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The Process of Conceptualizing Taught through the Social Studies and Examples of Concepts Related to the Sixth Grade Study of the South American Nation, Brazil

Ruth Black Cole
Central Washington University

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THE PROCESS OF CONCEPTUALIZING TAUGHT THROUGH THE SOCIAL
STUDIES AND EXAMPLES OF CONCEPTS RELATED TO THE SIXTH
GRADE STUDY OF THE SOUTH AMERICAN NATION, BRAZIL

A Research Paper
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the degree
Master of Education

by
Ruth Black Cole
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THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING
THE PLAN 2 REQUIREMENT FOR THE
COMPLETION OF A RESEARCH PAPER.

Donald J. Murphy
FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

. . . no one will live all his life in the world into which he was born, and no one will die in the world in which he worked in his maturity (5:125).

In the last twenty years, the life expectancy of man has increased to such an extent and his activity in the world has produced such comprehensive change that it is not difficult to agree that the above is true more often than not. In order to be an intelligent, vital force in the world he has designed, man must have a great deal of information and a clear concept of the social processes of the reduced global neighborhood he inhabits. Each unit of his neighborhood must be able to use a knowledge of itself and its fellows with understanding in order to promote a useful and peaceful world atmosphere.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study (1) to show the need for planned teaching of concepts; (2) to offer procedures for teaching concepts through the social studies; and (3) to suggest some concepts as thought provoking points of departure for sixth grade teachers of the social studies.

Importance of the study. Knowledge without

understanding is a lost cause. To memorize material from reams of paper can be of no service if the information cannot be applied to similar situations appearing in different context. Stendler (14:176) writes, "Clear concepts are the basis for clear communication." In order to apply wisdom to practice, the student must build concepts to develop the understanding necessary for the communication. How can the pupil learn to the best advantage if the instruction is not forthcoming?

It is important that teachers become aware of the need for training children in concept building. Stendler states, "The learning of new concepts is perhaps the single most important kind of learning the pupil must master; . . ." (14:54). He also says that it is the duty of the teacher to correct misconception, to help the student add more breadth to his existing concepts, and to help him in the formation of many more (14:55). Ellsworth (5:120) writes that developmental concept guidance should begin with the child in the kindergarten and should continue with him as he moves through elementary and high school experiences.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Concepts. Furman (6:91) describes concepts as being "functioning meanings and understandings which children acquire from their experiences as well as from subject

matter." Brownell and Hendrickson (1:106) define a concept as an abstraction that applies to a class or group of objects which have certain qualities in common.

Generalizations. Concepts may be used to develop generalizations. The Report of the State Central Committee on Social Studies to the California State Curriculum Commission defines generalizations as:

. . . sometimes more technically referred to as "inclusive statements of broad applicability based upon an organization of facts in two or more concepts." . . . Generalizations tend to be abstract and often take the form of principles or rules. The difference between concepts and generalizations are largely differences of degree and complexity (3:15).

Russell condenses the definition of generalization by Brownell and Hendrickson to read: Generalizations are verbalized formulations of relationships among concepts-- they appear as rules, laws, principles, or conclusions (13:228).

Social Studies. Michaelis writes:

The social studies are concerned with people and their interaction with their social and physical environment; they deal with human relationships. . . . attention is given to ways of living and working together, use of the environment to meet basic human needs, customs, institutions, values, and life situations--the cultural heritage and its dynamic on-going characteristics (11:2).

CHAPTER II

THE NEED FOR TEACHING CONCEPTS

I. HISTORICAL NEED

In the beginning man's needs were few. He served himself, motivated by elementary needs, and found the trial and error method of learning adequate. Concepts were slowly built and, compared to today, were limited in number. With the development of small social groups, trial and error learning was augmented by the experiences of other men within the society. This aid to concept building allowed man to maintain status within the group.

The interdependence of man began to be evident as he moved away from rural to town living. He began to form many more concepts and felt the need to do so more quickly in order to compete and to find security in this more sophisticated society. Butts (2:34-5) states that in order to facilitate learning he established opportunity for the schooling of some children outside the confines of the home.

The Industrial Revolution quickened the pulse of civilization. New ideas and contrivances introduced and demanded the growth of many new concepts. Eventually most children were enrolled in the public school system. A more specialized education was needed. Preston states:

Intelligent living in society . . . places many demands upon the individual and requires a greater volume of

systematic knowledge than would be acquired through allegedly "natural" learning (12:43).

II. CURRENT NEED FOR GUIDED CONCEPT BUILDING

Two world-encompassing wars demanded a speeding of inventiveness. At the same time, humans found they were living and fighting in world areas previously recognized as spots on a map or information in a book. At the close of the Second World War, improvement in transportation, communication, business venture, and tourism encouraged reduction in the size of the global community. Without understanding how it happened or knowing what to do about it, people found the world economics tightly interwoven.

According to Preston:

Understanding other peoples is an urgent need of our age. Because of developments in aviation and communication every region has access to other regions that fifty years ago were scarcely imagined. This shortening of distances around the globe holds out the choice of either a beneficial exchange of goods and ideas between nations or else international nuclear bombardment. Provincial attitudes must be converted to an understanding which embraces people in other regions--in our own country and in all countries. Learning of the environmental and other developmental factors in a group's ways of living helps to build understanding and to dispel those superficial judgments which so easily become directed against those who seem different from ourselves (12:40).

To build understanding in a world where systems of business and pleasure change at such speed that a man can't die in the same age in which he was born requires a well organized and planned system of learning. The school, home,

and community need to provide experiences to encourage growth of concepts to keep pace with the need and to help solve the related as well as the over-all problem.

Concept building is an ongoing affair. Brownell and Hendrickson (1:94) say that it begins with the simple and works toward the complex as the need develops and as the student desires to follow the learning pattern. Developmental guidance and motivation for concept building through our schools is one way to help solve the world socio-economic problem.

Carpenter and Spieseke write (4:7):

America's faith and confidence in the future stability of this democratic republic rests largely in the public schools. With increasing vision the schools are facing the challenge of imparting to young citizens the arts and skills for successful democratic living.

CHAPTER III

TEACHING CONCEPTS THROUGH SOCIAL STUDIES

All disciplines the school uses to educate its young provide opportunity for the teaching of concepts. The social studies, however, is singularly valuable as a vehicle for such study because it comes in contact with problems most intimately associated with life.

I. THE ROLE OF THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

The individual who teaches concepts must be aware of the need for planned developmental concept building and of the particular role he plays as the guide in learning situations. Furman (6:92) describes the teacher's position as that of planning and guiding to strengthen the child's comprehension of his environment. Opportunities are provided for this through day-to-day activities, "teachable moments," and the planned pursuits of the classroom and the community.

In order to provide experiences for children, Preston (12:43) says that adults must take the trouble to explore the world systematically. He feels that "society demands greater knowledge than can possibly be acquired merely through affable living." The teacher endeavoring to build social concept must be schooled in current as well as historical events. Since concepts are slowly built and quickly

modified, the educator must be prepared for continual repetition, reinforcement, and modification through many related social learnings.

To encourage the growth of concepts suitable for the critical thinking necessary to make generalizations, the teacher must plan to teach the unpleasant along with the pleasant. Stendler writes (14:283):

The sixth-grade teacher who emphasizes the number of petticoats worn by Bolivian women but who fails to include discussion of the dire poverty of the tin miners may do so because he feels that the children are too young to be exposed to the realities of life, or to understand them. But unpleasant as well as pleasant facts must be faced in the social studies and the reasons for the unfortunate conditions discussed. Children are dealing with the realities of life and the school curriculum ought to help them in their adjustments.

Horn (9:523) says there are too many concepts to be taught. It is necessary to eliminate all but the essential ones. Stendler (14:282) points out that the teacher must be the selecting force, determining the suitability of a concept from the need and developmental level of the children. By careful questioning or a class discussion, a teacher can ascertain whether or not the children have the necessary background for a particular study. The choice can then evolve toward the expansion of known concepts and (or) the addition of new ones.

Stendler (14:282-3) cautions educators to beware of attempting to teach concepts that are too easy. Teachers have found that children can grasp quite difficult concepts

if these are built "slowly and carefully upon what the children already know."

Teachers must know how children learn concepts. They also need to know how to teach concepts. No amount of guidance, planning, provision for experience, repetition, reinforcement, modification, motivation, or selection can assist in concept training if the instructor is unaware of need and procedure.

II. CONCEPT LEARNING

Brownell and Hendrickson (1:109-12) describe the method by which children learn concepts. They use a schema, (Figure 1) represented by a set of stair steps of unequal division. Since a concept develops slowly, these uneven steps represent the irregular method of accumulating ideas for complete or arrested concept formation. The lower step on the drawing represents the beginning response. The reactions here may be clumsy or inexpert. The top steps on the schema represent the point at which response is refined, or precise. Progress up this abstract ladder may be halted or stopped at any time and will proceed only as the learner feels need or purpose to improve his concept. Advance may depend upon a new, more intense motivation or the discovery of an improved method of response. Old responses are not abandoned but are readily available should the need arise for their use.

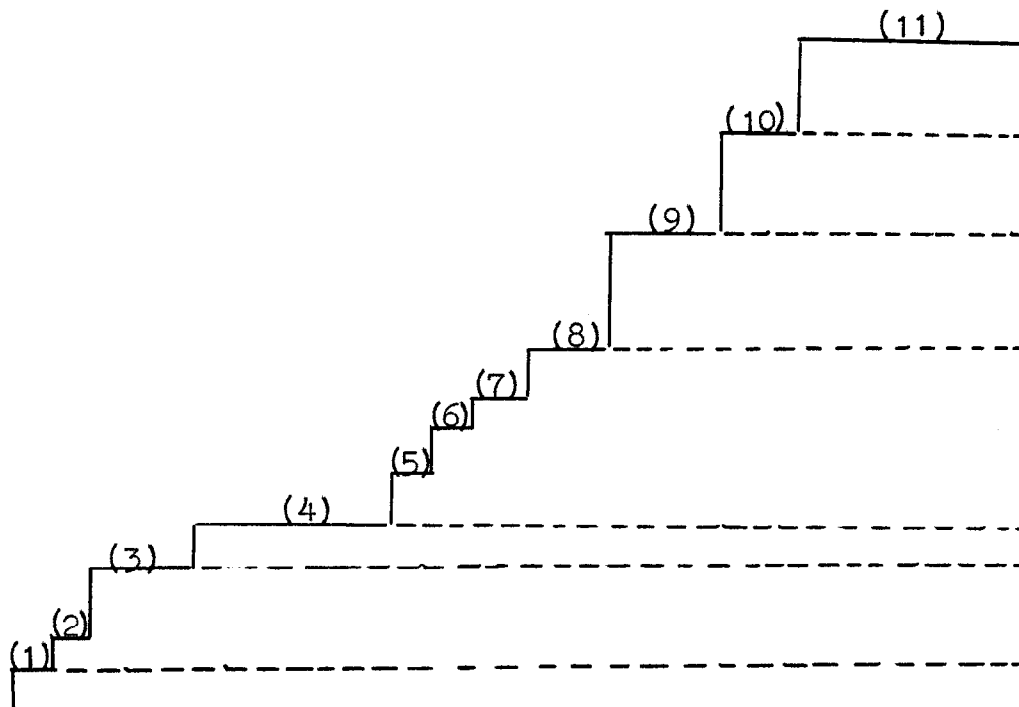


FIGURE I

CONCEPT LEARNING SCHEMA (1:110)

HORIZONTAL LINES REPRESENT IMPROVEMENT;

VERTICAL LINES REPRESENT TIME;

DOTTED LINES INDICATE RETAINED KNOWLEDGE READY FOR USE

An illustration of concept learning. The charts illustrate a pattern for the development of the symbol mateⁱ. The chart for each concept growth pattern would be different because no two concepts grow in the same way and no two individuals would develop like concepts in a parallel pattern.

- (1) The child enters the South American Pavilion at the Fair, hears and sees the symbol for the liquid, and is given a drink; he decides it is not good.
- (2) He later discusses the drink with his mother who, by her part in the discussion, modifies his budding concept.
- (3) Three months later the child reads about the liquid as he studies South America. He learns to pronounce the word correctly and studies to make a report about mateⁱ, thereby enlarging his concept.
- (4) The report re-enforces his learning and improves his concept.
- (5) Several years later the child buys a can of mateⁱ.
- (6) He reads the label.
- (7) He discusses his previous experience with the drink as he pays for it.
- (8) He enjoys drinking the tea which he now considers to be a health drink.
- (9) As an adult visiting Brazil he views the culture of the holly-like tree.

- (10) He discusses the relative merits of mate¹ with the owner of the processing plant.
- (11) He decides to become an importer of mate¹ into America.

The modification and growth of the concept over the period of years now places the individual on the top step of the schema, in a position where he can talk precisely about mate¹. As an adult his concept will continue to change as he constructs new meanings out of his own experiences.

III. TEACHING PROCEDURES

According to information reviewed, the process of teaching concepts through the social studies is the same process used for teaching concepts in any school disciplines. There are, however, many concepts which might be chosen for teaching in a social studies class. Because of the nature of the subject, abstract concepts outweigh concrete ones. No matter how concrete the subject, if it is on the other side of the world it still is abstract to the learner. Love, poverty, patriotism, and similar concepts are closely akin to the study of people and their social responses. Each of these is abstract and difficult to comprehend because only the result may be observed.

General procedures for teaching concepts. Brownell and Hendrickson (1:113-16) have a comprehensive list of

instructions which give general information to help in the teaching of concepts. They feel that (1) the number of concepts to be taught should be limited because there are too many to teach all; some are better learned out of school and some are of slight value. (2) The teacher should not try for completeness at the time of introduction. No matter how urgent the need, it takes time to formulate concepts. (3) All children should not be expected to attain the highest level of meaningfulness. The teacher must see that the child feels a need before she encourages him to go beyond the level at which he stopped himself. (4) Learning is problem-solving; therefore, the teacher must guide rather than direct. (5) The learner's background needs to be studied to provide the teacher with understanding for concept guidance. (6) Learning activities must be limited to those which have direct relationship to the concept being taught. (7) Learning activities should be varied. Meaning is not improved by repetition of the same information or procedure. (8) Misconception needs to be corrected by the teacher. This gives opportunity for constructive teaching. (9) The evaluation of concept learning is found in the ability of the student to use the concept correctly. (10) Initial motivation may need to be extrinsic, but the preferred motivation will be intrinsic. Conceptual learning encourages self motivation. (11) Opportunity should be provided for significant

activity to help in the retention of the concept. If it has been related to the learner's needs and purposes, this will not be difficult.

Specific procedures for guiding concept learning.

Stendler (14:59) writes that teachers must apply the four essentials of learning to the guidance of concept formation. She lists these four essentials as drive, cue, response, and reinforcement.

As related to social studies, the four essentials may be explained in this manner. Drive: the student may be motivated, intrinsically or extrinsically, to develop a concept of the term, jungle. Cue: a discussion follows in which questions are asked, a problem is posed, and research material is suggested. Response: as a result of research the student is able to bring pictures to class. Reinforcement: the picture suggests further study and further opportunity for discussion.

Wesley (15:299) suggests a different avenue of approach to the developing of social concepts:

. . .the teacher should keep three principles clearly in view. (1) The word should be an identification of experience. There is no use to try to develop the word system, for example, unless the pupil has some basic experience which the word identifies. (2) The word should always be used before being defined or explained. The concept must be used in context, before singling it out for attention and study. (3) Each word should be developed in ascending levels of difficulty or widening areas of inclusiveness. If these general principles are followed, the pupil will have little difficulty in building rich meaningful concepts.

Woodruff (16:127) believes the student should come in contact with the concept through his senses. If possible, the introduction should be concrete evidence of the concept to be learned. Since many social studies concepts are abstract, it will be necessary to introduce them in a vivid portrayal via such things as movies, strip films, role playing, and others. If these ways are impossible, the third choice would be introduction through the best description possible. In the next step in concept learning, the student is stimulated to become aware of all parts of the problem; he makes a record in his mind of all the things his senses perceive. The third step in the process is to use all the proper names for the parts when discussing it. The fourth step is discovering the function of the problem about which the concept is being built.

Woodruff (16:116) feels that it is up to the teacher to see that the student goes through all these steps. The learning must be done by the pupil; he must do the talking and carry out all the processes: visualizing, perceiving, learning the names of parts, and the function of the concepts.

All three scholars quoted agree that the senses help in learning a concept. Many visual aids are valuable for the teaching of social studies concepts. Movies, slides, bulletin boards, and pictures offer color and the activity of

sight and sound. Recordings, well-told stories, and readings give opportunity for hearing. Concrete examples provide favorable touching, seeing, or, perhaps smelling or tasting experiences.

Whichever method is followed for teaching concrete and abstract concepts, the result aimed at is intelligent, functional living. Concept development, of course, is only one of the processes involved in attaining that goal.

IV. OUTGROWTH OF CONCEPT TEACHING

One of the outgrowths of guided concept learning will be the ability to initiate formulation of generalizations. Guided concept formation involves learning skills such as the use of the problem-solving method, critical thinking, creative thinking, and evaluation. If the concepts are understood and the skills are functional in learning and living, the next step will be the formulation of generalizations. These generalizations help develop relationships between concepts and further increase the understanding needed for useful democratic and world citizenship.

CHAPTER IV

SUGGESTED LIST OF CONCEPTS

FOR THE SOUTH AMERICAN NATION, BRAZIL

The following list of concepts was developed after a review of a text and two library books. The list is not the result of a scientifically planned effort. The criteria for choice of concepts are (1) suitability for sixth grade children and (2) value for improving hemisphere understanding. The books reviewed are

Gray, William, and others. Exploring American Neighbors in Latin America and Canada. Chicago: Follet Publishing Company, 1956.

Hager, Alice Rogers. Brazil Giant to the South. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1945.

May, Stella Burke, Let's Read About Brazil. Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Fideler Company, 1948.

I. FACTS, CONCEPTS, AND GENERALIZATIONS

A concept, placed in its position in the critical thinking process, follows the establishment of a fact or facts. From a collection of concepts, the student expects to construct generalizations to help solve the problem. The first eight concepts are placed between a single fact and a single generalization to illustrate the developmental pattern.

Introduction:

Fact Brazil is interesting because of its size, position, resources, and people.

Concept. The Brazilian nation amazes both visitors and natives.

Generalization. .The Brazilian people and their large, interesting land provide fascinating study because they have many ways of living like ours and many opportunities and mores different from ours.

Amazon River system and Amazonia:

Fact The city of Manaus is a port for ocean going steamers.

Concept. Ocean going steamers on the Amazon River indicate the resource value of the river system.

Generalization . Even though the Amazon River is wide and deep enough, ocean-going ships would not come up the river to Manaus if there were no resources to carry away.

Fact The Amazon River area is the home of primitive peoples and civilized peoples.

Concepts Various cultures of the human race inhabit the Amazon River area.

Generalization . The variety of plants and animals found in the Amazon jungle make it possible for

man to subsist or to progressively improve his living standard.

Fact Large white orchids with yellow tongues grow in the Amazon jungle.

Concept. Living conditions in a jungle develop extreme plant and animal life.

Generalization . Plants and animals expecting to survive in the jungle must adapt to the high humidity, heat, darkness, and dangers of the rain forest.

Fact Rubber farms are not as valuable as they used to be.

Concept. Change in the demand for goods can change the economy of a town or an area.

Generalization . The introduction of rubber substitutes and the spread of growing areas to other parts of the world have limited the need for Brazilian rubber on the world market.

The Northeast:

Fact Many people of the Northeast arid section are poverty stricken.

Concept. Geographic and climatic conditions may contribute to the insecurity of groups of people.

Generalization . The adverse climatic and geographic conditions of an area may be changed by the

introduction of modern methods of farming, but impoverished farmers will need the help of money and knowledge from outside sources.

Fact The fertile plains of the Northeast are used for the growing of cocoa, carnauba palms, castor beans, fruits, sugar, hemp, and tobacco.

Concept. Some areas of northeastern Brazil provide raw material for manufactured goods.

Generalization . The development of manufacturing plants for the processing of goods could help to balance the economy of the northeastern region of Brazil by providing work for the impoverished farmers of the area.

Central Brazil:

Fact A man of mulatto blood has been president of Brazil.

Concept. People of many races and nationalities live in harmony and with equal rights in Brazil.

Generalization . The integration of the races and nationalities in Brazil may be a contributing factor in the friendly hospitality dispensed to visitors of that country.

II. LIST OF CONCEPTS

Central Brazil:

1. Topography and climate control the living areas chosen by the people of Brazil.
2. Transportation conditions encourage the growth or stagnation of Brazilian enterprise.
3. Multi-use of the land provides greater economic security for more people of Brazil.
4. Extreme land holdings of a few men encourage the poverty of many men.
5. Growth of an industrial economy affects the export-import pattern of the nation.
6. Equal education opportunity supports individual opportunity for improvement.
7. Open air markets satisfy the gregarious instincts of the people and foster the continuation of folk art.
8. The folk art of Brazil reveals the character of the people.
9. An abundance of natural and man developed resources in central Brazil help to concentrate the wealth there.
10. Coffee, cotton, and corn play an important role in the economy of Brazil.
11. Large cities in Brazil resemble large cities in the United States.
12. Mineral resources provide economic security for some

citizens of Brazil and export goods for the nation.

13. Central Brazil resembles the United States in many ways.
14. The term democracy may have different interpretations.
15. Activities of various kinds may be used to encourage the movement of people from a congested population area.
16. Uneducated and uninterested citizenry provoke government control by a few military or political leaders.
17. Brasilia may represent man's dream of fulfillment for Brazil.

Extreme South:

1. Processing facilities demand improvement in animal breeding for meat.
2. Southern forests yield an important part of the national income.
3. The use of potential hydro-electric power could change the economy of Brazil.

General:

1. History plays an important part in the recreation patterns of Brazilians.
2. American and Brazilian plans for economic aid to some areas of need in Brazil play an important part in preventing the development of unwelcome economies in Brazil.

3. Friendly relations between countries may be obtained by application of a Good Neighbor Policy.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

There is a need for understanding socio-economic regional and world problems. Though all school disciplines contribute to the techniques, skills, and learnings involved in solving the problems, social studies is one of the most important disciplines. It deals directly with people and their physical and social environment.

The teacher should act as guide in teaching concept building. Many new concepts are introduced or reinforced each day. Students need to be motivated to keep active the learning of important ones. The instructor needs to be aware that learning takes place through the action of the learner; he must be encouraged to question, think critically, and evaluate his learning for its function in his environment.

The selection of concepts depends upon the need and experience of the learner. Because of the varied backgrounds and needs of students and teachers, no two lists of concepts will be the same for different individuals or for different groups. The concepts listed are merely suggestions.

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