

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

A JUNIOR HIGH SOCIAL SCIENCE CURRICULUM ALTERNATIVE;  
A CASE STUDY OF AN HUMANISTIC INFORMAL  
APPROACH TO LEARNING

by

ROBERT CLIVE ARMSTRONG

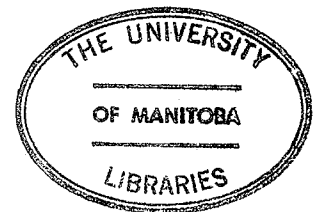
A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Education

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION;  
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

1976



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Abstract

This study was undertaken to determine whether an humanistic informal approach to learning could satisfy the needs, concerns and interests of students, while at the same time improving self and other awareness, values clarification, civic awareness and cognition. In order to test the notion, it was necessary to devise, implement and evaluate a new curriculum based upon an open education philosophy. The resulting program design, learning experiences and classroom organization was explained early in the thesis, while the methods and materials employed to judge the worth of the program, and the subsequent analysis, followed in the form of charts and a textual examination.

While the thesis was not intended to be an intervention study, it did present some relevant findings from two questionnaires which demonstrated that the program was a success.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years a recognizable shift in teaching goals, strategies and emphases has ushered in the beginnings of a new curriculum revolution. The result has been an effort 1) to create more satisfying and relevant programs "aimed at helping children with their concerns,"<sup>1</sup> 2) to offer greater opportunities for learning through an open education environment,<sup>2</sup> 3) to provide students with an active "experience curriculum"<sup>3</sup> and 4) to emphasize self awareness and personal growth, or the "effective dimensions of an individual's life."<sup>4</sup>

Among the reasons for this change has been the awareness of some educators that a number of urgent social influences are being ignored. Included among these are 1) the changing values brought about by the post-Sputnik

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<sup>1</sup>G. Weinstein and M. D. Fantini, Toward Humanistic Education (New York: Praeger Publ., 1971), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Ronald S. Barth "Open Education: Assumptions About Children's Learning," ed. Charles H. Rathbone, Open Education: The Informal Classroom (New York: Citation Press, 1971), p. 116.

<sup>3</sup>Reginald D. Archambault, "The Philosophical Bases of the Experience Curriculum," Dewey On Education (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 160.

<sup>4</sup>David E. Purpel and Maurice Belanger, Curriculum and Cultural Revolution (Berkeley Calif: McCutchan Publ. Corp., 1972), p. 253.

trends in education, 2) the changing tempo of society itself,<sup>1</sup> 3) the changing concerns of individuals in their quest to become "more effective self-actualizing adults after school,"<sup>2</sup> and 4) the changing meta-issues, or "crisis in the human image,"<sup>3</sup> in authority, in economic values and in pluralism.<sup>4</sup>

Accepting, therefore, that this evidence is strong enough to warrant a change in educational methodology, it would appear that if this change is to occur, there will be an equally strong need for clear, tested teaching models for teachers to implement or modify.

#### Purpose of Study

The underlying purpose of this thesis, therefore, is:

1. to offer a rationale for developing an alternative social science curriculum which employs an humanistic, informal approach to learning,
2. to review the relevant literature,
3. to outline the methods, techniques and procedures for developing a program aimed at dealing with the needs, concerns, and interests of students, and, at the same time, generating better feelings about self, and toward other

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<sup>1</sup>Willis W. Harman, "The nature of our changing society: implications for schools," David E. Purpel and Maurice Belanger, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>Alfred S. Alzchuler, "Psychological Education," Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>3</sup>Willis W. Harman, Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

students, teachers, and members of the community,

4. to offer a number of suggestions as to how curricular change may be implemented within a school,<sup>1</sup>

5. to describe the problems implementing a program,

6. to report on a student and parent inventory questionnaire, and finally,

7. to suggest a number of implications and conclusions as they relate to the success of the program.

### Rationale

In recent years a number of genuine criticisms have been raised concerning the value of the existing Social Science Curriculum in recognizing the needs, interests and capacities of students. Alvin Toffler has warned us that unless our schools begin to organize their goals for the future, students will go elsewhere, or have to confront future shock.<sup>2</sup> Future shock, said Neil Postman, "occurs when you are confronted by the fact that the world you are educated into or believe in does not exist."<sup>3</sup>

The problem tends to reach even deeper proportions.

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<sup>1</sup>For a brief discussion of this question see R. H. Howse, "The Micropolitics of Innovation: Nine Propositions," Phi Delta Kappan, January 1976, pp. 337-40.

<sup>2</sup>Alvin Toffler, "Education in the Future Tense," ed. Richard W. Saxe, Opening The Schools (Berkley: McCutchan Publ. Co. 1972), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Neil Postman and C. Weingartner, Teaching As A Subversive Activity (New York: Dell Publ. Co. Inc. 1969), p. 14.

Some educators have serious doubts that what is being taught has anything whatsoever to do with determining our chances for survival.<sup>1</sup> More important than gaining the ability to earn a living, said A. B. Hodgetts in, What culture? What heritage?, is the fact that our students

. . . need the self-rewarding satisfaction of developing their intellectual and creative powers to the limits of their natural endowments . . . they need the intellectual skills, the knowledge and the opportunities to play more effective and satisfying roles as citizens in the wider society.<sup>2</sup>

In summarizing, his argument for a Canadian Studies Curriculum and, in particular, a more effective civics course, Hodgetts remarked:

To deny the value of formal civic education or to claim that young people are incapable of acquiring it, is to deny a fundamental principal of democracy. . .<sup>3</sup>

Again, while referring to the inefficiency of the present courses in Canadian history, social studies and civics, Hodgetts noted:

Let us frankly recognize that what we are teaching our young people about Canada and its problems is antiquated . . . These courses lack any contemporary meaning. They continue to be narrowly<sup>4</sup> confined to constitutional and political history.

Moreover, students must be taught the necessary strategies for survival. In the words of Neil Postman:

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<sup>1</sup>Neil Postman and C. Weingartner, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>A. B. Hodgetts, What culture? What heritage? (Toronto: The Ontario Institute For Studies in Education, 1969), p. vi.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. vi.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

Survival depends almost entirely on the ability to identify which old concepts are relevant<sup>1</sup> to the demands imposed by new threats to survival.

It would appear, therefore, that a more realistic Canadian Studies course might promote a more satisfying understanding of the wider community. In fact A. B. Hodgetts explains, "that what we have been doing in our Canadian studies program is not good enough."<sup>2</sup>

These criticisms have of late received some empirical support. In a study of the cognitive development of young people, E. A. Peel found that the formal, or explainer, level of reasoning, or an individual's ability to form hypothesis or propositions did not begin until a mental age of 14.7 years.<sup>3</sup> Whereas Jean Piaget believed these capacities began to develop at a chronological age of eleven or twelve,<sup>4</sup> R. N. Hallam concluded that formal thinking, particularly in history, begins at about 16.2 to 16.6 years of age. He says, "that a mental age of 16.5 to 18.2 is required for the beginning of the formal stage."<sup>5</sup>

Parallel with the thinking of Piaget is Joseph

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<sup>1</sup>Neil Postman and C. Weingartner, op. cit., p. 208.

<sup>2</sup>A. B. Hodgetts, op. cit., p. 115.

<sup>3</sup>E. A. Peel "Intellectual Growth During Adolescence," Educational Review 17 (1965), p. 33.

<sup>4</sup>J. Piaget and B. Inhelder, The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence (New York: Basic Books, 1958), p. 132.

<sup>5</sup>R. N. Hallam, "Logical Thinking in History," Educational Review, 19 (1967), p. 191.

Adelson, who concluded that the ability to think in political abstractions does not develop until mid-adolescence, somewhere between twelve and sixteen years of age. He concluded that:

By the time this period is at an end, a dramatic change is evident; the youngster's grasp of the political world is now recognizably adult. His mind moves with some agility within the terrain of political concepts; he has achieved abstractness, complexity, and even some delicacy in his sense of political textures . . .

Similar findings were reported by Kenneth Langton of students in the United States. He said of students' understandings of political concepts:

Studies of the relations between social studies courses and political relevant attitudes<sup>2</sup> report either inconclusive or negative results.

It is, therefore, very possible that what we are teaching in the junior high school social studies courses at present may be beyond the mental capacities of the students, and as such, requires re-evaluation. Further, it would seem that, if one of our goals is citizenship, however defined, our present courses of study do little to achieve it.

If improvements are to be made, therefore, it will be necessary to develop a curriculum which will communicate its essential principles and features in such a form that they are open to critical scrutiny and are capable of

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<sup>1</sup>J. Adelson, "The Political Imagination of the Young Adolescent," Daedalus, 100 (4) Fall, 1971, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth P. Langton, Political Socialization, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 88.

effective translation into practice.<sup>1</sup> This thesis, therefore, questions our conventional assumptions about how learning occurs, and attitudes change. Consequently, this study disputes:

1. that knowledge is best presented and understood when organized in disciplines or subjects,
2. that content is more important than process,
3. that subject matter is unaffected by change,
4. that teachers are hired to transmit the ideas, precepts and conclusions of this content,
5. that the four walls of the school are the most logical place for this content to be learned,
6. that structured forty minute periods, three or six times per cycle are the most realistic scheme for learning,
7. that students learn by listening to their teacher or by answering teacher-directed questions, and,
8. that the above are a preparation for life.<sup>2</sup>

Further, these assumptions contradict, what we know about early adolescence. J. J. Mitchell characterizes this stage, the years between ten and sixteen years of age, as a period when:

Boundaries are not clear, definitions are not crisp, body impulses are not precise and social

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<sup>1</sup>L. Stenhouse, An Introduction To Curriculum Research and Development (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Neil Postman, and C. Weingartner, A Soft Revolution (New York: Dell Publ. Co., 1971), p. 9.

patterns are not constant.<sup>1</sup>

As expressed by Peel and others, this is a period when formal systematic thought develops; a period when according to Michell:

Mental growth brings about significant transformation in the social, moral and psychological life of the adolescent . . . adolescents question the source of knowledge and disagree openly with parents and other authoritarian figures.<sup>2</sup>

He continues:

The thought process of the adolescent probe into the inner personality more persistently . . . as a result periods of<sup>3</sup> pensive introspection characterize his life.

Recognizing, therefore, that:

1. Freedom from parental bonds is the single most important social event in the early adolescent cycle,<sup>4</sup>

2. Learning to interact with members of the opposite sex becomes one of the major developmental tasks of early adolescence,<sup>5</sup>

3. Justice is the dominant moral impulse of the adolescence years,<sup>6</sup>

4. Adolescence is the first stage in the life cycle when moral issues become existentially as well as intellectually expensive,<sup>7</sup> and,

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<sup>1</sup>John J. Mitchell, Human Life: The Early Adolescent Years (Toronto: Holt Reinhart and Winston, 1974). p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 6.



5. Each person must formulate his own viewpoints on moral questions,<sup>1</sup>

it would seem that a totally new set of assumptions must be considered.

Since kinds of thought are changing during this early period of adolescence, and since this mental growth is bringing about significant transformation in the social, moral and psychological life of the adolescent,<sup>2</sup> this thesis offers a completely different set of educational assumptions:

1. that learning takes place best when it occurs in an open environment in the context of real, concrete, daily life experiences, as opposed to the abstract imitating experiences of the classroom,

2. that each learner ultimately, must organize his own learning in his own way and subsequently is the best judge of the worth of his learning experiences,

3. that a problem-oriented approach to learning is more realistic especially when it is based on needs and interests and not on subjects,

4. that students are capable of directly and authentically participating in the intellectual and social life of their community,

5. that the community badly needs them in this capacity,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-10.

6. that improved student satisfaction will result in better motivation for achievement,<sup>1</sup> and,

7. that education in a free society should have a broad human focus and be based upon students' personal problems and concerns.<sup>2</sup>

### Program Objectives

In the most general terms, the objectives, or principles of procedure of the course, to be described and analyzed in this thesis, are those outlined by Hanley and associates in Man: A Course of Study.<sup>3</sup> They are:

1. To initiate and develop in youngsters a process of question-posing (the inquiry method);
2. To teach a research methodology where children can look for information to answer questions they have raised and use the framework developed in the course (e.g. the concept of the life cycle) and apply it to new areas;
3. To help youngsters to develop the ability to use a variety of first-hand sources as evidence from which to develop hypotheses and draw conclusions;
4. To conduct class discussions in which youngsters learn to listen to others as well as express their own views;
5. To legitimize the search; that is to give sanction and support to open-ended discussions where definite answers to many questions are not found;
6. To encourage children to reflect on their own experiences; and,
7. To create a new role for the teacher, in which he becomes a resource rather than an authority.<sup>4</sup>

While the above aims suggest the broader aspects of the program, the following goals are expressed as specific

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<sup>1</sup>M. Fantini and G. Weinstein, op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>Hanley, et al, "Man: A Course of Study," cited in, L. Stenhouse, An Introduction To Curriculum Research and Development (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 38.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

learning outcomes.

### Specific Learning Outcomes

As a result of students structuring, evaluating and supervising their own learning experiences around contemporary social problems, it is intended that students will:

1. demonstrate a greater sense of self-awareness; that is, they will develop an improved feeling of adequacy, competence and confidence. In short, the intention is "to make children feel good about themselves"<sup>1</sup>;
2. reveal a greater awareness of others; that is, the ability to understand the relationship of individual to individual, and among individuals in a group<sup>2</sup>; in total, improved inter-personal growth;
3. improve in their ability to clarify values; that is, they will develop a value system freely, by their own choice, which, in general, is pervasive, consistent and predictable, characterizing a life style;
4. indicate an improved sense of civic responsibility; that is, an understanding and appreciation of service, co-operation, open mindedness and respect for the democratic way of life; and,
5. acquire new knowledge while developing improved learning skills including the ability to analyze, synthesize and evaluate new information; that is, to develop processes

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<sup>1</sup>Neil Postman, The School Book (New York: Delacorte Press, 1973), p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

for predicting and explaining the principal problems involved in the social, political and economic spheres of the community.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Literature

The programme described in this thesis, entitled A Community Studies Course for Urban Living, incorporates elements of a variety of educational approaches, including open education; experience education; effective-psychological education; or, together, humanistic education. Since there is an abundance of literature on these approaches, this chapter, for reasons of practicality, will review only the fundamental works.

### Open Education: Its Nature and Content

The term open education can be best expressed simply as an informal approach to learning whereby students through their "own volition cause things to happen."<sup>1</sup> This informal approach has also been referred to by Roland S. Barth, as the "free day, integrated day, integrated classroom, informal classroom, developmental classroom, and child-centered classroom."<sup>2</sup> It is the kind of education according to the Saturday Review that discards "the traditional stylized roles of the teacher and pupils for a much freer, more informal, highly individualized child-centered

---

<sup>1</sup>Charles H. Rathbone, "The Implicit Rationale of the Open Education Classroom," Charles H. Rathbone, ed., Open Education (New York: Citation Press, 1971), p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>Ronald S. Barth, "Open Education: assumptions about children, learning and knowledge," Ibid., p. 116.

learning experience."<sup>1</sup> More succinctly stated:

Students' feelings, interests, and needs are given priority over lesson plans, organizational patterns, rigid time schedules and no-option structures.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, open education is much more. It is also a physical arrangement, free from walls or, where walls exist, involving free movement to the corridors, the administrative offices, staff rooms, and the outdoors. In writing on the maximum and imaginative use of space, Ruth Flurry notes that:

Space is viewed as a commodity on which the child has first option. When his needs are met as nearly adequately as possible, then adult members of the school community can be considered.<sup>3</sup>

Open education also allows for flexibility of staffing, individual development, scheduling, planning, student-initiated curriculum, student-staff needs, self/group evaluation, and a wide variety of curricular materials including the community itself.<sup>4</sup>

In her attempt to define Open Education, Barbara Blitz has listed a number of philosophical premises upon which the theory is based. She says:

---

<sup>1</sup>Ewald B. Nyquist, "Open Education: Its Philosophy, Historical Perspectives and Implications," ed., Ewald B. Nyquist, Open Education (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>3</sup>Ruth C. Flurry, "Open Education: What Is It?", Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 104-108.

Most would agree that 1. children should have the right to pursue individual interests; 2. that they need to be actively engaged with their environment and other people in order for meaningful learning to occur; 3. that the environment is of major importance in structuring the learning of the child; 4. that children learn at their own pace and with their own particular learning styles; 5. that learning should be exciting and enjoyable; and 6. that the teacher's role should be that of diagnostician, guide and stimulator. With these building blocks other ingredients may be quite variable, depending upon the philosophy and personality<sup>1</sup> of the teacher and upon the available facilities.

Blitz continues:

Because I believe the form should remain flexible and open to change at all times, I will refer to a general form of teaching which embodies the above principles as the open classroom.<sup>2</sup>

The goal of open education is, therefore, to provide places where students can

. . . move out into the world of human experience around them and in their own way learn to act in it, cope with it, and make sense of it.<sup>3</sup>

In learning how to interact with others in an open classroom environment, students further learn:

1. to develop a feeling of self-esteem, or to say it more strongly, as Barth observes

. . . a strong self concept on the part of the child is the sine qua non of open education; if, and only if the child respects himself will he be able to be responsible for his own learning.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Blitz, The Open Classroom: Making It Work (Boston: Allyn and Bacon Inc., 1973), pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>John Holt, "Introduction", Charles H. Rathbone, ed., Open Education, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Ronald S. Barth "Open Education; Assumptions About Children's Learning," ed., H. Rathbone, Open Education, op. cit., p. 121.

2. to develop skills for a purpose; above all to be adaptable and capable of adjusting to their changing environments,<sup>1</sup>

3. to develop a "personal philosophy, a basic set of values,"<sup>2</sup> and,

4. to develop a feeling for citizenship, democracy and a concern about others, including family.<sup>3</sup>

### Experience Education: Its Nature and Content

The assumption that learning takes place best when it occurs in the context of real daily life is not wholly new. In 1938, John Dewey spoke of life's activities as being "essential to the process of life adjustment."<sup>4</sup> He says:

Since experience itself is a process of adjustment to a changing environment, knowledge is defined in terms of the interaction of the individual with a problematic situation. . . .<sup>5</sup>

Learning, therefore, which is derived from an experience curriculum, is "experience education." Learnings, consequently, are the changes that result from a series of

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<sup>1</sup>"The Plowden Report," in Charles E. Silberman's, The Open Classroom Reader (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>"The Vermont Design for Education," in Charles E. Silberman's, The Open Classroom Reader, Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>3</sup>James S. Coleman, "How Do The Young Become Adults," Review of Educational Research (Vol. 42, No. 4.), p. 432.

<sup>4</sup>Reginald D. Archambault, "The Philosophical Bases of the Experience Curriculum," Dewey on Education, Appraisals (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 161.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 161.