

Editorial

The Names of the Game

The fact that this special issue of the *McGill Journal of Education* is devoted to the social studies may not make it clear to all what its contents should be. Perhaps of all subjects in the curriculum, social studies is the most amorphous. While history and geography are well recognized disciplines with a stature equal to that of physics, mathematics and biology, social studies is not; while history and geography have a strong cognitive component which most laypeople (and parents) are aware of, social studies has traditionally had a more strongly affective side. The socialization of children has, since Dewey, been one of its aims and its success depends upon the inculcation of certain social values. The subjects which form social studies contribute to this broader objective. Thus, social studies is not simply an amalgam of disciplines; it has a dimension which the individual disciplines do not possess alone. The whole, in this case, is greater than the sum of its parts.

And yet, some people would argue, it is also less than the sum of its parts, for it lacks what the disciplines possess — namely, discipline itself. History and geography have not only well-recognized bodies of content, but also well-recognized procedures. In learning these procedures, children learn to think logically. Although some of the procedures may be adapted to the broader aims of social studies, others may not. There is, nonetheless, some common ground. Social studies is interested in society just as its component disciplines are. To a large extent their interests complement its own, since the questions which they ask illuminate our understanding of society. Moreover, the really important questions today — of environmental quality and control, of energy supply and allocation, of interracial or interethnic tension — have an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary nature which suits well the catholicity of social studies.

When a department was first created in 1965 as part of the Faculty of Education, it was named the Department of Instruction in History and Geography. Such a label was an obvious one at that time since the department had to reflect, to some extent, what was happening in its principal constituency. History and geography were taught as subjects both at the later childhood level in the elementary school and in all grades of the high school in Québec. Social studies was taught only at the early childhood level of the elementary school. But during the late 1960's, changes occurred in social education that appeared to make the name of the Department quite anachronistic. Schools were beginning to take an interest in subjects that had not previously been included in the curriculum, particularly economics, anthropology and political science. Also, interest was developing in interdisciplinary studies where subject matter from several of the social sciences was brought to bear on such areas as urban studies, native North American studies and Canadian studies. Taking these factors into consideration, the Department opted to change its name in 1968 to the Department of Education in Social Sciences. Some developments that followed in Québec in the early 1970's seemed to have underlined the appropriateness of the change. Economics and law have both become approved subjects in the high school curriculum. At the later childhood level of the elementary school, history and geography have been replaced by social studies, and interest in other interdisciplinary studies has expanded.

The essays contained in the present issue of the *McGill Journal of Education* express some of this diversity of interests and objectives. Some are concerned with questions which pertain to the mainstream disciplines of history and geography: To what extent have changes in the research methodology of these fields induced changes in teaching practice? What is the role of fieldwork or of environmental perception? Others have a wider and more sweeping relevance: Who is served by social research? How may intercultural understanding be achieved? What is the role of the community? Yet another tries to place these questions within the instructional framework of Québec education. All, in one way or another, seek to initiate debate and to throw some light on a field which may seem, to its practitioners and to outsiders alike, bewildering in its variety.

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