populations, it is easy to adopt crisis management as a style of government. As a result governments and schools in such countries tend to focus on finding immediate but superficial and rather shortsighted answers to national needs.

This mentality suffuses all aspects of society. It is manifested through sloppily produced and assembled merchandise, poorly maintained vehicles and equipment, and new roads that deteriorate after only a few months of use.

Quantity, Not Quality

Less obvious than the potholes in the roads are the deficiencies in the training of the young people, espe-

cially at the primary and secondary levels. As a result of the tremendous push for mass education and improved literacy, major strides have been made in education in most developing countries. Unfortunately, the emphasis has often been placed on quantity rather than quality.¹

Since limited education resources must stretch to meet the needs of more and more citizens, it is hard to fault governments for focusing on the sciences rather than social studies. Increased agricultural production to feed the hungry, improved technology education and production techniques to improve foreign exchange earnings obviously appear more important than the study of history and geography.²

Instant Information

The differences between the wealth of developed nations and the extreme poverty in third-world areas have become more and more glaring with the introduction of instant news, made widely available

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through cheap radios, television, newspapers and other publications. Satellites now make it possible for people in the most remote areas to know in minutes about happenings half a world away.

Instant news, as well as world travel for tourism, business, and education have made our globe seem much smaller. In some ways

this has made us feel part of a common human family. However, the differences between us have also become more apparent. Poor people now know what the rich possess, and covet wealth and sophistication for themselves.

Sensational publications and biased news commentary can convey a skewed interpretation of life in other lands. This becomes even more of a problem when certain nations tamper with the free flow of

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information or spread disinformation.

Social Studies for Decision Making

In a global community basic knowledge in the social sciences becomes of vital importance in helping citizens develop attitudes that will enable them to make sound and independent judgments. Such knowledge is vital to creating and preserving a free and open society that honors human rights and operates on democratic principles.

Social studies is basically the study of human roots and relationships within their geographical setting. It teaches people to live productively in the family and local society, and helps them understand other peoples and civilizations.

Training for Citizenship

Training for citizenship is relatively new. In earlier times the family and tribe took care of initiating the young into full membership in the community. As people moved from the country into metropolitan areas, this close-knit pattern of preparing the young for life responsibilities faded away, and new challenges appeared that exceeded the scope of the former training.

Among these challenges were the problems of a pluralistic and more technically sophisticated society that existed in the melting pot of a congested city environment.³ In the late 1950s and the 1960s when most African colonies gained their independence, they began to rule geographical areas inhabited by numerous ethnic groups. Often such peoples had no common denominator other than the language of the former colonial masters and whatever administrative system they left behind.

To live productively and to intelligently sort out the complexities that face them every day, people must learn how to live in a family and community. This requires a basic understanding of the common values and past history of their own ethnic group. To broaden their outlook, however, they should receive sufficient education to enable them to share common

ground with their fellow citizens.

Shared Values

Every nation, whatever its stage of growth, has a common set of laws and a system of government that ties it together and makes it distinct. If these values are not shared and taught, then ethnic groups will never be able to grow together to nationhood.

It is obvious, therefore, that as long as social studies is neglected, nations will fail to give proper attention to consensus building. National disintegration and civil war remain a threat if there is limited interaction between ethnic groups. Business and social life also suffer.

Barriers between peoples can best be broken down through interaction and knowledge of the values of other groups.

To be a contributing citizen, a person must feel secure in his or her environment, and must have some degree of pride in his or her accomplishments as well as those of previous generations. This becomes especially important as people from different nations meet and associate together.

A World View

Simply knowing about their own culture, however, will not make people intelligent members

of the world community. They also need some basic knowledge about the culture, history, geography, and systems of government in other countries.

Information about customs and living conditions in other nations and an understanding of the way other people think can make the difference between war and peace.

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It can allow people to work together cooperatively to solve international problems.

A Common Approach to Social Studies

When the former African colonies became independent nations it became obvious that a common approach to the teaching of social studies and the development of suitable curricula would be desirable. To achieve this, a conference was held in Mombasa, Kenya, in 1968. This conference led to the establishment of what has become known as the African Social Studies Program (ASSP).

Originally nine countries cooperated with the U.S. and Britain in this nongovernmental organization. As time went on, more countries joined, until a total of 18 now participate. In 1974 a reorganization took place, with the ministries of education of the member countries taking over the operation of the organization.⁴

The Mombasa conference adopted the following aims for the ASSP:

1. It will create an awareness and an understanding of the evolving social and physical environment as a whole, its natural man-made, cultural, and spiritual resources, together with the rational use and conservation of these resources for development;

2. It is to develop in the learner a capacity to learn and to acquire skills, including not only the basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing and calculation, but also the skills of hand, together with the skills of observation, analysis, and inference that are essential to the forming of sound judgment;

3. To ensure in the learner the acquisition of that relevant knowledge which is an essential prerequisite to personal development as well as to a positive personal contribution to the betterment of mankind; and

4. It is to develop in the learner a sympathetic appreciation of the diversity and interdependence of all members of the local community and the wider global community.⁵

Expected Outcomes

Students who have completed the social studies program offered in the schools should have developed skills and attitudes providing for the following outcomes:

1. Self-confidence and initiative, based on an understanding of one's own accomplishments, potentialities, and one's own worth;

2. Powers of imagination and resourcefulness;

3. A desire for continued learning;

4. An appreciation of the essential dignity of human beings;

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approach seems absolutely necessary. The student who has begun in the classroom the process of separating the absolutes of Christianity from their historical circumstances will be ready to translate that living faith into another cultural context, whether it be a Western society or a non-Western civilization.

Cultural and intellectual history, by making us more aware of our identity, individually and collectively, puts us in a position of strength as we face the buffeting winds of a rapidly changing world. □

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, Jr., *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

² James Harvey Robinson, *The New History* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1912; paperback ed., New York: The Free Press, 1965), p. 22.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴ Bloom, p. 30. Because of the relativistic assumptions behind much cultural history, Bloom is quite critical of the field. He believes that philosophy is a superior means of transcending time and place.

⁵ James Burke, *The Day the Universe Changed* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1985), p. 337.

⁶ Bloom, p. 39.

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held by many Christians, world political affairs are very closely related to the development of Christianity, the growth of churches, and the completion of the gospel commission. Seventh-day Adventist students need to learn about political affairs and systems and their relationship to religion in a variety of governments and political systems. Such knowledge will help them better understand their church, their political system, and the world around them. □

REFERENCES

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1940), p. 28.

² John 15:19; 17:14, 16.

³ 1 John 2:15; Colossians 3:2.

⁴ James 4:4.

⁵ David Eastson, *The Political System* (New York: Knopf, 1953).

⁶ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1930), pp. 2, 3.

⁷ Karl Marx, "Principles of Communism," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International, 1975), p. 354.

⁸ Donald N. Clark, *Christianity in Modern Korea* (New York: University Press of America, 1986), p. 36.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Donald Eugene Smith, *Religion and Political Development* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1970).

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5. A sense of compassion for the less fortunate;

6. A sense of respect for and therefore a tolerance for the opinions of others;

7. A willingness to accept necessary changes within a system of law and order deriving from the will of the people;

8. Attitudes favorable to the social, physical, cultural, and economic development that will enable the learners to participate in the life of the community, and when they leave school to function as innovators in a society in which all members can take pride; social studies should make the school an agent of change.⁶

The original purpose of the ASSP was to reorganize the approach to social studies both at the primary and secondary levels as well as in teacher-training colleges.⁷ These concepts have, therefore, become the basis for the advanced teacher-training program in social studies in Kenya.

Guidelines for Zimbabwe Schools

When the newly independent country of Zimbabwe in 1980 settled on a social studies syllabus for their primary schools, they adopted the following broad guidelines:

1. To gain such an understanding of oneself as a member of society as will result in positive and acceptable behavior in the community.

2. To gain insight into the organization, origins, and culture of his and other communities.

3. To understand one's social obligations and responsibilities in fulfilling them.

4. To know about life in certain selected communities and countries, comparing and contrasting them with one's own so as to ensure an appreciative understanding of their differences.

5. To be able to relate the past to the present in the study of change and continuity in human affairs.

6. To be aware of the implications of population growth upon one's physical and social environment.⁸

In most African countries the syllabi both for primary and secondary schools are set by the government. Where church-operated schools still exist, they have to follow the same guidelines as the government-operated institutions. This is particularly true in the secondary schools where students are prepared for national exams.

Obstacles to Implementation

The above guidelines show that the theoretical framework exists for a competent social-studies program in the African nations. However, in some countries the program has not been made fully operational because those in charge have failed to commit sufficient resources to make it succeed.

Some governments have committed themselves to upgrading science training, feeling that they will achieve greatest benefit from the money thus spent. However, social studies is critical to the education and modernization efforts of developing nations.

Improvement is needed in two main areas. Textbooks are seldom available in sufficient quantities. In fact they are often not available at all. Teachers often have limited training, and their pay is so low that they skip classes to earn a second income from another job. Neither of these problems is unique to social studies, but rather tied in with other problems in the educational systems of the developing countries.

Christian Values and Social Studies

Although social studies offers some solutions to the conflicts between peoples and nations, it also highlights the intractable nature of certain human problems and draws attention to the eternal and more stable values of human existence. These values seem to have greater appeal in the third world than in some of the developed countries.⁹

A Christian who is well versed in the social sciences will definitely have an advantage in interpreting the human situation at this critical

stage in earth's history. Christian education can combine the spiritual aspects of life with the insights gained through social studies.

As Adventists we have a mission that requires us to be alert to changes in society and to prepare for the ultimate showdown between good and evil. This should encourage us to take the lead in strengthening the social-studies program where we have church-operated primary and secondary schools as well as in our teacher-training programs. □

REFERENCES

¹ Henry O. Ayot, Stephen Mutunga, Sylvester N. Diah, "African Curriculum Organisation, Course Six: Curriculum Development in Social Studies" (Nairobi: 1981). Unpublished.

² A. Irumba, "Social Studies in the Third World. A Luxury or Necessity?" Unpublished paper prepared at the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Kenya, 1987, page 3.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 5.

⁴ Henry O. Ayot, "African Studies Programme. Evaluation and Present State of Social Studies Education in Africa." Unpublished paper used at Kenyatta Teachers College, 1981, pp. 1, 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸ Educational Development Unit, Ministry of Education, "Social Studies Syllabus for Primary Schools," Zimbabwe, March 1980.

⁹ Irumba, p. 6.

INTEGRATING "HERSTORY" INTO HISTORY

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*Women and Teaching Women's History.*²

Once armed with this material and a new conceptual framework for broadening the study of history, choose textbooks, films, and other materials to enhance students' awareness of women's contributions. At the K-8 level where history is introduced as social studies, films like "And Everything Nice," "Other Women, Other Work," "Women's Place," and "Young Women in Sports," (see bibliography) can spark open-ended discussions on male/female roles in society.

Hands-on Projects

Elementary teachers can assign projects that offer "hands-on" experiences to expand students' understanding, apply research

skills to history, and make women's history "come alive." Students can design bulletin boards featuring pictures of women in nontraditional jobs; leading out in great moments of U.S. or world history; guiding the suffrage, labor, birth control, or other movements; and showing how women's work has changed in America from colonial days to the present.

Younger pupils also enjoy role-playing, acting out the lives of others. Why not have them compose plays, skits, or charades on the theme "If I were a(n) . . ." (Puritan woman, suffragist, female abolitionist, et cetera). In these dramas the students can imagine their feelings and responses during a specific event or era in a male-dominated society.

Gifted students can be assigned to do oral book reports on famous women in U.S. or world history or on topics related to women. Such reports will be interesting and stimulating for the whole class.

Be sure to include church and community resource people in broadening the curriculum. Talks by female professionals, skilled laborers, and craftswomen can generate much dialogue and help young people think more broadly about their own potential.

Nor should worship time and after-lunch story time be overlooked as opportunities for introducing women's roles in SDA history. Try reading books like *Lucy Miller, The Girl Who Waited for Jesus; Mary Andrews, Companion of Sorrows; Journey to Freedom* (Anna Knight's story); or *Amy Carmichael, Rebel Turned Missionary*, all available at your Adventist Book Center. These books emphasize the invaluable contributions women have made to our church's past and present.

Ideas for Secondary Teaching

At the academy level, the history teacher has greater freedom to choose a quality textbook and materials to integrate "herstory" into the curricula. Mazour, Peoples, and Rabb's *People and Nations, A World History*³ gives significant emphasis to women in ancient Egypt, Babylon, Sparta, Athens, India, China, and Japan, as well as

women in the African kingdoms, Islamic nations, and feudal Europe. The book also highlights women's roles during the French and Industrial revolutions, suffrage struggle, the two World Wars, as well as marriage customs through the ages, 19th-century family reform laws, and women's education and jobs.

For an academy-level U.S. history textbook sensitive to women's issues, none surpasses Risjord and Haywoode's *People and Our Country*.⁴ This amazing text has 186 page references to 63 topics relating to women (including one page favorably devoted to Ellen Harmon White). Some of the topics include women in abolitionism, education, feminism, employment, government, labor unions, literature, and medicine, as well as black and native American women, and women during key eras (colonial, Revolutionary War, Civil War, New Deal, et cetera). Fascinating photo features highlight little-known women such as Margaret Brent (president of Maryland's colonial assembly), Deborah Sampson (Revolutionary soldier), Belle Boyd (Confederate spy), Vinnie Ream (sculptress), and Dorothy Lange (Depression-era photographer).

Moreover, a host of color films at low rentals (\$10 to \$20) await the social studies and history teacher at city, county, and university film libraries. Academy-age youth will enjoy provocative movies such as "Doll's House: Oppression and Emancipation of Women," "How We Got the Vote," "She's Nobody's Baby," and "You've Come a Long Way, Maybe?"

Students in grades 9-12 civics, world, and U.S. history classes are also ready to tackle more challenging projects as well. Bulletin boards could feature female roles in U.S. history; women in various careers (medicine, law, aviation, art, or politics); women in Seventh-day Adventist history; or women's struggle for the vote, higher wages, entry into colleges and medical schools.

Book reviews (which by now should include some critical thinking skills) on female leaders such as Eleanor of Aquitaine, Mother Theresa, or Eleanor Roosevelt, as well as women's roles in industrial-