



Generalization and concept development as an instructional method for 8th grade American history  
by Orville Neal Dodge

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION  
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**Abstract:**

This study was designed to test the major hypothesis that a concept-generalization development approach to teaching American history would produce a significantly greater pupil achievement than would a traditional approach. Examination of literature concerning the teaching of American history revealed a need for improved techniques of teaching to help overcome the difficulties of learning and retaining historical facts and knowledge. Little research had been done to determine the value of the concept-generalization approach. However, the use of concepts and generalizations, which is widely recommended in the survey of literature is in accord with generally accepted theories of learning.

An eight-week experiment was designed and an investigation conducted in which a concept-generalization approach group of 64 pupils and a traditional approach group of 59 pupils were selected with a different teacher for each group. The concept-generalization approach group was taught by a teacher who selected the key ideas and developed these ideas of the unit. The traditional approach group was taught by a teacher who emphasized facts and adhered strictly to the textbook.

Both groups used the same textbook and covered the same units of history.

The testing of the statistical hypothesis, that the concept-generalization approach would improve final achievement in American history, showed that the concept-generalization approach group made statistically significant gain over the traditional approach group in learning and organizing historical knowledge. There was no significant difference in the pupils in learning of historical facts.

The following conclusions concerning the teaching of American history by the concept-generalization approach method was made on the basis of the review of literature and the findings of this study; (1) Concept-generalization development tends to make the pupils learning an active process, meaningful, interesting, transferable, and unified.

(2) Concept-generalization approach produced a significantly greater achievement than a traditional approach which involves memorization, simple question and answer technique, and strict adherence to the textbook with an emphasis on factual acquiring of knowledge. (3) Developing concepts step by step appears to be a crucial factor in a pupil's attaining concept-generalization skills. (4) Pupils need guidance and practice in developing concept-generalization skills.


GENERALIZATION AND CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL  
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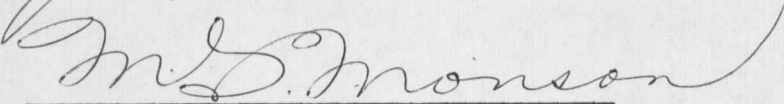
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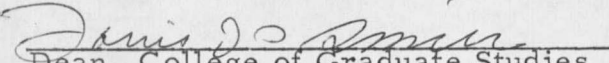
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O. N. D.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
	Purpose of the Study . . . . .	2
	Procedure . . . . .	3
	Limitations . . . . .	4
	Definition of Terms . . . . .	5
II.	REVIEW OF LITERATURE . . . . .	8
	Status of Teaching American History . . . . .	8
	Reported Difficulties Encountered in the Learning and Retention of American History . . . . .	14
	The Teaching of American History by the Concept Technique . . . . .	15
	Psychology of Learning as Related to the Use of Concepts in Learning . . . . .	20
	Previous and Current Related Studies in Concept Development . . . . .	27
	Previous Studies . . . . .	27
	Current Studies . . . . .	31
	Summary . . . . .	32
III.	THE EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE . . . . .	34
	The Three Unit Concept-Generalization Method . . . . .	34
	The Concepts and Generalizations to be Included in the Units . . . . .	35
	Determination of the Time Required for Completing the Units . . . . .	36
	Content of the Units . . . . .	36
	Selection and Assignment of Teachers . . . . .	37
	Information Used in Comparing the Concept- Generalization Group and the Traditional Approach Group . . . . .	37
	Comparing the I. Q. 's of the Concept- Generalization Approach Group and the Traditional Approach Group . . . . .	39
	History Grades from Previous Semester Test . . . . .	39
	Pre-test of Knowledge of Facts in American History . . . . .	41

Chapter	Page
Teaching Procedure . . . . .	42
Summary . . . . .	43
IV. NATURE OF UNITS OF INSTRUCTION FOR THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP . . . . .	45
V. THE EFFECT ON FINAL ACHIEVEMENT OF A CONCEPT-GENERALIZATION AND TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF THREE UNITS OF AMERICAN HISTORY . . . . .	51
Summary . . . . .	57
VI. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS. . . . .	59
Summary . . . . .	59
Conclusions . . . . .	61
Recommendations . . . . .	62
LITERATURE CONSULTED . . . . .	64
APPENDIX . . . . .	73
Appendix A: Pre-Test . . . . .	74
Appendix B: Unit I Outline . . . . .	82
Appendix C: Unit II Outline . . . . .	86
Appendix D: Unit I Test . . . . .	89
Appendix E: Unit II Test . . . . .	97
Appendix F: Unit III Test . . . . .	106
Appendix G: Post-Test . . . . .	114
Appendix H: Tables . . . . .	123

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Analyses of Variance and Difference Between Previous History Test Raw Score, Intelligence Quotient, and Pre-Test of American History, Raw Score of Concept-Generalization Approach Group and Traditional Approach Group. . . . .	40
2. Analysis of Variance and Difference Between the Unit Test Total Raw Scores and the Unit Test of Concepts of Experimental and Control Groups . . . . .	53
3. Intelligence Quotient, Previous History Test, Pre-Test, Unit I Test, Unit II Test, Unit III Test, and Post-Test Raw Scores for Each Participating Pupil in the Concept-Generalization Approach Group. . . . .	124
4. Intelligence Quotient, Previous History Test, Pre-Test, Unit I Test, Unit II Test, Unit III Test, and Post-Test Raw Scores for Each Participating Pupil in the Traditional Approach Group . . . . .	126

## ABSTRACT

This study was designed to test the major hypothesis that a concept-generalization development approach to teaching American history would produce a significantly greater pupil achievement than would a traditional approach. Examination of literature concerning the teaching of American history revealed a need for improved techniques of teaching to help overcome the difficulties of learning and retaining historical facts and knowledge. Little research had been done to determine the value of the concept-generalization approach. However, the use of concepts and generalizations, which is widely recommended in the survey of literature is in accord with generally accepted theories of learning.

An eight-week experiment was designed and an investigation conducted in which a concept-generalization approach group of 64 pupils and a traditional approach group of 59 pupils were selected with a different teacher for each group. The concept-generalization approach group was taught by a teacher who selected the key ideas and developed these ideas of the unit. The traditional approach group was taught by a teacher who emphasized facts and adhered strictly to the textbook. Both groups used the same textbook and covered the same units of history.

The testing of the statistical hypothesis, that the concept-generalization approach would improve final achievement in American history, showed that the concept-generalization approach group made statistically significant gain over the traditional approach group in learning and organizing historical knowledge. There was no significant difference in the pupils in learning of historical facts.

The following conclusions concerning the teaching of American history by the concept-generalization approach method was made on the basis of the review of literature and the findings of this study; (1) Concept-generalization development tends to make the pupils learning an active process, meaningful, interesting, transferable, and unified. (2) Concept-generalization approach produced a significantly greater achievement than a traditional approach which involves memorization, simple question and answer technique, and strict adherence to the textbook with an emphasis on factual acquiring of knowledge. (3) Developing concepts step by step appears to be a crucial factor in a pupil's attaining concept-generalization skills. (4) Pupils need guidance and practice in developing concept-generalization skills.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Much has been reported lately about the possibility of orienting a social studies curriculum toward a concept-generalization development approach. There are three primary reasons for this approach: (1) Emerging nations are coming into international prominence and demand more attention in the social studies curriculum. However, since school time has not been extended to any great extent any additional curricular material may result in deletion or "watering-down" of existing subject matter in a social studies curriculum in order to include these new nations. (2) If we emphasize current problems such as those in the new nations we might neglect the problems of Colonial America, which are important to our understanding of America's development. (3) Finally, the field of social studies has become departmentalized into various independent areas. Not long ago, history and geography were considered the only pertinent subjects in the secondary school curriculum. Later, civics and economics assumed this degree of pertinence, and today, sociology, psychology, and anthropology seem to have legitimate claims as independent foci of study within the broad social studies curriculum.

An adoption of the concept-generalization approach to the teaching of social studies is an attempt to correlate and condense the many subjects with stress on the important and crucial concepts which encompass the total social studies area.



A curriculum based on concept-generalization may be designed to allow the pupils, as they move from grade to grade, to extend and deepen their concepts and generalizations by gathering and organizing information, thus, adding new dimensions of meaning to them.

This writer believes that the pupils, by relying on basic concepts which permeate social studies would, (1) be better prepared to appreciate man's ingenuity, (2) be prone to have a positive attitude toward the dignity of mankind, and (3) be aware of and possess a deep understanding and appreciation of American democracy.

More important, however, than the advantages of improved social attitude, concept development in social studies may provide a key to the mental processes of the individual learner which, once unlocked, might bring confidence, stability, and critical thinking to the pupil.

#### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not a concept-generalization development in an eighth grade American history course had more effect on the final achievement of the pupil than did the traditional approach.

The major hypothesis to be tested was that pupils who were taught by the concept-generalization method would show an improvement in

final achievement over pupils who were taught eighth grade American history in the traditional approach.

Little experimental research is available in the concept-generalization area of social studies. Some experiments on concept development outside the field of social studies do exist. However, it does not apply necessarily that such studies can be used as evidence to support the use of concept development in the teaching of social studies since the content of each subject would be different.

#### Procedure

Concept-generalization development in social studies was used as a method of instruction to determine the effect on final achievement in an eighth grade American history course.

An examination of the literature relating to the problem of the study was made to determine: (1) the status of the teaching of American history, (2) the reported difficulties pupils encountered in the learning and retention of American history, (3) the teaching of American history by the concept technique, (4) the psychology of learning as related to the use of concepts in learning, and (5) previous and current related studies in concept development.

In order to obtain data for testing the hypothesis, it was necessary to enlist the aid of two teachers of eighth grade American history from Willson Junior High School, Bozeman, Montana, who were assigned to the concept-generalization approach group and to the

traditional approach group.

The teacher of the traditional approach taught his class in the prescribed manner in which the text was followed with little attention to main ideas. The facts were discussed through question and answer sessions. The concept-generalization approach group was taught by developing the main ideas of the unit.

In order to provide additional information, tests were selected to measure the student's comprehension of American history, and to measure his ability to generalize from materials he had already learned. The tests selected for this purpose were the Cooperative Topical Tests in American History,<sup>1</sup> and Selected Test Items in American History.<sup>2</sup> These tests were administered to the pupils in the concept-generalization approach group and the traditional approach group.

#### Limitations

Certain limitations are inherent in this study. These limitations include:

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<sup>1</sup> Cooperative Topical Tests in American History: Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N. J., 1963, 7 pp. See Appendix .

<sup>2</sup> Anderson, Howard R. and Lindquist, E. F., "Selected Test Items in American History," Washington, D. C., National Council for the Social Studies, Bulletin No. 6, May, 1964, See Appendix G.

(1) The experimental portion of this study was confined to eighth grade pupils of the American history class in the Willson Junior High School, Bozeman, Montana.

(2) The two teachers participating in this study were regularly assigned teachers to the Willson Junior High School in the eighth grade American history program.

(3) The population of 123 pupils was restricted to 64 pupils in the concept-generalization approach group and 59 pupils in the traditional approach group.

(4) The concept-generalization approach group was assigned to one participating teacher; the traditional approach group was assigned to the remaining teacher.

(5) The actual experiment was designed for an eight week period at the beginning of the second semester of American history.

(6) Three concept-generalization units were designed for the eight week period.

(7) The tests were selected to measure the pupils' knowledge of history and their ability to recognize statements which tended to support concepts and generalizations.

#### Definition of Terms

Before reviewing the research devoted to the traditional and concept-generalization approaches to the teaching of American history, a definition of (1) concept, (2) generalization, (3) learning, (4) concept-

generalization approach, and (5) traditional approach to teaching of American history was necessary.

(1) Concept. The main ideas that might be taught in American history. The concepts are also abstractions that apply to a class or group of objects or activities that have certain qualities in common. The following is an example.

Interdependence has been a constant and important factor in human relationships everywhere.<sup>3</sup>

(2) Generalization. Statements of broad applicability that indicate the relationship between concepts. A principle or concept tested by application (repeated until the idea becomes permanently part of the person.)

(3) Learning. Learning refers to a change in behavior exhibited by a living organism which occurs as the result of some affect of the environment.

(4) Concept-Generalization Approach. In social studies the development of a definite concept will usually lead to a specific generalization. Therefore, in this study concept and generalization were used as a single term meaning the major idea to be developed in history.

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<sup>3</sup> California State Curriculum Commission, Social Studies Framework for the Public Schools of California, Sacramento State Department of Education, May 11, 1962, p. 94.

This method of teaching implies (1) development of the main idea, (2) presentation of supporting ideas, (3) development of supporting ideas by the provision of a variety of direct experiences, encouragement of thorough verbal discussion, directing the pupils in the discovery of characteristics common to the main idea being taught, and (4) encouragement of pupils to build comprehensive understanding of main ideas.

(5) Traditional Approach. This teaching approach makes historical facts important in themselves. It involves strict adherence to a textbook and places emphasis on memorization rather than on critical or reflective thought.

This method of teaching implies (1) the text is read, (2) the facts are discussed through question and answer sessions, and (3) the pupils are tested to see how much of the factual information has been retained.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of the review of literature was to provide background information concerning the history and present status of the teaching of American history as related to the effect of the use of generalizations and concept development on final achievement and to present a brief summary of previous investigations of this and closely related problems. Five phases pertinent to the problem of this study were considered in the review: (1) the status of the teaching of American history, (2) the reported difficulties students encountered in the study of American history, (3) the teaching of American history by the concept technique, (4) the psychology of learning as related to the use of concepts in learning, and (5) previous and current related studies in concept development.

#### Status of the Teaching of American History

A search of the literature relating to the status of the teaching of American history was made to determine if a need existed for new teaching techniques such as the concept development approach used in this study. The investigation of the literature relating to the status of teaching American history disclosed an apparent dissatisfaction in the area of instruction. From the late nineteenth century various national committees have helped to shape social studies instruction. Their

efforts were at first directed toward setting up fairly detailed courses of study, but in the present century their suggestions have been broader and less prescriptive, reflecting the new attitudes and ideas which have accompanied changes in American life and American education.

Harold and Earle Rugg<sup>4</sup> severely criticized the methods of curriculum construction employed by the national committees. The Ruggs were leaders of a movement to select content for the social studies by using quantitative methods to analyze activities in terms of their social worth or utility. The activities which proved to be of the greatest value would then be organized into teaching units on the basis of experience or understanding.

In the early 1920's, widely used high school history textbooks were subjected to violent attacks--some of which reached the political arena.<sup>5</sup> Techniques for molding public opinion, highly developed during the war, were employed in an attempt to control the content of social studies instruction in the public schools.

The Commission on the Social Studies was appointed and began work in 1929. Many of the conclusions of this Commission were

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<sup>4</sup>Rugg, Harold, and Rugg, Earle. National Society for the Study of Education, Twenty-Second Yearbook, Part II, "The Social Studies in the Elementary and Secondary School," Bloomington, Ill, Public School, 1923, pp. 9-10, 60-66.

<sup>5</sup>Beale, Howard K., American Teachers Free? New York: Scribner, 1936, pp. 277-319.



severely criticized. The Commission felt that a program of social education must provide rich and meaningful experiences in the basic aspects of life and must promote optimum personal development and effective participation in a democratic society. Such a program of social education, the Commission insisted, should be built on the personal-social needs of adolescents, as revealed by a study of adolescents themselves and of the culture in which they live. Thus the curriculum must be flexible, growing from the needs of young people, not rigid and unchanging.<sup>6</sup>

Great hopes were held that the new interest in the social studies and the new courses included in some plans of study would result in a higher degree of social competence for the American public. However, the immediate results were disappointing. America did not succeed to any degree in equipping students with knowledge of contemporary issues or the historical, economic, and sociological factors behind those issues. Instead the schools continued to put their greatest emphasis on teaching facts and subject matter--which showed no marked success.

The New York Times discovered some years later that high school graduates were no better off than previous high school graduates. In order "to determine the amount of United States history that the high

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<sup>6</sup>"The Social Studies in General Education," New York: Appleton, 1940, pp. 382-384.

school graduate retains from his secondary course,"<sup>7</sup> the newspaper gave an examination to seven thousand graduates. The test was inadequate, because it dealt with questions which required rote memorization rather than understanding of basic generalizations, yet the results showed clearly that many students had forgotten, mislearned, or never learned important facts about the history of their country.

In 1934 several committees were appointed by national associations to re-evaluate social studies instruction, but the scholars of the National Association could not agree among themselves sufficiently to present unified recommendations.

In 1938, the Pennsylvania Study and the Regents' Inquiry, commonly called P. S. , found that New York students knew about a third to a half of the items on conventional tests of civic information and American history.

The Pennsylvania Study concluded that if students are to acquire the understanding necessary for effective participation in group living, they must have many opportunities to meet important social and economic concepts. In this way, through progressive study and reflection, the basic generalizations would become a part of the students'.

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<sup>7</sup>Wilson, Howard E., Education for Citizenship, New York: McGraw, 1938, pp. 20-27.

mental equipment, to be interpreted and applied in his daily living.

In 1943, in an effort to discover how widely United States history was being taught, the American Historical Association, the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, and the National Council for the Social Studies appointed the Committee on American History in Schools and Colleges, with Edgar B. Wesley as director.

The evidence gathered by the committee showed that nearly all high school graduates in the 1940's had taken courses in American history at least three times. The committee's findings<sup>8</sup> also demonstrated the social studies program in the great majority of American schools had not altered markedly, and evidence from other sources supported this conclusion. Apparently as Erling Hunt<sup>9</sup> said, "It is, again, not the quantity but the kind and the quality of history that we teach that need attention."

The importance of well-qualified and well-trained teachers has been a major theme in the committee reports which shaped social studies instruction in the United States. The Committee on Social Studies<sup>10</sup> wrote in 1916, "Probably the greatest obstacle to the

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<sup>8</sup> National Education Association, Department of Superintendence, Fourteenth Yearbook, "The Social Studies Curriculum," Washington, D. C.: The Department, 1936, pp. 63-90.

<sup>9</sup> Hunt, Erling, "More American History," Social Education VI, October 1942, p. 252.

<sup>10</sup> National Education Association, American Association of School Administrators, Thirty-Second Yearbook, Educating for American Citizenship, Washington, D. C., the Association, 1954, p. 377.

vitalization of the social studies is the lack of preparation on the part of teacher," and thirty years later the Committee on American History in Schools and Colleges<sup>11</sup> wrote that all other factors which might raise the quality of social studies instruction "are ineffectual unless the work is directed by a good teacher."

Since the Soviet Union launched its first Sputnik in October, 1957, the high schools have given increased emphasis to mathematics, science, and foreign languages, and some educators have feared that the social studies might be neglected. A resolution of the National Council for Social Studies, November 29, 1957, states:

The most serious issues of our times are within the field of human affairs. In the solution of these problems we must look to the social sciences and to the humanities.<sup>12</sup>

The social studies, as well as American education generally, have undergone a vigorous reappraisal since the launching of Sputnik I. Recently state and national leadership in curriculum reconstruction has been increasingly emphasized. Sutherland<sup>13</sup> states the history curricula need the same sort of evaluation which has been given other disciplines

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>12</sup>National Council for Social Studies, Social Education, XXII, February, 1958, p. 53.

<sup>13</sup>Sutherland, Neil, "Structure in the History Curricular", Social Education, XXVI, March, 1962, p. 133.

in recent years.

Reported Difficulties Encountered in the  
Learning and Retention of American History

The difficulties encountered in the learning and retention of American history were reviewed to determine which difficulties could be overcome by the use of concept development techniques of instruction employed in this study. The area in which pupils experience their greatest difficulties in the study of American history have been reported in a study conducted by Learned and Wood.<sup>14</sup> The study points out that the pupils are unable to handle books and library facilities; to interpret data; to analyze issues; to draw generalizations; to identify and develop key concepts; to master the technique and tools of communication. The study also points out that:

Instead of building up in the pupil through progressive study and reflection a well-knit body of knowledge worth keeping alive and then expecting the pupil to grow in his power to apply and interpret it, the school invites him to deposit isolated layers of information many of which must chiefly appeal to him as valuable in order to pass the course.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Learned, William S., and Wood, Benjamin D., The Student and His Knowledge, Bulletin No. 29, New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1938, p. 147.

<sup>15</sup> Dressel, Paul L., "Evaluation Procedures for General Education Objectives," Educational Record, April 1950, pp. 97-122; Lindquist, E. F., Educational Measurement, Washington, D. C., American Council on Education, 1951, Chapt. 5; Murray, Thomas R., Judging Student Progress, New York; Longmans, Green and Company, 1954, Chapt. 1.

In the literature reviewed, there was a general consensus by writers that pupils of American history often experience considerable difficulties knowing which specific facts should be remembered.

Furst<sup>16</sup> considered the organization of the materials to be learned as most essential.

An examination of literature indicated that although other areas of difficulty in the study of American history existed, the area which caused major difficulties concerning the pupils was the learning of so many isolated facts. Concept development along with organization of related knowledge is believed by the writer to be a device to overcome the difficulties in retaining the isolated facts.<sup>17</sup>

#### The Teaching of American History by the Concept Technique

Since the method of instruction used in this study was concept development, a search of the literature concerning the place of concepts in the teaching of American history was made. The Committee on Concepts and Values of the National Council for the Social Studies

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<sup>16</sup>Furst, Edward J., "Effect of the Organization of Learning Experiences Upon the Organization of Learning Outcomes," Journal of Experimental Education, XVIII, March, 1954, pp. 215-228.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 218.

developed fourteen themes as a guide for content in the social studies. To develop these themes, the following illustrative concepts, generalizations and content were suggested.<sup>18</sup>

1. Intelligent uses of the Force of Nature
2. Recognition and Understanding of World Interdependence
3. Recognition of the Dignity and Worth of the Individual
4. The use of Intelligence to Improve Human Living
5. The Vitalization of our Democracy through an Intelligent use of our Public Educational Facilities.
6. The Intelligent Acceptance by Individuals and Groups, of Responsibility for Achieving Democratic Social action.
7. Increasing the effectiveness of the Family as a Basic Social Institution.
8. The effective Development of Moral and Spiritual Values.
9. The Intelligent and Responsible Sharing of Power in order to attain justice.
10. The intelligent Utilization of Scarce Resources to Attain the Widest General Well-being.
11. Achievement of Adequate Horizons of Loyalty.
12. Cooperation in the Interest of Place and Welfare.
13. Achieving a Balance Between Social Stability and Social Change.
14. Widening and Deepening the Ability to Live More Richly.

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<sup>18</sup> National Council for the Social Studies, Report of the Committee on Concepts and Values; A Guide to Content in the Social Studies, Washington, D. C.; National Council for the Social Studies.

In 1950, Gottschalk believed that historians were increasing their use of generalization by saying:

Despite persistent and wide-spread apprehensions, the use of social science generalizations by the historians is increasing-- He endeavors (1) to discover single cases that will illustrate a social-science generalization. The importance of understanding general principles of knowing whether a single case with which they deal, fit into any generalization, has often escaped the historian. This is why history; ... does not feel called upon to explain why it should be of interest to anyone else, (2) to discover single cases that will contradict a social-science generalization to a historian trend or series of similar events. To be a generalization it must be deliberately studied with a view to seeing whether valid contradiction and exception can be found in the past by historians.<sup>19</sup>

Dewey stated that education builds on the experience of the learner. He also stressed the fact that educative experiences develop "Out into an expanding world of subject matter, a subject matter of facts or information and of ideas."<sup>20</sup> In emphasizing this point he made a statement that seems almost prophetic:

Failure to give constant attention to development of the intellectual content of experiences and to obtain ever increasing organization of facts and ideas may in the end merely strengthen the tendency toward a reactionary between intellectual and moral authoritarianism.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Gottschalk, Louis, Understanding History, A Primer of Historical Method, New York: Alfred A. Knof, 1950, p. 252.

<sup>20</sup> Dewey, John, Experiences and Education, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949, p. III.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 109.



Anderson and Gates<sup>22</sup> were more specific in stating the schools responsibility for teaching generalizations:

Almost all learning, and certainly the great bulk of that for which the school assumes responsibility, has significance only as it is generalized... Within recent years almost all who have studied and discussed the educational process have emphasized understanding and of applying what has been learned to a wide variety of normal life problems.

Since the mid 1940's it has been the concern of the Committee on Historical Analysis of the National Council for the Social Studies to discover the nature, scope, validity and use of the important concepts and generalizations used by historians. Dimond<sup>23</sup> pointed out the trend in the social studies toward teaching concepts and generalizations rather than facts; toward our emphasis on the use of information rather than just the acquisition of it. He saw a two-fold role for the concepts and generalizations in the social studies:

1. To provide the framework around which facts can be acquired and organized.
2. To provide the opportunity to test the truth or falsity of concepts and generalizations.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Anderson, G. Lester, and Gates, Arthur I., "The General Nature of Learning," Learning and Instruction, Forty-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Dimond, Stanley C., "The Role of Generalizations in Teaching the Social Studies," Social Education, XXII, May 1958, pp. 232-234.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 232-234.

Preston<sup>25</sup> stated that it is the role of the social studies to help children to understand the concepts that describe and explain human society and to develop the knowledge and skills required by democratic citizenship. He urged that we understand the capacity of students to deal with substantial content.

Social scientists seem to be placing increased value upon the role of generalizations in the social studies for the elementary school. Cartwright<sup>26</sup> outlined the contribution history makes to effective citizenship, but stressed the fact that these contributions are secured, not through emphasizing names and dates, but through the use of concepts and generalizations.

Manolakes<sup>27</sup> reported the findings of a committee which examined social studies textbooks. Concepts received secondary or incidental consideration in those textbooks studied. Once introduced, concepts were often inadequately reinforced, distorted, or contradicted by the reliance of the authors on stereotype in the illustrative materials

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<sup>25</sup>Preston, Ralph C., "The Role of Social Studies in Elementary Education," Fifty-Sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part 2, 1957, Chicago; National Society for the Study of Education, pp. 4-6.

<sup>26</sup>Cartwright, William H., "The Role of History Teaching in Citizenship Education," The High School Journal, XLIV, December, 1960, pp. 112-117.

<sup>27</sup>Manolakes, George, "Concept Development in Social Studies Textbooks," National Elementary Principals, XXXVII, May, 1958, pp. 25-27.

used.

In 1959, Davis<sup>28</sup> indicated that children are capable of learning complex concepts. He emphasized that it is undesirable and probably impossible to rigidly assign concepts to particular grade levels, and that complete understanding of a concept is not necessary in the elementary school.

The use of concepts and generalization in the teaching of American history was widely recommended in the literature reviewed.

#### Psychology of Learning as Related to the Use of Concepts in Learning

The concept development approach to teaching has its basis in the field theory of learning. The essence of the field theory is that "all events in nature--and this statement plainly includes psychological and educational phenomena--always occur within some field, big or little, whose properties and structure explain the localized occurrence that it embraces and simultaneously permit increased control over it."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Davis, O. L., Jr., "Children Can Learn Complex Concepts," Educational Leadership XVII, December, 1959, pp. 170-175.

<sup>29</sup> Hartman, "The Field Theory of Learning and its Educational Consequence," in The Psychology of Learning, Forty-first Yearbook, pt. 2, pp. 164-214, edited by Nelson B. Henry, National Society for the Study of Education, Chicago, 1942.

















































































































































































































































