

Curriculum and the 1970s Culture Wars: *Man: A Course of Study*

Carolyn A. Weber Julie Marie Frye Connie Ables-Rigsbee
Indiana University Indiana University Franklin College

Jesse Goodman
Indiana University

The recent “culture wars” (Hunter 1991) in the United States has not been kind to the K-12 curriculum found in our public schools. As Rorty (1999) noted, conservatives have come to dominate what we teach our pre-college age children. Conflicts over reading and writing, history, mastery learning, sex and drug education, high stakes testing, and the predetermination and standardization of content have resulted in the near complete demise of progressive pedagogy and curriculum development in our public schools.¹ While many educators wait for the pendulum to swing back towards a more thoughtful and progressive pedagogy, Apple and Whitty (2002) argue that it may have swung too far to ever return. Even with the election of a progressive President who has rejected the conservative foreign, health care, and economic policies of the Bush administration, Obama seems little interested in changing the direction of K-12 education in our society. As Dillon (2009, A1) stated, “We have watched the continued allocation of federal funding to expand the usage of students’ test scores to evaluate teachers (and schools).” No Child Left Behind (NCLB) continues under the Obama administration which significantly threatens a return to more intellectually engaging curriculum and pedagogy in our public schools. We continue to see the

trivialization of learning through the “deskilling” of teachers, the push to “cover” (skim) the topics being taught (i.e., the “skipping stone” curriculum), and an over-dependence on rote memorization of facts. Due to the hegemony of conservatism, educational practice over the last three decades (and especially during the last Bush administration), progressive teachers and administrators are now considered an endangered species by some (e.g., Hayes 2006). A few education professors (e.g., Cochran-Smith 2004; Zeichner 2009) have fought this extinction of progressive ideals and practices through teacher education and doctoral programs, but their impact on the elementary teaching and curriculum has not been extensive. With the threat of extinction lurking, progressive educators need to protect and reproduce the rich curriculum for which they stand. One way education historians can help these efforts is to revisit examples of progressive curriculum. They can serve as a reminder of the good fruit that is produced when our focus is on student inquiry, intellectual engagement, and depth of knowledge. *Man: A Course of Study* (MACOS) deserves such a revisiting. In response, this paper will first provide a brief review of the historical context and content of MACOS. Next, we describe the MACOS curriculum, explore the controversies that surrounded the use of this curriculum, and

then speculate on what lessons might be learned from this historical event.

Historical Context

After the Soviets launched Sputnik in 1957, the United States responded in many ways, including a call for major reform of public school curriculum. People were frightened by the prospect of a world dominated by the Soviet Union, and looked to public schools to change their curricula in ways that would promote the sciences as potential occupational goals for the next generation. However, rather than look to educators for generating this curricula, the federal government called upon scientists to create radically new and exciting K-12 curricula for their respective fields (e.g., chemistry, physics, biology). Although concerned about how much freedom they would have to create these curricula, many scientists were drawn into this project by the high esteem the government placed upon it and the substantial funding that came with these curriculum grants (Rudolph 2002). They wanted curricula that would not only provide students with information, but more importantly, saw knowledge as a catalyst for intellectual engagement and activity (Rudolph 2002). In general, they wanted to reproduce, as much as possible, the experiences of being a scientist. As Schwab (1963) noted, these new courses were to be based upon students engaging in inquiry projects and depth of study over merely covering material.

As one might expect, social scientists did not want to be left out of this government project, and they successfully lobbied for inclusion. One of the leading

social scientist of the day, Dr. Jerome Bruner, recruited a number of social scientists and educators in order to create a radically new social studies curriculum. Peter Dow (personal communication, May 29, 2009) stated that Bruner not only wanted to provide knowledge of the social world to children, but more importantly, give students opportunities to “be” social scientists. Like their natural science colleagues, Bruner wanted to create curricula that encouraged students to make observations, think deeply about these observations, engage in thoughtful discussions with their peers based upon this thinking, and conduct inquiries that would lead to insights about humanity (Dow 1991). In addition, Bruner advocated for a social studies curriculum that would teach students comparative analytic skills concerning diverse societies, and how to thoughtfully examine the individual’s role within these societies (Dow 1991). With this emphasis on diverse societies and the self, developers of this new social studies had high hopes that by creating this curriculum they would give children opportunities to reflect upon what being human means and the state of the human condition.

As we (Goodman 2006) and others (e.g., Gabbard 2008) have discussed, the country was also in the early stages of what became a powerful “conservative restoration.” Hursh (2008) noted, this movement represented a “backlash” to the “new left” radicalism of the late 1960s/early 1970s (e.g., Elbaum 2002; Garfinkle 1995; Gitlin 1993; Isserman & Kazin 2000; Kurlansky 2004; Rorty 1998). Political ideas, policies, and officials that use to be

considered “moderate” or “centrist” were recast as “liberal” or “radical” (e.g., Easton 2000, Wallerstein 1995). Within the political realm of society this backlash included events as Richard Nixon’s “southern strategy” that successfully incorporated the conservative Democrats into the Republican Party, the subsequent election of Ronald Reagan (and for educators the publication of *A Nation at Risk*), which in turn set the stage for the “dixification” of the U.S. economy and culture (Cummings 1998) and the election of George W. Bush. Other examples of this restoration included: the rise of conservative and fundamentalist, Christian talk radio such as Rush Limbaugh, Oliver North, Gordan Liddy, and Dr. Laura and conservative television networks such as *Fox News* and shows such as *The O’Rielly Factor*, *Hannity*, and *Glenn Beck* (Andersen 1995; Durham & Kellner 2001); the establishment of numerous well funded, conservative “think tanks” and institutions such as the Heritage Foundation, John Olin Foundation, Hudson Institute, American Enterprise Institute, and Free Congress Foundation (Stefancic & Delgado 1996); and the public promotion of conservative intellectuals such as Milton Friedman, William Bennett, and Chester Finn. Local and state school boards were particular targets for conservatives, and their agenda included policies such as public supported vouchers for children going to private schools, high stakes testing, legislation of curriculum content (i.e., standards), emphasis on drilling and memorization of facts, internal racial segregation through tracking, the deskilling of teachers, and a deepening of “savage

inequalities” (Kozol 1992) related to the inequitable resources provided children of wealthy versus impoverished children (e.g., Apple 2001; Miller 1995). Conflicts over sex education (e.g., Laker 2006; Moran 2000), history and religion (e.g., Zimmerman 2002), and evolution (e.g., Humes 2007) began to emerge across the country. As previously mentioned, one of the first conflicts arose over the MACOS curriculum. However, before exploring this struggle and what can be learned from it, we review a few more details of this innovative program of study.

The Beginnings of MACOS

After watching early implementation trials of the Physical Science Study Committee’s (PSSC) curriculum, Bruner became determined to create a course in the social sciences (Dow 1991). What gave him academic momentum was more than just his established career as a cognitive psychologist. He wanted to connect two of the main topics within the field of social studies education: the interest in the self’s relationship to society and the need for intellectually engaging, inquiry-focused curricula and pedagogy. He was particularly interested in the possibility of relatively young children engaged in sophisticated intellectual activity. His rationale was: if 10 and 11 year olds can conduct thoughtful inquiries around a substantive topic (e.g., the nature of humanity), then educators could make similar efforts for older children. As a result, he focused his team on developing a fifth grade social studies curriculum (Kraus 1977). According to Dow (personal communication, May 29, 2009), Bruner

selected this target audience to determine if children could learn inquiry skills that were often associated with advanced college-aged students. He decided to do this through the social science lens of anthropology.

The Curriculum Team: Bruner, Practicing Educators, and Respected Scholars

After Bruner took a sabbatical to teach public school fifth graders, he was well-positioned to be the “architect” of a new curriculum aimed at the intellectual engagement of this age group (Evans, 2004 p. 126). Because the curriculum development project was well-funded by the federal government, with contributions of well over four million dollars, Bruner was able to sign on like-minded, creative experts to contribute to the MACOS curriculum with the promise that they could design something completely different from what had been previously taught in social studies classrooms (Kraus 1977).

Differing from the other federally funded curriculum development projects in which scientists were sole designers, Bruner partnered with elementary school teachers in the writing of an anthropology curriculum for 10 and 11 year-olds. One educator, Peter Dow, became especially interested in Bruner’s efforts. Dow (1991) claimed that “Hearing Bruner...deepened my conviction that collaboration between scholars and teachers could improve the process of schooling” (4).

In addition to educators, Bruner sought assistance from a number of his Harvard colleagues in the anthropology

department (Lutkehaus 2008). He asked these anthropologists to help him “find better ways to bridge the gap between the organizing conjectures of [anthropology] and the developing intelligence of the young” (Dow 1991, 72). Thus, they were not serving just as content experts, but also were fully invested in the pedagogical goals of MACOS. The team agreed that the best way to teach social studies was not through the recitation of surface-level facts, but through looking at one discipline in great depth (Dow 1991). This would allow students to reach a broader understanding of curriculum concepts.

After much discussion, the anthropologists suggested that the following three questions be at the core of the MACOS curriculum: 1) What is human about (wo)man? 2) How did humans become who they are? 3) How can one become more human? (Kennedy 1973). To help students explore these questions, MACOS focused on a re-creation of the Netsilik Indians’ traditional lifestyle, thus providing an in-depth study of humans in a pre-modern environment.²

The MACOS Curriculum

Bruner’s team of scholars and educators worked from 1963 to 1969 in developing the materials for MACOS: 24 student booklets, nine volume teachers’ guides, 16 color films with natural sound; five filmstrips; four audio records; three simulation games; Eskimo cards; and 23 maps, posters, and photomurals (Kraus 1977). They also carefully wrote these materials in ways that reflected a progressive approach to pedagogy including,

but not limited to: offering fascinating and informative visual and reading materials, having students make observations and speculations about this material, and regularly involving students in reflective exercises, frequently asking students to draw connections between the curriculum and their own lives.

Perhaps the most innovative concept was introduced by ethnographer Balikci's film which gave students the opportunity to view a pre-modern culture without a narrator explaining what was taking place in the films. Instead, Balikci designed the films to ask students to summarize and interpret the unique, cultural rituals and other activities viewed, while also reflecting on their own cultural beliefs and identity. As previously mentioned, an integral part of the curriculum was reflection. Daily, students were encouraged to organize their thoughts of newly introduced concepts and ideas and share them aloud (Laird 2003).

MACOS designers wanted to ensure that teachers modeled life-long-learning for their students. Thus, receiving this curriculum also required teachers to participate in training sessions in which they would discuss its core ideas and receive additional resources and strategies for classroom use. As Wolcott (2007, 199) explained, "In addition to summer institutes, MACOS teachers in each district gathered for a day or two of inservice training several times throughout the school year." It was not acceptable for teachers to merely read through the teachers' manuals and use them verbatim. Instead, manuals were designed to deepen and enrich teachers' knowledge of

the subject matter as well as stimulate their curiosity and intellect.

For the MACOS team, it was important to stress that this curriculum was to be "scientific," or more specifically, anthropological. Professional development sessions revealed that MACOS wanted teachers and their students to learn about their own culture through studying one that was far removed from their daily lives. This in-service training would often raise subtle issues for teachers to consider. For example, the curriculum was never intended to critique the "American values" (as critics claimed), but rather provide them with opportunities to understand the role values played in the construction of culture and how the size, history, geography (cultural and natural), and economics of a given culture influences its values (Laird 2003). In responding to critics, Dow (1991, 192) explained this position by claiming "Schools...should concern themselves with the growth of the mind, not with the transmission of belief." According to Dow (personal communication, May 29, 2009), teachers found these training sessions to be beneficial in terms of not only understanding what should be taught, but also for their own intellectual engagement.

The Controversy

While Sputnik encouraged the idea that schools needed to do more to prepare students for the space age, American education did not change quickly, and politicians had much to say about that change. As Dow (1991, 8) explained, "Historically, we have been more concerned about promoting democratic values,

transmitting universally accepted skills like the three R's, and socializing the young into useful lives within their local communities than about cultivating the intellect." The mood Sputnik created changed this orientation towards reform very briefly, but soon the old ideas of value transmission and surface level knowledge returned.

The MACOS curriculum developers conducted a pilot study during the summer of 1966 to work through any problems. They tested the textual content and teacher participants revealed potential concerns. Dow (1991, 68) explained that this inappropriate content illustrated a chasm between "scholars preparing materials and [those] who were using them." However, most of these concerns related to the level of abstract thought required of students rather than the topics found in the curriculum.

As Dow noted in an interview, some teachers also questioned if students could understand the number of different concepts (e.g., evolution, cultural values, myths, rituals, modernism) explored in MACOS. In response to these concerns, MACOS designers did make a few alterations to the curriculum. This feedback, however, completely overlooked possible critiques that eventually emerged from politicians, conservative community activists, and parent allies. Perhaps the reason for this lack of foresight was, in part, due to the fact that the teachers involved in the pilot study shared Bruner's progressive views towards teaching and learning. Unfortunately, the creators never anticipated the previously mentioned conservative backlash that was taking place in the United States during the

1970s, and would soon focus its attack on the MACOS curriculum.

One of the first signs of the mounting conservative backlash in the United States was manifested by political attacks against MACOS. The controversy began with conservatives voicing objections to a number of progressive pedagogical activities from the late 1960s, and included, "a distrust of federally sponsored curriculum innovation, an increased involvement of parents in curriculum choices, and a demand for a return to the 'basics' of reading, writing, mathematics, history, and Judeo-Christian values" (Dow 1991, 178). Because MACOS was *anything but* the basic or conservative, "The historical timing for MACOS...could not have been worse. Caught in the crossfire between social upheaval, a counterculture movement, and a new-conservative reaction, cognitive processes and relativistic social studies were doomed from the start" (Goetz 1992, 520). At its peak in 1972, MACOS was taught to over 400,000 students; however, by 1975 it was at the forefront of the argument in Congress about the federal government's control over education. Distancing itself from the cultural debate, the National Science Foundation withdrew the majority of MACOS funding (Laird 2003). By the late 1970s MACOS barely existed inside American schools.

As the program director, Dow was responsible for defending MACOS to Congress in 1975. Upon reflection, he (1991, 5) realized that in the United States (and probably most, if not all, other countries), "Decisions about educational reform are driven far more by political

considerations, such as the prevailing public mood, than they are by any systematic effort to improve instruction.” Within the political arena of society where traditional values came face to face with what conservatives considered to be shocking and immoral lessons of MACOS, conventional values prevailed. Many United States’ politicians and citizens were not ready to accept MACOS’ respect for and understand of a hunting/gathering culture as a way for young people to comprehend our own modern society. Consequently, MACOS received intense criticism from conservatives. They raised a number of concerns that resulted in an emotionally charged attack on progressive curricula and learning experiences that continues up to the present.

Various interest groups and individuals fueled opposition against MACOS, ranging from right-wing extremists to those with educated concerns. Challengers included parents, ministers, textbook critics, and politicians. In particular, MACOS foes found a national voice in Arizona Representative John Conlan who used his House Committee on Science and Technology membership to undermine MACOS in Congress.³ This committee had partial control over the National Science Foundation’s budget. According to Dow (1991), instead of introducing MACOS during a subcommittee meeting as typically done when a member has a concern about a particular appropriation, Conlan waited until the full committee’s meeting and then viciously attacked the curriculum. Dow (1991) claimed Conlan did this with the full knowledge that fellow committee members

knew little or nothing about MACOS. Very few members of Congress actually studied the material, even after Conlan railed against it (Dow 1991).

Conlan’s first amendment to end funding for MACOS failed after Missouri Congressman Symington “recounted the history of Conlan’s opposition to the course, describing his various political maneuvers, including the latest amendment, as a strategy for circumventing a solution already agreed to by the National Science Foundation” (Dow 1991, 214). However, progressive educators were not able to celebrate long, as a more conservative amendment passed which required “congressional review of all NSF grant proposals every thirty days” (Dow 1991, 215). As a result, during the next round of approved grants, Conlan was determined to terminate financial support of MACOS. As noted by Kraus (1977), Conlan argued that MACOS: 1) taught children to accept senilicide and female infanticide; 2) required children to view excessive blood and gore in scenes of killing and butchering animals; 3) condoned inappropriate sexual behavior such as trial marriages, polygamy and polyandry, wife swapping, and bestiality; 4) treated religion as myth; 5) promoted the teaching of evolution as fact; and 6) excused instances of murder and other acts of revenge. While many concerns were inaccurate or exaggerated, others had some merit. However, as will be discussed below, even these were often exaggerated and misleading. Unfortunately, with the exception of a few congressmen, no one at the time seemed interested in whether or not these charges were accurate, half truths, or

outright lies. Our analysis suggested that there were three types of criticisms that doomed this innovative curriculum.

Misleading and Scandalous Criticisms

Many of the controversies raised had no validity; in fact, opposition was raised by people who had not even read all (or possibly any) of the MACOS materials and thus jumped to erroneous conclusions. As Kraus (1977) explained, many of the criticisms were sensationalized. For example, a Floridian Baptist minister argued MACOS taught children about sex which horrified his followers (Dow, 1991). He jumped to this conclusion after learning that the MACOS teachers' manual encouraged classrooms to have "live animals such as grasshoppers, mealworms, crickets, gerbils, or mice in the classroom so that pupils could observe life cycle stages, including the birth of offspring" (Dow 1991, 179). The sheer shock value of claiming that MACOS was teaching ten-year-olds about sex was enough to generate fear and anger among many who had not read any of the course materials.

Similar to the example above, most of the criticisms that fueled controversy were based on information that was not mentioned in books to which pupils had access. Most of this information was found exclusive in teachers' manuals as explanatory and background information for adults, not intended for students. For example, one of the most sensationalized charges was that the MACOS curriculum legitimized cannibalism which was mentioned in the teacher's manual, *Talks to Teachers*. Tuneq, a Netsilik who, during a famine, chose to:

save his own life by eating his wife. At first he only cut small pieces from her clothing and ate them...The wife knew that the spirits had said her husband should eat her, but she was so exhausted that it made no impression on her. ... she ran for her life, and then it was as if Tuneq saw her only as a quarry that was about to escape him; he ran after her and stabbed her to death... Tuneq's brother Itqilik ate his younger brother...his younger brother was frostbitten in both feet so that he was unable to walk. Gangrene set in, and as his feet were quite numb, Itqulik cut them off his living brother and ate them (Rasmussen 1968, 91).

Obviously, modernist values do not endorse cannibalistic activity. Yet, it was not in any way part of the students' curriculum and was intended only for teachers' background knowledge as a way to illustrate the differences between modern American society and this isolated culture where survival was often extremely difficult. Its purpose was to enhance teachers' understanding of the complexities embedded in anthropology.

Similar to cannibalism, the topics of divorce, trial marriage, polygamy, polyandry, and wife-swapping are only mentioned in *Talks to Teachers*. The issues of divorce and trial marriage within the Netsilik community were described as "common as long as there [were] no children, and there [were] women who [went] through seven or eight trial marriages before they finally settle[d] down"

(Rasmussen 1968, 108). Polygamy was also acceptable in the Netsilik culture: “If a man has more than one wife it is consequently always a sign of good standing and especial skill as a hunter” (Rasmussen 1968, 109). A common practice among Netsilik women was polyandry: “it [was] no rare occurrence for a woman to have two husbands...these marriages [seldom] run smoothly, especially if the men are young, for it very often ends in one of them being killed” (Rasmussen 1968, 109-110). Finally, wife-swapping occurred in Netsilik communities for:

men who usually follow one another at a song festival. [They] are considered to be so closely associated that not only after the ceremony but at all times when they feel inclined they can exchange wives...if a man is about to set out on a long journey – perhaps to trade- and his wife is with child, sick or in some other manner unfit to go with him, he can borrow the wife of his iglua (song-fellow) to accompany him, giving his own in exchange (Rasmussen 1968, 110).

These five controversial topics would be difficult to defend if they were found as directions for living in students’ textbooks. If teachers used the instructor guides as originally intended, students would never have been exposed to this information. Critics seemed to suggest that if teachers had this information, they would pass it onto their students. They implied that the discussion of these issues in *Talks to*

Teachers was, in fact, an endorsement of these practices rather than as an illustration of how diverse cultures live by different values based upon their environment. Suggesting otherwise was a gross (and purposeful) misreading (or non-reading) of the materials.

Exaggerated Concerns

Some of the grievances Conlan and others raised were technically valid, in that they did exist in the MACOS student materials; however, the substance of these concerns was greatly exaggerated. For example, bestiality is found in the student books as critics noted. However, their implication was that MACOS materials somehow encouraged this type of sexual activity. Although no images or discussion of bestiality was presented as something the Netsilik Indians did, it was mentioned in the discussion of their myths. For example, the story of Kiviok, a man who traveled “from village to village, taking animals as wives” (Kraus 1977, 74) was presented as a myth. MACOS was clearly not suggesting that the Netsilik Indians actually engaged in this sexual practice. Yet, this charge was made many times against MACOS. What is particularly disturbing was that many elementary, social studies texts published similar myths at the time, but only MACOS was singled out for criticism. For example, Greek myths tell the story of Zeus changing into a bull to seduce Europa, a young woman, and changing into an eagle to kidnap Ganymede, a young male. In this regard Greek myths were no different than the Netsilik myths, just more culturally familiar. Again, the opponents to MACOS

exaggerated the inclusion of this controversial topic for political and religious reasons, and these exaggerations had only the slightest connection to the full truth. In response, these myths were “quietly eased out of the program” by MACOS curriculum developers even before some of the public complaints about the myths began, and yet this exaggeration continued to be widely expressed (Wolcott 2007, 200). The MACOS adversaries cared little and only intensified their campaign to remove it from schools.

Similar to bestiality, senilicide also appeared in students’ books. However, the portrayal of this act in the course was very different than how those arguing against MACOS presented it. In the materials, the choice by an elderly woman to remain behind so that the rest of her family could survive a hunting journey was done as an act of community/family survival and not as a systematic death ritual (Kraus 1977). Opponents misrepresented the story pretending the woman was brutally forced into staying behind against her will (Kraus 1977).

Even though it was the choice of the old woman to remain behind, MACOS curriculum developers were sensitive to the presentation of senilicide to students. Teachers not prepared to discuss this cultural practice were carefully trained through the teachers’ manuals. Senilicide was presented in a chapter of *Talks to Teachers* as a common way of life for the Netsilik, where the elderly were culturally expected to commit suicide once their children or grandchildren would have to care for them: “old people, who can no longer

keep themselves, prefer to put an end to their life by hanging rather than drag themselves through life in poverty and helpless old age” (Rasmussen 1968, 92-93). Netsilik peoples believed that senilicide was “how it is, and we see no wickedness in it” (Rasmussen 1968, 94). In explaining this practice, it was noted that “they do this merely not only to rid [one] life that is no longer a pleasure, but also to relieve their nearest relations of the trouble they give them” (Rasmussen 1968, 95). Given this careful discussion, MACOS developers were surprised it was used as ammunition against them, and had a difficult time responding to the charge that MACOS “supported” the killing of old people (Dow, personal communication, May 29, 2009).

Conlan made another exaggerated criticism that the MACOS films contained gore and excessive blood in scenes of killing and butchering animals. Upon careful review of the films, we and others (e.g., Wolcott 2007) found a couple of hunting scenes with some (but not excessive) blood; however, these encompassed only an extremely small fraction of screen time. Curriculum opponents presented this “gore” as if it were much more frequent and detailed (Kraus 1977). These films were a realistic portrayal of what hunting actually involved. While there were elements that supported conservatives’ concerns within the student materials (i.e. bestiality, senilicide, and excessive gore and violence), our careful review of the curriculum did not support these attacks.

One might think in light of these criticisms that the creators of MACOS were completely insensitive to conventional

family values of American citizens. However, this accusation is inaccurate. During the design of MACOS, content was removed because the developers were concerned that certain aspects would be too controversial. For example, they chose not to use videos of African Bushmen because they were “half-naked” even though the teachers and students spoke highly of these films in early reviews (Dow 1991, 122). The other films were also carefully made and edited to avoid unnecessary attacks. Nevertheless, in their attempt to create an intellectually engaging curriculum, the MACOS scholars did make some ironically naive decisions.

Valid Concerns

A couple of the issues on Conlan’s “hit list” did have some validity. With hindsight, one might have cautioned against the MACOS section in which the practice of female infanticide was presented even though teachers were trained to discuss it thoughtfully with students. The children’s books explained that the custom of killing a female child, not promised in marriage, was done so with great sorrow and difficulty in order to save the rest of the family from starvation during harsh winters (Kraus 1977). However, trying to help young children understand the justification for killing female children for whatever reason was bound to cause objections. While this criticism was fostered by conservatives, one can imagine contemporary feminists also objecting to the presentation of this information unless the killing of female babies was overtly condemned in the materials. There are clearly other points of

information found in MACOS that one might consider inappropriate for young children. However, the conservative attacks were designed to destroy this curriculum rather than modify its content in order to make it more suitable for children’s sensitivities.

As previously mentioned, Dow defended MACOS in his role as project director. For example, in 1971 he was asked to debate two critics on an Arizona radio station, where the radio host was also against teaching MACOS. Dow’s (1991, 191) reaction to this debate illustrated the difficulty of advocating for a curriculum that many simply would not tolerate and had no real interest in understanding:

The debate with Musselman and Day and Stuart proved to be more thought-provoking and less painful than I had feared. Although serious dialogue was impossible, since my opponents were close-minded and fanatically rigid in their views, I admired their perseverance and their devotion to what they believed.

Dow noted that Musselman and Day diverged from most of the detractors in that they had actually read and studied the MACOS materials, as well as other works by Bruner (Dow 1991). They also made Dow think about what MACOS included and why. He left the confrontation questioning why they had included some of the more controversial information and images and if these were good educational decisions. While these topics of controversy may have been interesting and important, in

reflection, Dow (May 29, 2009) questioned if their inclusion in MACOS was necessary to foster students' intellectual engagement.

If the creators had considered more carefully how their content might be received by the general public or even teachers, would they have been able to avoid some of the major controversies? The expressed goals of MACOS creators certainly were not controversial. As Dow (1991, 56) stated, it was hoped that MACOS would "stress those features of the Western tradition that would help young people comprehend the philosophical roots of American democratic beliefs and institutions." However, these beliefs were likely connected to American scholarly values of making warranted assertions without regard for the social implications of this information. While this ideal is central for scholarship, MACOS educators would have done well to be more sensitive to the intended audience of this curriculum. In any case, these goals were overshadowed by these controversies. Even though most criticisms were unfounded, misleading, or exaggerated, MACOS was successfully removed from schools.

Lessons Learned

A return to this controversial curriculum has given us opportunities to consider what might be learned from MACOS and the political struggle that surrounded its implementation. Although many implications can be explored, due to space limitations we focus our attention on three of what we consider the most important for progressive-thinking educators

who work in schools or teacher education programs.

Substantive Curriculum Development

As several scholars (e.g., Apple 2001; Gabbard 2007; Meier & Wood 2004; Ravitch 2009; Sunderman, Kim & Orfield 2005) have noted, NCLB has forced many educators to focus all of their attention on getting students to improve their scores on math and language arts standardized tests. The curriculum in this environment rarely encourages teachers to engage their students intellectually as they emphasize test taking preparation. In addition, many elementary schools in an effort to avoid being declared "failures," have narrowed the official curriculum and all but eliminated social studies, science, and art (e.g., Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere & Stewart 2008).

The punitive outcomes for schools whose students fail to perform on standardized tests keep teachers in professional development training focused on teaching to the test. National funding is focused on a narrow definition of "scientific-based" teaching methods. Teachers and curriculum developers are rarely encouraged to stimulate children's curiosity, reflection, imagination, synthesizing abilities, or analytical reasoning. Exploring interesting topics in the social or natural sciences is extremely limited in this age of accountability and test scores. Children are almost never asked to understand the unfamiliar or delve into questions such as what it means to be human as MACOS curriculum encouraged. Ironically, perhaps more than ever (due to globalization and the need for greater

democracy and social justice), young people would benefit from intellectually engaging materials that teach them to speculate about the world around them; inquire about cultural beliefs; and learn to develop their own conclusions based on a diversity of resources. We would be wise to teach them that it is okay to question basic cultural assumptions and the nature of the human condition. Despite its unpopularity, educators would do well to resist the current myopic view of school curriculum. We realize that in current school climate, teachers and curriculum designers must take risks and must exercise their civic courage in order to provide our children with a substantive education. Fortunately, there are still teachers and other educators willing to go beyond drilling and testing of utilitarian skills and help children develop their powers of thought and intelligence (e.g., Boyle-Baise, Bernens-Kinhead, Coake, Loudermilk, Lukasik, Podany; Johnston-Parsons in press).

Anticipating Controversy

The mere idea of significantly changing the pre-established curriculum and substantively reforming the way curriculum is taught is controversial in and of itself. Teachers are often overwhelmed by the constant stream of new “programs” they must adopt each school year. When schools change from one curriculum to another – or alter how things are taught, teachers often feel frustrated and threatened. What was wrong with the “old” way and the “old” curriculum? Do I have to design new curriculum or teach in different ways? Do I have to learn new information and concepts?

In the case of MACOS, many teachers said “yes” to these and other questions. Years later, Dow recognized this dynamic. He (1991, 4-5) claimed that “By challenging many of the conventional assumptions about both the content and methodology of instruction, [curriculum developers] threatened teachers, alienated publishers, and confused parents.” This oversight caused more problems than the MACOS team ever expected. Progressive educators would do well to approach curriculum reform by collaborating with practicing educators and the public at large in order to be successful. We might learn from Bruner’s mistake of gathering a team of people with few diverse pedagogical or social values or experiences.

While most educators would value Harvard scholars and well-respected scientists as contributors to the curriculum, their expertise was not necessarily the most crucial in terms of developing a successful elementary social science curriculum. Their ideas and feedback failed to take into consideration the conservative backlash that might occur. While the MACOS team did make some important revisions, like editing out the half-naked African Bushman from the curriculum, their efforts were not enough. Without diverse feedback on a curricular project, its impact is unpredictable because of the highly political nature of education. MACOS designers did not really “consider the social and political ramifications of their work” (Dow 1991, 30), and in our interview with Dow, he once again remarked “how politically naive we were” (personal communication, May 29, 2009).

This naiveté begs the question: Could MACOS have avoided the controversies it generated? Certainly, if the MACOS designers had sought out reactions from a more politically diverse group of individuals, they might have avoided some of its more inflammatory content. For example, this feedback might have suggested that MACOS was geared at the wrong age group. One must ask if there would have been the degree of controversy if MACOS was taught as an elective, high school anthropology course, rather than a fifth grade required social studies class. Others might have pointed out that an anthropology course in the fifth grade would replace the traditional focus on American history for these children. The insight of educators with more diverse ideologies or those working in non-academic environments, particularly on the teachers' manual, might have illuminated the controversial components of the curriculum that could have been more competently explained, defended, or revised. For example, the curriculum was accused of questioning sacred canons of Christianity in the name of moral relativism which might have been prevented or defended more successfully if the creators of MACOS had been more fully prepared. Getting this more diverse feedback might have forewarned the MACOS scholars about the turbulent political and religious temperatures of the politicians, teachers, and the communities of the time. Perhaps more diverse feedback would have provided the makers of MACOS with ideas to avoid a public protest that "wanted a more traditionally 'American' and authoritative perspective fed to

students" (Evans 2004, 144). As Wolcott (2007, 200) stated, "The initial inclusion of such potentially controversial material (e.g., the Kiviok myth) illustrates the blinders toward public criticism that those connected with the program tended to wear at the time."

However, in light of the conservative restoration and backlash that has emerged in reaction to the 1960s new left (and now the Obama administration), it can be argued that MACOS was doomed from the beginning. If nothing else, its support of biological evolution would have been a cause for controversy. The United States is, when it comes to education, much more conservative than it was during the turbulent 1960s/70s. One lesson progressive educators would do well to learn is to recognize that our nation has a large, well organized and financed, conservative activist group, which often appeals to basic fears and prejudices of Americans. Creating an effective discourse to counter this conservative ideology is crucial if education in our public schools is ever to become more stimulating and meaningful. Progressive educators are known for our sensitivity to other cultures; it is time we consider our own when creating curriculum. This sensitivity is especially needed when it comes to children. As Luker (2006) insightfully notes in her study of the culture wars over sex education, although most progressive thinking citizens and educators believe that it is best to expose children to scientific and modernist cultural ideals (e.g., democracy, social justice, tolerance, diversity), conservatives view much of our modern society with trepidation and believe

they must protect their children from evil and sinful ideas and images. In our imperfect democracy, we would be wise to take these fears and ideas into consideration when creating thoughtful and intellectually engaging curricula. Had the MACOS creators thought more about the content they were presenting to these young children and focused more on the types of learning experiences they wanted children to have, or developed the materials for teenagers, these controversies might have been avoided and MACOS might still be with us today. However, as previously mentioned, it is also very possible that the creators of MACOS could do nothing to protect their work in light of the larger socio-political conservative trends of the times.

Preservation of Materials

A final lesson to be learned from the MACOS experience concerns the possibility that excellent ideas which are out of step with the times may be lost to future generations. Educators, and more specifically school administrators, are known for adopting a given instructional program one year only to adopt a different program the following year. As Kliebard (1970) demonstrated long ago, being aware of our curricular history is extremely important. What happens to discarded curricula, such as MACOS, that might not have had adequate time to be successful in our schools' quest to improve the education of our children? After 1975, when it was all but eradicated from the public schools, the MACOS curriculum spent decades in Dow's basement with little interest from educators or scholars (personal communication, May

29, 2009). Morrissett (1975) noted, instead of building upon MACOS' innovation, educators ignored what they had once believed to be a very successful curriculum. This abandonment was (is) indicative of the way in which the censorship of the social studies curriculum affected the national climate in terms of decreasing their "optimism about the climate for innovation" (Morrissett, 1975). Yet forty years later, our review of the materials point to a clear indication of the intellectual value MACOS had.

More than being just a template to revise anthropological or an inquiry-based curriculum, MACOS represents an historical battleground where progressive educators struggled for academic freedom. Educators need opportunities to view historical, controversial teaching materials to make sense of the battles between traditionalists and progressives. During the last three decades progressive educators have completely failed to articulate ideas that illustrate the value and benefits of inquiry based pedagogy and intellectually engaging curricula. Perhaps future generations of progressive educators and scholars will be more successful if they study what happened to MACOS and other progressive curricula and instructional programs. If libraries are to be repositories of our cultural past, protectors of our cultural heritage, collections like MACOS need to be preserved in academic libraries whose collections are published in *WorldCat* and that boast flexible interlibrary loan policies (Cloonan 2007). These preservation efforts will play an important role for future educators and scholars who are interested in

progressive pedagogy. Furthermore, this may be the only way to teach the next generation of curriculum designers and scholars how to anticipate similar attacks on future progressive efforts. Without preserving collections like MACOS, the lessons learned are merely waiting to be discovered in the basements and cellars of progressive educators who stand alone in their belief in the power of intellectually engaging curriculum. If Hayes (2006) has correctly predicted the extinction of progressive educators, then the special collections of academic libraries are the final remnant for progressive ideals to firmly take root in American public education.

Conclusion

Although one can understand why the creators of MACOS were unprepared for the culture war that erupted in the late 1970s, we have few illusions of such activities today. As previously mentioned, conservatives have clearly taken over control of the public school curriculum. This control has been solidified through the creation of State Standards by elected members of State Boards of Education, and as previously mentioned, high stakes testing. However, conservatives have not stopped their efforts to completely dominate what children are taught in our schools. For example, the Texas Board of Education recently passed new textbook Standards which minimized (at first the effort was to eliminate) any mention of Thomas Jefferson's support for the "separation between church and state" and reduced many references to people of color who have contributed to our nation's and other

nation's democracy and social justice. This development is particularly problematic given the power Texas has in influencing the content of textbooks across the nation (McKinley 2010). Similarly, Arizona recently passed a law that forbids the teaching of ethnic studies in public schools (Santa Cruz 2010). Given the political nature of school curriculum, and the conservative attitudes that dominate our electorate, it is, perhaps, not surprising that MACOS was only one effort in what has become a movement to eliminate all progressive curricula or pedagogy from our children's schooling.

MACOS was one of the most intellectually engaging and meaningful curriculum ever created for public schools. Although the curriculum did not overtly condemn cultural practices that most United States' citizens find disturbing, the criticisms were by and large misleading and unfair. In particular, MACOS asked students to explore fundamental questions of what it means to be human; how cultures have changed over the centuries, and the relationships and commitments we have towards each other. It did not merely provide information for students to memorize and regurgitate, but rather, used information to foster students' powers of imagination, speculation, analysis, synthesis, and curiosity. It did not tell students what to think or value, and this fact alone, was disturbing to our more conservative citizens. Its complete removal from our public schools was unfortunate and unjustified. MACOS is exactly the type of curriculum that in a democracy, even an imperfect democracy such as our own, educators

should build upon. However, if curricula, such as MACOS, are ever going to find their way into American public schools, then educators and scholars will have to articulate ideas in ways that avoid unnecessary controversies and in ways that the public at large find important and appealing.

Notes

¹ One curricular struggle that conservatives have failed to win is the battle over teaching evolution versus “intelligent design” or “creationism” in science classes (Humes 2007). Although the courts have prevented the latter pseudo-sciences from being officially recognized and taught, many teachers teach as little evolution as possible to avoid conservative attacks. In addition, the Obama administration has supported comprehensive instead of “abstinence only” sex and drug education, but here, too, the impact on most classroom curricula has been minimal. Of course, as recent efforts by conservatives in Texas and Arizona illustrate, many conservatives still believe that our K-12 schools are too “liberal” (e.g., McKinley 2010; Santa Cruz 2010).

² MACOS also had students study animals to help children understand humans’ basic relationship to other mammals, other pre-agricultural people such as the Bushmen as a way to draw comparisons between early and modern humans.

³ Dow (1991) suggests that Conlan might have used MACOS as a way to further his own political future. Whether or not Conlan authentically believed that this curriculum would be harmful to students or if he was just trying to make political gains at its expense is difficult to confirm. Most likely, there were elements of both in his decision to lead the attack against MACOS.

References

- Andersen, R. 1995. *Consumer culture and TV programming*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Apple, M. 2001. *Educating the "right" way: Markets, standards, God, and inequality*. New York: Routledge/Falmer Press.
- Apple, M. & Whitty, G. 2002. Structuring the postmodern in education policy. In D. Hill. (Ed.), *Marxism against postmodernism in educational theory*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Boyle-Baise, L., Hsu, M., Johnson, S., Serriere, S., Stewart, D. 2008. Putting reading first: Teaching social studies in elementary classrooms. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 36 (3), 233-255.
- Boyle-Baise, M., Bernens-Kinhead, D., Coake, W., Loudermilk, L., Lukasik, L., Podany, W. (in press). Social Studies as a verb: Teaching students to become informed, think it through, and take action. *Social Studies and the Young Learner*.
- Cloonan, M. V. 2007. The moral imperative to preserve. *Library Trends*, 55, 746-755.
- Cochran-Smith, M. 2004. Walking the road: Race, diversity, and social justice in teacher education. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cummings, S. 1998). *The dixification of America: The American odyssey into the conservative economic trap*. Westport, CT: Praeger Press.

- Dillon, S. 2009, August 17. Dangling money, Obama pushes education shift. *New York Times*, p. A1.
- Dow, P. 1991. *Schoolhouse politics: Lessons from the Sputnik era*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Durham, M. & Kellner, D. 2001. *Media and cultural studies*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Easton, N. 2000. *Gang of five: Leaders at the center of the conservative crusade*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Elbaum, M. 2002. *Revolution in the air: Sixties radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che*. New York: Verso.
- Evans, R. 2004. *The social studies wars: What should we teach the children?* New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gabbard, D. 2008. *Knowledge & power in the global economy*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Press.
- Garfinkle, A. 1995. *Telltale hearts: The origins and impact of the Vietnam antiwar movement*. NY: Macmillan/St. Martin's Press.
- Gitlin, T. 1993. *The sixties: Years of hope, days of rage*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Goetz, W.W. 1992. The rise and fall of MACOS: A blip on the historical screen? *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 22 (4), pp. 515-522.
- Goodman, J. 2006. *Reforming schools: Working within a progressive tradition during conservative times*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Hayes, W. 2006. *The progressive education movement: Is it still a factor in today's schools?* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Humes, E. 2007. *Monkey girl: Evolution, education, religion, and the battle for America's soul*. New York: Harper Press.
- Hunter, J. 1991. *Culture wars: The struggle to define America*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hursh, D. 2008. Neoliberalism. In D. Gabbard's (Ed.), *Knowledge & power in the global economy*, pp. 35-44. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Press.
- Isserman, M. & Kazin, M. 2000. *America divided: The civil war of the 1960s*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kennedy, C. 1973. Curriculum materials analysis system, readability formulae and MACOS: A colloquium paper. Unpublished Colloquium Paper, Indiana University.
- Kliebard, H. 1970. The Tyler rationale. *School Review* 78 (2), 259-272.
- Kozol, J. 1992. *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York: Harper Publications.
- Kraus, L. 1977. Curriculum, public policy, and criticism: an analysis of the controversies surrounding Man: A course of study. Unpublished dissertation. University of Texas.
- Kurlansky, M. 2004. *1968: The year that rocked the world*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Laird, C. 2003. *Through these eyes* [DVD]. USA: Documentary Educational Resources.
- Luker, K. 2006. *When sex goes to school: Warring views on sex and sex education since the sixties*. New York: Norton Press.
- Lutkehaus, N. 2008. Putting "culture" into cultural psychology: Anthropology's

- role in the development of Bruner's cultural psychology. *Ethos*, 36 (1), pp. 46-59.
- McKinley, J. March 13, 2010. Texas conservatives win curriculum change. *New York Times*, p. A10.
- Meier, D. & Wood, G. 2004. *Many children left behind: How the No Child Left Behind Act is damaging our children and our schools*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Miller, R. 1995. *Educational freedom for a democratic society: A critique of national educational goals, standards, and curriculum*. Brandon, VT: Great Ideas in Education Press.
- Moran, J. 2000. *Teaching sex: The shaping of adolescence in the 20th century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Morrisett, I. 1975. Curriculum information network, fourth report: Controversies in the classroom. *Social Education*, 29, 246-252.
- Rasmussen, K. 1968. The Netsilik Eskimos. In *Talks to teachers I* (pp. 86-119). Cambridge, MA: Education Development Center.
- Ravitch, D. (2009). *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education*. New York: Basic Books.
- Rorty, R. 1998. *Achieving our country: Leftist thought in twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rorty, R. (1999). *Philosophy and social hope*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Rudolph, J. 2002. *Scientists in the classroom: The Cold War reconstruction of American science education*. New York: Palgrave Press.
- Santa Cruz, N. May 12, 2010. Arizona bill targeting ethnic studies signed into law. *Los Angeles Times*.
- Schwab, J. (1963). *Biology teachers' handbook*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Stefanic, J. & Delgado, R. 1996. *No mercy: How conservative think tanks and foundations changed America's social agenda*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Sunderman, G., Kim, J., & Orfield, G. 2005. *NCLB meets school realities: Lessons from the field*. New York: Corwin Press.
- Wallerstein, I. 1995. *After liberalism*. New York: The New Press.
- Wolcott, H.F. 2007. Reflections from the field: the middlemen of MACOS. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 38 (2), pp. 195-206.
- Zeichner, K. 2009. *Teacher education and the struggle for social justice*. New York: Routledge Press.
- Zimmerman, J. 2002. *Whose America: Culture wars in the public schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.