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THE CONSTRUCTION OF UNITS IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES

How units in the social studies may be arranged and presented; their classification as "vertical" and "horizontal."

IT may seem presumptuous for one even to attempt to write a paper on The Construction of Units in the Social Studies at a time when the curriculum of our state is undergoing a revision. Since some time must elapse before the new curriculum will be in statewide use, the necessity for the teacher's using present methods will still obtain. It may truly be said that the proposed curriculum will not necessitate a complete change for many teachers, for it is felt that the proposed methods now being advocated are to some extent being used by many teachers throughout the state. For these teachers a change in educational terminology, rather than in substance, will be the only adaptation necessary.

For many years educational leaders have given of their time and substance to improve the teaching process. Books have been written and many magazine articles have been published defining and explaining proposed methods designed to improve methods of teaching. Each subject in the various curricula has received its share of emphasis in this respect. As a result of these efforts many schemes have been evolved such as the "socialized recitation," the "project method," the "contract method," etc. A statement that characterizes all these methods is that they emphasize subject matter as such. All are concerned with merchandizing subject matter; all represent enthusiastic attempts to find a better way. One

of the most recent attempts to improve teaching is the "unit method." It is about this method that this paper is concerned.

A few years ago the writer of this paper felt that the pupils in her social science classes, as in other classes, were attempting to memorize subject matter instead of trying to think their way through problems. The usual reason given for an opinion, if indeed the reaction could be called such, was "The book says so." This observation caused the teacher to cast about for a better way, and she began to organize the social sciences she taught into several units each. The effort had for its motive the substitution of learning units or exercises for lessons, chapters, ground-to-be-covered, and above all, understanding for knowledge. This departure necessitated a reconstruction of thinking relative to both learning and teaching. First attempts at reorganization of materials of various kinds resulted largely in outlining the field or problem to be explored and solved by the pupil. This initial enthusiasm, augmented by the educational principle that in order to learn one must be actively engaged and by that epoch-making book of Dr. Morrison's, *The Practice of Teaching in the Secondary School*, has materialized in a still better way and a more refined technique. The unit, according to Morrison, "is a comprehensive and significant aspect of the environment, or of an organized science, capable of being understood rather than capable merely of being remembered." A unit in history, says the same writer, consists "of the larger significant movements in human history, which go far to explain the society in which he lives, and which develop in him a reasoning attitude toward the social world of today, in the place of an attitude of passive acceptance." Some units suggested by Morrison

are as follows: Liberty and Law, The Industrial Revolution, The Enforcement of Law, etc. Several so-called work books in the social sciences have been organized according to Morrison's idea. For proof of the above, one needs only to refer to such authors as Barnard, Tryon and Lingley, Hill, Wilson, and Bailey. Wilson's *Laboratory Manual in American History* contains the following:

1. The Background of American History
2. Colonizing the Continent
3. Forming the American Nation
4. Establishing an Independent State
5. The Era of National Expansion
6. The Slavery Controversy
7. Reconstruction
8. A Second Industrial Revolution
9. United States—A World Power
10. The World War and Reconstruction

The other writers mentioned above have a similar organization in their respective fields; it is therefore not necessary to take either the time or space to enumerate their units. In teaching units, Morrison advocated five separate steps, *viz.*, exploration, presentation, assimilation, organization, and recitation.

Miller uses the term "challenge" for the learning unit and defines it as "any body of materials or principles presented as a basis of study for a class group." This he substitutes for the problem, project, or lesson methods. Says he, "The daily 'lesson' must go. It fits nobody. Units of learning comprehensive in their nature, will be substituted for 'lessons'." In his book *Creative Learning and Teaching*, Chapter II, such units or contracts as the Plantagenet world, the parallelogram, the moving wheel are suggested as models. Upon examination one finds a striking similarity between the Morrison and the Miller units. Miller, however, suggests three teaching steps: (1) the problem-raising movement; (2) the directed study movement; and (3) the organizing and unifying movement. Thus it appears

that he does not favor exploration and presentation in the Morrison procedure.

Upon examining the social science units referred to above one will find that they are capable of being handled very much as were the several divisions of subject matter of the older textbooks, or they can be used as intended, a means to an end. Even if regarded as old subject matter it is reorganized and regrouped and pruned of irrelevant materials. Both Morrison and Miller think of the learning unit as a "challenge which can be brought to bear on present living and which make it more meaningful to every individual." They do not use subject matter as something to be memorized nor as tasks to be performed. The writer has had experience with both the Miller and the Morrison units and has found the results almost equally satisfactory. The pupils were as much stimulated with and interested in the one as the other. Under the Miller plan, the pupils constructed their own units, guided by the teacher who had carefully planned for this beforehand so as to avoid going too far astray from the core idea. For example, in a unit so made, "Citizens Making Known Their Will in Government," the approaching presidential election served as the stimulus. The pupils selected the objectives, and such activities were selected as to make the realization of these objectives possible. The pupils under teacher guidance explored the field and set to work to answer and solve certain self-imposed questions and problems that were suggested in the informal discussions and plans. Certain learning activities were engaged in for the purpose of arriving at understandings necessary to make intelligent participation. Some are as follows: Interviewing certain officials; listening to radio speeches on the subject; reading magazine and newspaper articles; making posters; writing essays on the election of a president to show how the election process has changed by the various means of constitutional growth; ascertaining qualifications for voting; deter-

mining who citizens are, and the rights they enjoy and how they participate in government directly and indirectly in ways other than voting; investigating the influence of minorities and public opinion; studying initiative, referendum, and recall; preparing booths for balloting; registering the student body and teachers; appointing election officials, etc. The culminating activity was an election conducted after the manner of a real election to ascertain if the class group had achieved its goal.

The pupils worked harmoniously in groups, calling on the teacher whenever they felt in need. The degree of enthusiasm manifested by the pupils in carrying this unit, with its diversity of activities, to a successful conclusion, was no greater perhaps than that shown in many of the more formal units, wholly or partially prepared by the teacher—such as one of the horizontal type, "The United States from Isolation to Leadership and Back Again." Naturally the activities here were largely of the discussion and reading types. In this case the teacher made the entire unit and used as a stimulus some current happenings. Possibly the fact that units of this type were introduced at the psychological time may have accounted for the interest manifested. Also the fact that the pupils were very much interested in international relations may be one explanation of the enthusiasm shown in this teacher-made unit.

Much of the value of any unit depends upon the activities that may be used to realize the objective for which it was designed. These should be varied enough to provide for individual differences, but one must ever bear in mind that activities are not to be performed for their own sake, but are to represent experiences which can be organized and unified into an understandable whole. It has been observed by the writer that there is a tendency among her pupils to select from the supplementary activities some which may lead to vocations or avocations. Some pupils almost invariably choose

the creative type activity such as writing a poem, painting or drawing, making linoleum models for wood cuts, while others choose reading or writing biographies. Radio broadcasts of weekly news are popular among some. Interviewing the Public Welfare nurse last year led one girl to accompany this worker on her rounds every Saturday and led her to decide to prepare herself for such work, etc.

Some teachers find it convenient to classify units according to the organization of the learning exercises into two groups—vertical and horizontal. Almost all of the available ready-made ones up to this time seem to fall in the vertical classification. They suggest the chronological or period treatment. For example, The Industrial Revolution is suggested as a unit in modern history. Now the vertical arrangement implies that a section of history, economic, social, and industrial, during and following the War of 1812 is separated and delimited for study. The learning activities or reactions may be concerned wholly with the past. Whether the learner's experience leads him to feel that The Industrial Revolution was an aspect of modern history, beginning and ending in the past, depends on the teacher.

The other type is known as the horizontal. Here one begins with a present movement, problem, or aspect of social life and traces it back through history to its beginning or origin. An illustration will suffice. If the outcome desired should be a sympathetic understanding of the problems involved in an effort to secure world peace, one could begin with the United States' international relations today—Envoy Litvinoff's visit to the United States, for example—and continue back to the beginnings of this nation. If the purpose should be to carry the investigation still further back, then of course another limitation would have to be determined upon. Such a procedure cuts right through the periods of not only American history, but also through the other Social Sciences one finds in most

of the textbooks today. Such treatment does not cause the pupil to feel that history is concerned only with the dead past, but rather that it is a vital instrument necessary for his understanding and solution of many present-day problems. The vertical unit in organization is comparable to the logical organization of subject matter which aims to arrange knowledge in such a way as to show the relation of premise and conclusion, while the horizontal is psychological, the center of reference being the individual.

A criticism of the school is that it has done little about developing intelligent socially-minded people. Its pupils are able to recite poetry, recall dates, perform mathematical operations, and do various other things that have been regarded as indices of a functioning education process. When the pupil left the school he found himself face to face with a changing world, but his equipment was designed for a static one. Hence, the necessity of becoming re-educated. So one naturally asks the question, "Does the unit enable the product of the school to become socially adjusted better than is possible under the old order?" It is believed that the functional unit will make such adjustment possible. With such a unit one sees society as it is, uses the past to interpret it, and envisions the future. The criteria, according to many educators, of such an organization are: 1. It must be socially valid; 2. It must be historically developmental; 3. It must be culturally dynamic; 4. It must be mentally directive as well as comprehensive and understandable. It is believed that this unit under the direction and guidance of the artist teacher will "serve completely and efficiently in promoting the understanding which present social intelligence requires."

MARY KLINGAMAN STANLEY

Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time; for that's the stuff life is made of.
—*Poor Richard's Almanack.*

MAPS—THE GEOGRAPHICAL SHORTHAND

Grade four, by formal and informal methods of expression, learns to make and read maps.

THE fifth grade teacher and I were talking together about the class that had entered her room in September. "One of the things they do very well," she said, "is to read maps. They can read any type of map in the fifth grade books and reason out many facts about a region before they look at the text." That is a good skill to have attained at this level, of course, especially since it was attained painlessly, even happily.

According to our course of study, grade three pupils have considerable geographic experience, but they have little to do with maps. They find locations on the globe or on world maps, they show land and water forms on the sand table, or by means of blackboard sketching; this is about all. But grade four pupils, who study local geography, the home city, and the home state, submerge themselves in a flood of home-made maps of all kinds and descriptions, and emerge from the flood map-conscious and map-wise.

Near our school is an airport and an airplane picture of the school grounds printed in a local paper can be easily translated by any youngster into his first map. The farm next door with woodland, pastures, garden, brook, and numerous farm buildings, gives a chance for an outdoor geography lesson and the plans for a second map.

Next the city outline is studied. Each child has a cardboard pattern, large as 9x12 map paper will accommodate, and he traces around it until the city map is apparently in his system.

Or perhaps I should have said "in her system," since it is to the girls' side of the yard that I am often invited to inspect large city maps outlined with small stones, having