

An Overview of the Social Studies Curriculum In Trinidad and Tobago, 1994-2004

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Question

How has the Social-Studies syllabus in the Primary school evolved to meet the needs of the ever changing society?

Hypothesis

Education is much more than just the transmission of knowledge or developing understanding and applying of knowledge. It requires that the teacher develop values, attitudes, critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills and a multitude of learning skills to produce an honest, loyal, productive and contributing citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. Social-Studies is an area of study that will effectively allow this because it “draws from a variety of disciplines including Sociology, History, Geography, Economics, Political Science and many other disciplines which are necessary in understanding society” (Social Studies for the Primary School, 1994.)

This research project compares and contrasts the social studies curriculum in Trinidad and Tobago from 1994 to 2004. It further examines why the structure was changed and what are some of the implications for both the student and teacher and in a wider context, the community and the world.

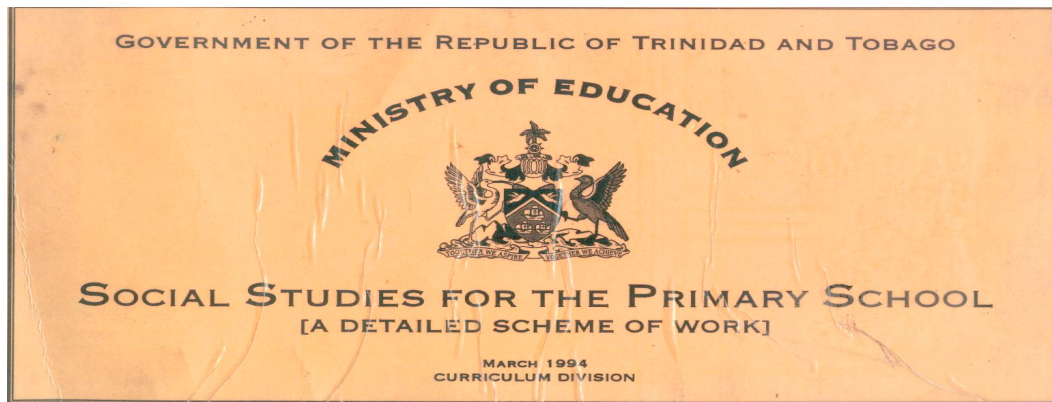


Fig. a. Cover of 1994 Social Studies Syllabus (1)

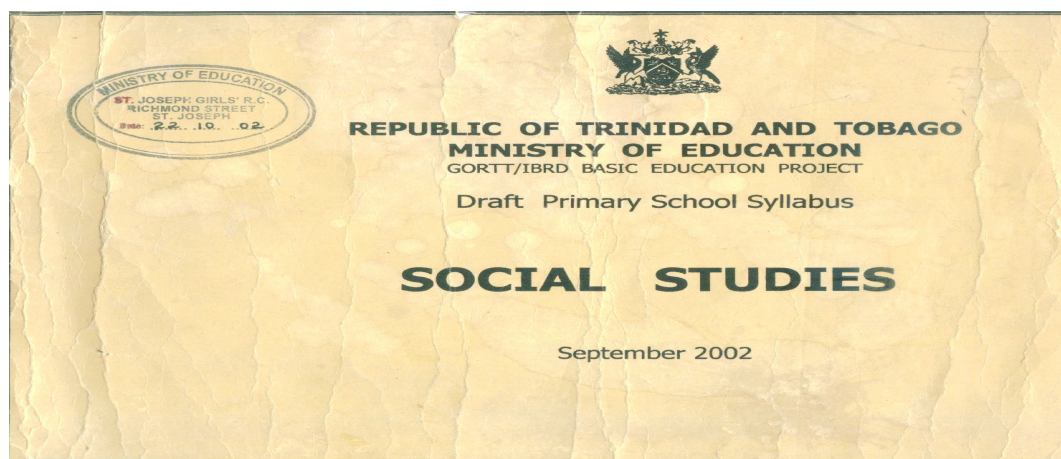


Fig. b. Cover of the 2002 Social Studies Syllabus (2)

Preliminary research has led to suggest that the social Studies curriculum was changed primarily to:

- Encourage students to research what is taking place in the world around them
- Foster and develop thinking and communication skills
- Identify causes and consequences
- Empower students with the knowledge, understanding and skills to incite change
- Increase students' awareness of the ways man interacts with his physical and social environment.
- Adopt active learning methods in the classroom.
- Develop a sense of pride and responsibility to Trinidad and Tobago's past and future.

The revised syllabus incorporated the individual unique subjects (listed above) into one disciplinary subject consisting of concepts, skills values and attitudes which are then presented to the children through a 'half term study structure'.

The syllabus from 1994 has most of these inter disciplinary subjects except it is taught and organized in a different way. The new structure of the syllabus in 2002 now provides teachers with slightly different challenges to the previous one.

Discussion of Sources

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- He was one of the committee members who were instrumental in drafting the 2002 Social Studies Syllabus.

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- Social Studies curriculum including rationale, objectives and Resources.

Ministry of Education, 2002 Draft Primary School Syllabus Social Studies.

- Social Studies curriculum including rationale, performance standard, objectives (General and Specific), and themes/units.

Robinson M., (1995) Social Studies for Common Entrance Students, Freeport Trinidad

- A textbook that reflected all the key concepts and content in the 1994 syllabus.

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- Background information on the education system in terms of schools and enrolment.

Secondary Sources

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- Recorded some of the earliest development in the education system in Trinidad and Tobago.

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Context of Education in Trinidad and Tobago

1.1 Overview of the Education System

Trinidad and Tobago is a twin-island republic, situated at the southern end of the chain of islands in the Caribbean, with a population of approximately 1.3 million. It gained independence from Britain in 1962 and acquired republican status in 1976, but remains a Commonwealth country.

The education system in Trinidad and Tobago has evolved from a colonial past, like in other British Commonwealth countries. The colonial government's involvement in education began in the post-slavery era and marked the opening up of education to the freed classes. Hitherto, education was provided only for the children of the landowners by private teachers and denominational schools established by various church groups. A dual system of government schools and denominational schools, assisted financially by government (known as “assisted” schools) was established and has continued up to the present time.

1.2 Structure of the Education System

Within Trinidad and Tobago's education system, the following types of schools can be identified:

(a) Government schools, which are fully owned and operated by the state; these include primary and secondary schools.

(b) Government-assisted schools, which are managed by a private body (usually a religious denomination) but given financial assistance by the state; these include primary and secondary schools;

(c) Private schools, which are maintained and operated by private bodies without any assistance from the state; and

(d) Special schools, which are designed for educating handicapped children, and which provide education mainly at the primary level.

Educational provision within this system is as follows:

1. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) for the 3-4 age cohort;

2. Universal primary education for the 5-11 age cohorts.

This includes two years of infant classes for children aged 5 and 6, and five years of primary Schooling (five Standard levels) for the 7-11 age cohorts;

3. Secondary education for the 12-18 age cohorts.

This is a complex sector, with educational provision in different types of secondary schools, namely:

I. Five-year composite (government), government secondary, government-assisted secondary, and private secondary schools (Forms 1-5) for the 12-16 age cohort;

II. Seven-year government and government-assisted schools (Forms 1-6) for the 12-18 age cohort.

4. Higher education for the 19+ age group

At the primary level, there are 476 public schools -135 government schools and 341 assisted schools -10 special schools, 54 registered private primary schools, and 20 post-primary centers.

1.3 Selection

Primary education up to age 12 was made compulsory and free in 1961 and, in the 1970s; access to secondary education was expanded from 22% to 70% of the 11+ age group. Until 2000, education beyond the primary level was not universal, and students were required to sit selection examinations at the end of a cycle of education for selection for publicly subsidized places at the next level.

At the end of primary education, Standard 5 students sat the Common Entrance Examination (CEE) for placement in Form 1 of a secondary school and for tracking, either in the Traditional Sector (considered as the better quality schools), or in the junior secondary or composite schools

With the establishment of universal secondary education in 2001, the CEE has been replaced by the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) Examination, the results of which will determine whether students are placed in schools of their choice or at the discretion of the Ministry of Education. It is intended that this examination will be complemented by a Continuous Assessment Programme (CAP), which is yet to be fully implemented. Because the new system is still in its infancy, it is not yet clear what changes will take place in the progression of students through the system.

1.4 Enrolment

Primary schools - In 1994, there were 191,640 students enrolled in government and government-assisted primary schools, which represented a decrease of 3,401 from a total of 195,041 in 1993. This also indicates that more than 13,000 students remained in the post-primary classes in the primary sector in 1993 and 1994, which was an increase over the numbers in the previous years. This increase can be linked with the expansion of the post-primary programme through the setting up of the post-primary centers.

In 1992/93, there were 6,144 students enrolled in private primary schools.

For the period 1989/90 to 1993/94, the number of male students enrolled at the primary level outnumbered the females.

The average student-teacher ratio in government and government-assisted primary schools ranges from 25:1 to 28:1, with rare extremes of 20:1 and 38:1. By contrast, the ratio in private primary schools is 18:1.

According to the Education Policy paper (1993-2003) global education is seen as a vehicle for social change and progressive national development. Within this context the education process in Trinidad and Tobago is guided by the philosophy of the education system that is enshrined on the Education Policy Paper (1993-2003), as developed by the national Task force on education. Today the guidelines and principles laid down in this policy document are still relevant and influence the many changes which are taking place in the education sector.

The Social Studies Syllabus 1994

This syllabus draws upon the disciplines of History, Geography, Economics, Social Studies and Political Science. It lists the benefits of Social Studies in 3 categories:

- Social Education
- Learning Skills
- Information

This syllabus also outlines the benchmarks for each level and shows a direct link to the general objectives. Each level is outlined under the headings as shown in Figure C below.

SOCIAL STUDIES INFANT - YEAR ONE - TERM ONE						
WEEK	TOPIC	LESSON	OBJECTIVES	ATTITUDES/ VALUES	ACTIVITIES	RESOURCES
5	The Family	ii) Members of a family	b) identify families e.g. animals a) identify members of a family b) draw members of their family		- Role playing - Labelling of family members	Pictures of different types of families
		i) Role of family members ii) Activities of family members iii) Special occasions which the family celebrates	a) state the role of various members of the family b) list the activities in which the family engage c) respond to celebrations of family members.	Helping at home Sharing Showing love Caring for pets Service to others	- Things which Mummy, Daddy and I do - Identifying tasks of family members - Making birthday cards, anniversary cards - Making flowers	Pictures Bristol board, crayons Potato chips packs, scrap cloth, crepe paper. Story
6	Family Health	i) Health rules ii) Keeping healthy	a) list basic health rules b) explain the importance of personal hygiene c) appreciate a clean environment	Love for cleanliness and order	- Making posters - Role playing - Miming	Illustrations and pictures
7	Family Safety	i) Safety rules in the home	a) identify safety rules b) obey safety rules at home	Respect for life Rules are necessary	- Comparing safe and unsafe situations at home by looking at pictures	Pictures
		ii) Precautions taken by the family to ensure safety	a) state precautions which are taken to ensure safety		- Making a list for school and home	

Fig. C. Layout of 1994 Syllabus (3)

From the layout shown in Figure C, the design was very clear and easy for all teachers to use. The headings; Week; Topic; Objectives; Attitudes/Values; Activities; Resources ensured that teachers throughout Trinidad and Tobago simultaneously teach the expected topics. It also encouraged a seamless transition for teachers who were being transferred into a particular school at any given period to easily continue and follow the social studies curriculum. The objectives were clear and measurable and again ensure that all teachers will have achieved the desirable objectives.

The Social Studies Syllabus 2002

The task of revising the syllabus is undertaken by the Curriculum Division in the Ministry of Education. The 2002 draft syllabus follows the 1994 syllabus which has its origin in the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (GORTT/IBRD) Basic Education Project. One of the components of the project targets, improvement of the quality of education at the primary level of the education system.(2002,Social-Studies syllabus) An international Consultant, a Local Consultant and a selected group of Trinidad and Tobago educators reviewed the existing Social Studies Syllabus.

Keith John, a lecturer at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, was one of the members of the committee who was instrumental in drafting this 2002 Social Studies Syllabus. He gave some general insights into the factors that were considered in the 2002 draft.

He acknowledged the curriculum objectives were ‘reoriented’ and its aims were to change the culture of the classroom to active learning methods, which meant a change in the content and teaching methods.

He admits that refresher courses should have followed the training that was initially given to introduce teachers to the new syllabus. Further, he added, teachers’ insufficient knowledge might account for how this subject is prioritized in different schools across the country.

This syllabus is a more detailed document where the General Objectives are divided into the following strands:

- Concepts
- Knowledge and understanding
- Skills
- Attitudes

It is further divided into Themes for each Level:

- Infant 1 –Understanding Myself and Family
- Infant 2 – Understanding my world
- Standard 1-Our community.
- Standard 2- Our island

- Standard 3- The Story of Trinidad and Tobago
- Standard 4 – Our Nation
- Standard 5 – World Studies

It should be noted that a Unit comprising of 6 lessons is then outlined for each theme. Each theme is divided into strands and the specific objectives of each strand are outlined under:

- Citizenship
- History
- Geography
- Personal and social education
- Health Education

As with the 1994 syllabus, the 2002 syllabus clearly outlined benchmarks for each level which are linked to the General Objectives of Social Studies. In the 2002 syllabus, the unit for each level is outlined under the headings:

Concept /Themes	Objectives	Learning Skills	Values and Attitudes	Suggested Teaching/learning	Suggested Formative Assessment Outcomes
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Fig. D

Topics listed in 1994 are placed under the heading of Themes in 2002. This meant the topics were required to be taught in a more detailed way in 2002. The 1994 syllabus incorporates the topic Family Health. This and similar topics were however eliminated from the 2002 syllabus and have since formed part of the Health and Family Life Education syllabus. Below is a table comparing and contrasting the two syllabi.

Fig. E

Level	Topics Listed in 1994 but not in 2002	Topics Listed in 2002 but not in 1994	Topics common to both
Infant	My body	My home	Celebrations

1	Family health Manners and courtesies Safety –Meeting and relating to strangers Human Needs Work and Money Personal Property	What affects me	Who am I My family My school Weather
Infant 2	Leaders and followers Buying and Selling Goods Vending Use and destruction of land Money –Types and uses	My family then and now Basic Needs My family Manners and courtesy Safety Co operation Proper hygiene Making positive choices	Celebrations My school Personal property Places and Location Caring for pets/plants
Standard 3	The Family: Types, Relationships within the Family, Families in the Community/World Our Nation – The People Who Came, The Story of T'dad and Tobago, The customs of our People, The Discovery of Trinidad, Colonialism to Republicanism, Locating Main Crops, Soils, Agriculture and Fishing. Preserving our Environment Values – Rules, Caring for property, Trusting Locating Information using Textbook/dictionary/newspape	Institutions supporting Family	Family Values The Community – Formation, Places of Interest, Problems/Solutions in the community. Our Nation – Physical Features, Resources In Trinidad and Tobago, Historical Sites, Places of Interest, Map and Globe Skills,

	rs/director Migration – Internal and International migration. Personal Safety and Health – Substance Abuse,		
Standard 4	Resources – Industries; Human; Trade – Local and International Consumer Affairs Understanding Maps and Charts; Globe Skills; Manufacturing Industries in Trinidad and Tobago; Benefits; Public Utilities Our Nation – Agricultural Production Understanding our ‘Global Village’	Leisure and Recreation The Water Cycle The Impact of Man on the Environment Becoming Effective Citizens Identifying outstanding Citizens in different fields Democracy; Patriotism; Rights and Responsibility of Citizens Budgeting and Savings Information and Communication Technology Being Pro-active Citizens	Our Nation – Physical Features; Preserving our Environment Tourism Population Our Local Culture (Heritage)
Standard 5	National Government –Law and Order; Cities and Boroughs; Tobago House of Assembly Our Financial Sector – Revenue and Expenditure; Providing Services Our Caribbean Family; Commonwealth	The Local/Regional media –Impact of events World Cities Economic Concepts – Being an informed consumer Information and Communication Technology	Our Caribbean Family(Location) - Caricom Our Nation –Nation Building; Outstanding Citizens Significance of National Symbols Rights and

		Modes of Travel/Transport – International Caribbean History Significant Caribbean Personalities The Importance of Caribbean integration Earth Concepts - Maps Compare and contrast local lifestyle, family, leisure within the islands and between the two islands. The Road to Republicanism Identifying the rights of a Voter Outstanding Citizens Good Health and Safety Practices; The Importance of a Healthy Environment The United Nation – Rights of a Child/Human Rights Consumer Affairs Various arms of the protective services and their Functions Qualities an Individual	National Government – Systems; Democracy; Local Government; Responsibility of a Citizen The United Nations- Role and Functions
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		should possess Concepts of dependency, independency and interdependency Cooperation at School, Work	
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The format for the 1994 syllabus entails Topics, Lessons, Objectives, Attitudes\Values, Activities and Resources. Whereas the revised 2002 structure of the Social-Studies syllabus was developed under the headings:

*Themes	*Units	*Sessions	*Concepts
* Objectives	*Learning skills	*Values\Attitudes	
*Teaching \Learning Strategies		*Formative Assessment Outcome	*Resources

The common elements between the two were: ***Objectives and Values /Attitudes.***

The revised 2002 syllabus focuses on the Quality of Teaching and Learning methods with the intention to improve the quality of education at the primary school level of the education system. As a member of the committee Mr. John stated that they considered global and local changes in societies with the aim of making it internationally appealing. It would enable children to find out about and discuss what is going on within their family, school, local community, country and the world.

The rapid changes that were taking place in Trinidad and Tobago and throughout the world required that students become more conscientious and question the development of priorities and objectives, nationalism, ethnicity, the environment, democracy and social rights and responsibilities.(2002Social-Studies syllabus) Such events and issues are communicated through mass communication technology.

As a result, students will need skills and understanding that will help them “become politically literate and responsible citizens” (2002, Social Studies Draft Syllabus).

One of the key implementation skills in the new syllabus is that of Active Learning. This is the involvement of pupils directly and actively in the learning process itself. This means that instead of receiving information verbally and visually, the children will be engaging and doing hands – on activities. It also promotes and fosters high level thinking skills which is an important factor in increasing Critical Thinking and Communication skills.

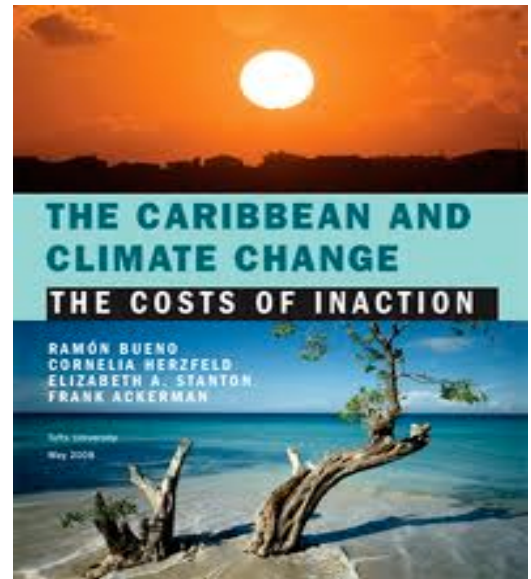
From analysis, many different thinking skills can be developed in the different units. These skills include:

- Information processing
- Reasoning
- Enquiry
- Creative Thinking
- Evaluation

When considering the impact of teaching methods on how students learn social studies, it is important to remember that they need a balance of teaching approaches .Some learning does not need the support of written notes and learning of facts. Facts and knowledge without research are useless and comprehending without facts is both difficult to develop and understand.

Active Learning methods are better at promoting understanding and creating an individual framework for understanding facts, developing skills and therefore the affective domain.

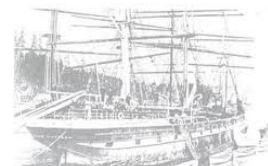
Some of the changes that have taken place in Trinidad and Tobago, within the Caribbean region and internationally would have contributed to the changes in our syllabus are:



- Rapid increase in the spread of HIV/AIDS
- Climate change and the Effects of Global Warming
- The Advancement of Information and Communication Technology



- Heads of Government in Caricom States, signed a Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas thus clearing the way for the transformation of the idea for a Common Market aspect of CARICOM into instead a Caribbean (CARICOM) Single Market and Economy.



- Significance of the East Indian Arrival in Trinidad and Tobago.
- Recognition of the Spiritual/Shouter Baptist faith. An annual holiday commemorates the repeal on March 30, 1951 of the 1917 Shouter Prohibition Ordinance that prohibited the activities of the Shouter or Spiritual Baptist faith.

Results of the Research

Some of the historical thinking concepts were realized based on the changes in the syllabus namely cause and consequence, continuity and change, historical perspectives as well as significance.

With regard to cause and consequence, the arrival of the East Indians in Trinidad and their significant presence and role in society, politically, culturally as well as socially, Indian Arrival day was one of the holidays that were added to the revised syllabus.

One notable topic that was excluded from the 2002 syllabus was that of the discovery of Trinidad by Christopher Columbus. This was due to the fact that it was not the main focus, but rather the British influence was more important and hence the onset of Independence and Republicanism. This therefore reflected Historical Perspective.

For the general change in a positive way as well as progress due to the existence of the family unit locally and through a broader spectrum internationally this was a prominent and important aspect that was concentrated on in the revised syllabus.

A notable finding was that of pupils' interaction, inclusion, hands-on activity and engagement coupled with teachers' active teaching and new innovative ways into the revised syllabus. This was one of the primary objective and criteria for the revision of the social studies syllabus.

Conclusion

In closing, the social- Studies syllabus whether old or new will work best in classrooms where the key ingredients of these mentioned below are found. They are:

- ✓ Establishment of positive relationships among students
- ✓ A dynamic classroom environment
- ✓ Class room organization and Methods

- ✓ The Skills/Attitudes that are develop
- ✓ Making the content relevant to a students' lives

The new syllabus addresses the modern and ever changing technological and advance improvements to suit the needs of a holistic child. Pupils are given the opportunity to understand themselves, in terms of family, community, nation, the Caribbean and the world. Children are more stimulated as well as challenged in this new changing environment.

The major skills reflected comprises of social issues which entails to a large degree values and attitudes. Children are encouraged to reflect on and communicate their feelings and beliefs, tolerating differences and accepting criticism. Pupils' attitudes about fundamental issues, the environment, gender roles, racial and other differences between people also have an impact upon the classroom. We have concluded therefore, that the 2004 Social-Studies syllabus will contribute significantly in improving the quality of teaching and learning in our country.