

Reflections from the Field

The Middlemen of MACOS

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Prompted by a recent review in American Anthropologist, I interviewed two people who played central roles in the training and dissemination of MACOS, a social studies curriculum unit designed for the fifth grade during the era of intensive curriculum reform beginning in the sixties. The article briefly discusses both how MACOS came to be and what subsequently happened to it. [curriculum, MACOS, politics of education, social studies]

Yes, I did teach that MACOS stuff. The kids loved it. Especially about the Yanamamos. They took drugs until the snot ran out of their noses and then beat the shit out of each other. The kids identified.

—Former local elementary school teacher

It was the single best thing that happened to me while a classroom teacher—it revolutionized the teaching and learning for our 5th and 6th grades.

—Former elementary school teacher (Falkenstein 1977:98)

I was saddened by Jay Ruby's film review "Anthropology as a Subversive Art: A Review of *Through These Eyes*," which appeared recently in *American Anthropologist* (107[4], December 2005). Not that the article itself made me sad, but it reminded me that the current crop of people working in "anthropology and education" probably have little or no idea of what the article was about or the story behind it. The purpose of this writing is to provide a brief history and analysis of MACOS, a social studies curriculum designed for upper elementary grades.

The acronym MACOS stands for "Man, A Course of Study." Little wonder that the whole ambitious curriculum package came to be known by its shorter acronym. The MACOS material was produced by the Education Development Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The project was closely associated with Jerome S. Bruner—a name well-known in psychology—who had a keen interest in how children learn.

I briefly describe the MACOS materials and then present the results of interviews with two individuals from regional centers through which it was introduced to teachers. Thus, the title of this article calls attention to the work of middlemen who managed the dissemination and implementation of the project. The materials themselves are numerous, including the wonderful set of films of anthropologist-filmmaker Asen Balikci. Here, I only inventory them for identification purposes. Nowadays, hardly any curriculum designer would label a program "MAN, a Course of Study." Even 40 years ago there were occasional rumblings about "Where is Woman in 'Man,

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A Course of Study?" but at the time *Man* generally referred to *Human*, rather than *Not Woman* as is its interpretation today.

I have compressed the history of a project that was five years in the design and five years in use. I do not claim this to be an objective view. Although I was teaching sixth grade on the day that Sputnik was launched (October 4, 1957), I find it hard to believe that Sputnik itself can be credited with the birth of the MACOS project. But Sputnik certainly gave a "wake-up call" to U.S. education, a call that precipitated a plethora of educational reforms in the 1960s, including the charge that the teaching of social studies was yet one more academic area in which U.S. education was lagging.

I was enraptured when I first heard project director Peter Dow describe the MACOS materials in November 1970. Although I was never directly involved with the project, I did obtain a full set of published materials and had access to all the films. By then I had added anthropology to my studies in education and was teaching at the university level. In my classes in anthropology and education, I pointed to MACOS as a superb example of the contribution anthropology could make to the curriculum. I agonized as instead I watched its rapid demise in the mid-1970s. This article, then, is more like a eulogy, a tribute to what I personally considered a great idea and a wonderful example of an anthropologically oriented project that many fifth and sixth grade teachers and students were privileged to experience during its active years.

Today, as the article in *AA* notes, anything left of the MACOS materials lies on dusty shelves in local school district curriculum offices or "resides in Peter Dow's basement" in Buffalo, New York (Ruby 2005:686), although some of the spectacular films developed for it—long separated from the program itself—are probably still available for anthropology classes. If this article intrigues you enough to want to know more about both the project's origins and its demise, I encourage you to read Peter Dow's insightful "insider's view" as related in *Schoolhouse Politics: Lessons from the Sputnik Era* (1991), a book that had its origins in his Harvard dissertation, ominously entitled "Innovation's Perils: An Account of the Origins, Development, Implementation, and Public Reaction to 'Man: A Course of Study'" (1979). His accounts provide insight into what seems to happen to anything even slightly controversial or avant-garde in U.S. education.

MACOS: The Concept and Materials

MACOS was developed as a film-based curriculum unit. The films were intended to stimulate discussion and arouse curiosity in much the same way that ethnography depends on the curiosity of the ethnographer to find out and piece together information. Totally absent from the MACOS films was what I used to think of as "the fifth-grade voice," informing pupils that "John and Mary are picking up buffalo chips, which the family will use for fuel." In the absence of overbearing narration or even translation of non-English dialogue in Balikci's masterful filming and editing, it was up to the pupils (together with their teacher) to try to figure out what Kingnuik might be telling her six-year-old stepson Umiapik inside the igloo.

The complete MACOS package included six hours of film, 30 booklets, nine informative teachers' manuals, three games, and two records, along with filmstrips, wall charts, and other classroom visuals. The multimedia package cost \$3,000 for a five-classroom set that could accommodate 150 students (Dow 1979:376, 382).

That was a significant expense for school districts at the time, especially for materials solely for fifth-grade social studies! The teachers' guides discussed salmon, herring gulls, baboons, and the Netsilik Eskimos, while the films included seven on animal life and eight devoted to the Netsilik. There was also a facsimile of the field notes of anthropologist Irven DeVore from his fieldwork among the baboons, and several booklets for the Eskimo unit. Materials needed to be readily available in any school using MACOS, not locked up in the local media center. The films that accompany the Netsilik Eskimo material are:

- Fishing at the Stone Weir (30 minutes)
- Life on the Tundra (14 minutes)
- At the Caribou Crossing-Place (29 minutes)
- Autumn River Camp, Part I (26 minutes)
- Autumn River Camp, Part II (32 minutes)
- Winter Sea-Ice Camp, Part I (32 minutes)
- Winter Sea-Ice Camp, Part II (30 minutes)
- The Legend of the Raven (20 minutes)

The Northwest Regional Training and Dissemination Center

How were these ideas and materials implemented? To explore this aspect of the MACOS story, I look first at the "middleman" in the case I know best: what was happening on my own campus, the University of Oregon. The original idea for MACOS did not start here, and its origins on our campus occurred long after the ever-changing (and constantly expanding) group of Cambridge scholars began pondering how they might restructure the social studies curriculum. On my campus, MACOS had its start in a conversation between a member of the education faculty and a former doctoral student, William H. "Bill" Harris. Bill had become restive in his postdoctoral position as a staff member of the state's Department of Education. So when he heard about the new MACOS project that had been developed at EDC (originally Educational Services, Incorporated) in Cambridge, he realized, "MACOS sounded like a neat program." He became even more interested when he learned that the National Science Foundation (NSF, the sponsoring agency) was looking for educators and educational institutions willing to take on the task of disseminating its new project, which had been under development since 1963.

Bill saw an unusual opportunity in the NSF-EDC search. He expressed his interest and helped to write a proposal to locate one of the new centers at the University of Oregon. Next, he traveled east to meet with the developers of MACOS, including Jerome Bruner, whom he found to be "keenly interesting and down-to-earth." Bruner was the obvious linchpin in the MACOS program that finally resulted.

Bill's proposal was to have the university serve as the West Coast contact that NSF sought (although he mused that EDC staff "always seemed surprised that anything happened west of Chicago"). The project not only needed to get the word out about its availability but also needed educators to conduct teacher training. Bill had a lot of "faith" in teachers, but after having worked with them for so long (previously he had been an elementary school principal) he realized that most elementary teachers want and need to know more about the subjects they are asked to teach. He was also aware how professionally isolated teachers can become. One of the conditions he wrote into

his proposal was that teachers attending his summer institutes would have to be accompanied by a principal or a staff member from the school district who had responsibility for the social studies curriculum. Bill recalls,

We really worked on instructional strategies with these people, so by the time the institute ended, teachers felt confident about the material and approach. We went through the program step by step. We had plenty of time to do this, for the institutes were four weeks long, with two evenings and four and a half days of instruction. And we always had teachers on hand who had already taught the material.

NSF imposed little direction on its disseminators, but it counted heavily on them, for MACOS was never promoted nationally. Although keenly interested in instructional processes, and in retrospect viewing the time he spent in elementary classrooms as "among the most intellectually rewarding periods of his academic life" (Dow 1991:255), Bruner himself was "not especially interested in teacher training" (Dow 1979:276). Nor were NSF funds allocated specifically for dissemination, an issue that would come back later to haunt them. There had been argument and compromise enough in getting the final product to the point where it was ready for distribution; others would have to engage in "the tough job of implementing the program in classrooms across the country" (Dow 1979:295).

These summer institutes, as they came to be known, focused on the MACOS materials but also included training components for instructional processes (for example, how to support "inquiry," which was at the root of MACOS). In addition, Bill attended to the interpersonal processes that teachers, together with their administrators, would need in order to work effectively as teams.

That special emphasis made the University of Oregon's program unique, just as each region's center reflected the interests and capabilities of its director. Oregon's center officially became the Northwest Regional Training and Dissemination Center for MACOS. Similar winning proposals were submitted from Florida State University, Central Connecticut College, Temple Buell College in Denver, and a center that eventually ended up at the State University of New York, Albany. The Oregon center proposed to work with school districts throughout Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Alaska, and Hawaii, attempting especially to identify what Bill called "lighthouse districts" that would point the way for other districts to follow.

Back on the campus, Bill was now faculty and was assigned graduate assistance, including Richard Arends, who worked with Bill for the next four years while completing his doctorate. In accord with MACOS policy, Bill also invited a faculty anthropologist to serve as the anthropologist-in-residence on his team. The institutes always had an anthropologist on hand. It also was policy that there should be teachers with classroom experience in MACOS present, so for his first year's training sessions Bill invited teachers from elsewhere who had previously taught the materials.

"What is human about human beings?" was the overall guiding question, and MACOS provided the material for investigating the topic. Through a series of workshops, lectures, and field trials, the program had developed a sequence and logic that led easily to the Netsilik films. That was where the cultural anthropology really kicked in, but students were guided first to explore some critical issues regarding the

nature of life itself: the life cycle of salmon for the role of animal survival, herring gulls for rudimentary parenting, free-ranging baboons for an examination of troop life, and the activities of the Netsilik Eskimo for the development of culture. Across these four areas other critical themes emerged, such as the contrast of the prolonged period of human dependency and learning versus innate behavior among salmon and herring gulls.

There was a perspective to be gained, there were teaching strategies to learn, and there were subtle lessons of working together that Bill was anxious to impart. Teachers who attended the workshops reportedly enjoyed them, learned from them, and gave them high approval. And no one could deny that they cast teachers in a different role, one in which pupil and teacher alike had the same data in front of them for drawing conclusions. Teachers had to learn to be resources rather than authorities, for who knew for sure what the Netsilik were saying to each other in films in which they spoke only their native tongue?

The films were the major instructional media for training teachers, just as they were for the students. As Peter Dow observes:

Like laboratory studies in the natural sciences, ethnographic films allowed students to subject behavior to repeated observation and analysis. Instead of telling students how people in other cultures behave and why, the films permitted children to figure things out for themselves through direct observation. [1991:95]

In addition to summer institutes, MACOS teachers in each district gathered for a day or two of in-service training several times throughout the school year. The anthropologist usually attended these sessions. The sessions had the effect of reminding teachers that they were not alone in facing provocative questions or problems raised by the course content.

Bill was determined to have at least one district in each state of his huge "territory" participate in the program. No one had yet been recruited for dissemination work in California, so Bill agreed to include Northern California within his realm. His efforts in California were not as exhaustive except in Berkeley, where his training and implementation program was adopted.

His success in recruitment was varied. He did better in some metropolitan areas, but he was not successful in implementing the program fully either in Portland, Oregon's largest city, or in his and the university's hometown, Eugene. His failure to get MACOS into the local schools was a disappointment, but as he explained, its social studies coordinator simply "wasn't keen" on a program that hadn't been her idea in the first place: "And if you didn't have administrative support from the very first, you were running uphill!"¹

Bill conducted the summer institutes in person, ably assisted by Arends and, after year one, by local teachers who had been trained at the university's own center. The two men worked furiously during those days, traveling endlessly by auto and air, to respond to district inquiries within the region and to provide in-service training for districts already on board. They had contact of some kind with at least 50 districts and successful implementations from California to Alaska and Hawaii. Most often their efforts were focused on the fifth or sixth grade, although some fourth, seventh, and eighth grade teachers attended the summer institutes and followed the MACOS curriculum.

Some Problems

From the very outset, MACOS presented problems. It had evolved as a curriculum unit designed for one particular grade, customarily grade five. Regardless of the grade level where it was placed, however, the project supplanted what the teacher or the district curriculum had previously covered for that grade. That ran against the grain of most school districts, which customarily adopted texts on the basis of a comprehensive and integrated curriculum for grades one through six or one through eight. This raised a perennial question: If you put MACOS in, what were you going to take out? There were many textbooks for elementary social studies on the market (often dull beyond belief), but at least they offered the continuity of a multiyear curriculum that systematically took pupils through some seemingly logical sequence of ideas and concepts, typically utilizing an "expanding environments" approach, moving from the local community to the city, the state, the nation, and the world. Where did the kinds of questions raised by MACOS fit into such a scheme?

Along with the obviously difficult questions raised by the problem of grade placement, there were other issues that seemed to invite trouble. Some materials were quietly eased out of the program as it was being implemented. An example is the fable *The Many Lives of Kiviok*, about a mythical figure in Eskimo culture whose outlandish exploits and, especially, whose multiple wives, seemed too awkward (i.e., risky) for teachers to present to children. The initial inclusion of such potentially controversial material illustrates the blinders toward public criticism that those connected with the program tended to wear at the time. As Peter Dow was later to wonder, "Did we have to leave ourselves open for such easy criticism?" (1979:416).

Over the next few years, even as the dissemination efforts grew, there were other issues brewing that would eventually derail the entire effort. One problem was in gathering evidence of what kids were learning. Most teachers claimed that the kids loved the program, but there was no way to assess such positive feelings or measure applications of inquiry processes or problem-solving skill except through anecdotal comments. Bill urged teachers to keep account of such events, but he acknowledged the difficulty of capturing any moments when a pupil actually employed critical thinking or questioned some traditional practice. There were no ways to measure what kids were learning, no way to identify the areas in which learning occurred, especially to people suspicious of an elite group of Cambridge intellectuals "taking over" the social studies curriculum.

Resistance: Rounding Up the "Usual Suspects"

A small but growing handful of vocal critics often showed up to greet any new presentation of MACOS material, with cries that the curriculum they were pushing was teaching children to question things that did not need to be questioned or was un-American or un-Christian. As Bill remarked of the severest critics, there were not so many of them, and their complaints were usually off-the-wall, but they were loud and persistent. These were the days of ultraconservative right-wingers (sound familiar?) such as the Heritage Foundation and the John Birch Society in Oregon (and elsewhere; see, for example, Woolfson 1974). Nationally, both James J. Kilpatrick and Pat Robertson managed to get into the act, and as Ruby's article notes, Robertson's diatribe can still be viewed today (see Christian Broadcasting Network 2001).

Local resistance groups, such as the Citizens for Moral Education in Florida or the Citizens United for Responsible Education were hastily assembled. Bill continued to make his presentations, but he was increasingly aware of mounting opposition to the entire program.

There was also early and unanticipated opposition coming from the federal level, from within Congress itself. The opposition turned primarily on the question of the teaching of “traditional values” and the schools’ handling of the values question, although concern was also expressed over the lengthy period of federal support for program development. The resistance is best summarized in the words of Representative John Conlan (R-Arizona), in the *Congressional Record* of April 9, 1975:

MACOS materials are full of references to adultery, cannibalism, killing female babies and old people, trial marriage and wife-swapping, violent murder, and other abhorrent behavior of the virtually extinct Netsilik Eskimo subculture the children study.

Communal living, elimination of the weak and elderly in society, sexual permissiveness and promiscuity, violence, and other revolting behavior are recurring MACOS themes.

This is simply not the kind of material Congress or any Federal agency should be promoting and marketing with taxpayers’ money. [p. H2585; see Falkenstein 1977:146–147]

That was the general nature of the complaints. But what seems to have stopped MACOS cold in its tracks in 1975, after the program had been operating almost nationwide for five years, was the fact that technically NSF funds had never been appropriated for the dissemination effort. What Conlan initiated, others took up, eventuating in a congressional vote that greatly reduced the funds that NSF could make available for that effort. Without continued funding, Bill’s training and support program could not continue their work. As funding withered, so did the extensive efforts at dissemination and so did MACOS itself.

Gradually the problems of trying to do anything to alter the school program also became more evident. As personnel were moved about or retired, and new staff and new administrators replaced old ones, districts lost internal funding for continuing staff development. Smaller school districts objected to the cost of purchasing the entire set of materials, and as Bill noted, teachers absolutely had to have access to the films to use the program. Bill remembers those times as “interesting but very frustrating.” Adoptions became less frequent as word spread among school administrators that the program was tinged with controversy.

In spite of controversy, the program persisted for a few years, especially in districts where it had strong administrative support, including several within Bill’s region: in Alaska, Washington, and Oregon. For a while, Hawaii, with its single-state unified school district, was keenly interested in the program and had many classrooms involved. But the questions raised would not go away, especially those dealing with underlying universals. As Peter Dow explains:

[The goal of MACOS was] to have students recognize that beneath the surface differences between cultures lie some universal behaviors that define the humanity shared by all people. It was the search for an understanding of those cultural and biological universals—birth, death, reproduction, play, parental care and protection, partnership, marriage, family, reciprocity, aggression, humor, sharing, explaining, believing—that *Man: A Course of Study* was really all about. [1979:474]

The growing resistance took aim at the very heart of what MACOS was intended to accomplish, the idea of genuine inquiry. As Jay Ruby summarizes in his report:

Unfortunately, the culturally relative point of view of the course—that is, the basic assumption that different cultures find different ways to solve basic human problems—also appeared to seriously challenge some basic assumptions that some parents and some congresspersons had about the goal of education. The ensuing controversy caused MACOS to be dropped from almost all school systems. [2005:685]

That brief paragraph sums up how things ended. It signals both the kinds of local resistance that Bill (and other regional directors) was meeting and trouble coming at the federal level. Conlan saw in MACOS a “dangerous trend toward a uniform national curriculum,” and he and others worked toward its demise. After Congress took away the funds dedicated to dissemination, Bill was unable to continue staff development programs or to try to build the necessary evaluation materials: “I was always sorry that I could not get a grant to follow up what happened with our dissemination model.”

The dissemination function, now separated from NSF funding, was taken over by a commercial publisher, Curriculum Development Associates (CDA). The CDA argued that it was not economically feasible to support a four-week workshop; at most it could fund only a few days for training, far less than what a university-based program could offer. Meanwhile, Bill’s assistant Richard Arends had graduated, and his own time was taken up with other activities. In much the same manner that it had at the local level, at the national level MACOS, as Jay Ruby aptly puts it, simply “disappeared.”

The disappearing act took place gradually; in Oregon the sale of MACOS materials reached its peak in 1972 and began declining after that (Falkenstein 1977:131). The materials and the excellent films were still around, and teachers were free to pick and choose anything from the set if they did not follow the entire curriculum. But the appeal of being part of a national effort or being at the forefront of a challenging social studies program was eroding. The other centers around the country suffered that same fate as that in the Northwest. Without NSF funds, they were unable to continue. “At its peak,” Jay Ruby reports, “the MACOS curriculum was taught in 47 states, in 1,700 schools, and to over 400,000 students” (2005:685). Despite these numbers, as the movement toward accountability gained momentum, those defending MACOS were unable to provide adequate evidence to justify or support its continued use in the face of such opposition.

The Role of the Anthropologist

Why were anthropologists so prevalent in MACOS?² Was this a pretext for slipping anthropology into the curriculum of the elementary school? Bruner himself “never thought of MACOS as a course designed to teach the concepts of anthropology or behavioral biology as an end in themselves” (Dow 1991:138). However, although Bruner was the linchpin for the project, the original idea did not begin with him, and he was not initially in charge.

At the beginning, the idea of “turning all students into little anthropologists” had indeed been central to the program. The idea had originated with Douglas Oliver, a Harvard anthropologist whose earliest vision was to make anthropology the unifying core of the *entire* social studies program, to begin in first grade with “the simplest and

oldest of human societies, the hunter-gatherers, and then progress through the grades by studying increasingly complex cultural forms . . . concentrating more heavily on the historical development of Western civilization beginning in grade seven" (Dow 1979:120).

Eventually the plan was to include a whole new interdisciplinary "scope and sequence" designed for grades 1–12, but the project began with its elementary school component. When Oliver heard about the ethnographic filming being done by Asen Balikci, he immediately commissioned him to continue filming among the Netsilik, but he asked Balikci to film now as though he were a first grader, with the idea that "the viewer should feel as if he were actually present, observing material sequences of behavior much the way an ethnographer would" (Dow 1979:128). Oliver was able to recruit others to begin work on similar projects intended for different grade levels: "With sufficient funds and time, they would have most certainly brought off a transformation of social studies teaching in the elementary schools" (Dow 1979:134). But Oliver left the project for personal family reasons, and it never happened. Despite his departure from the project, Dow writes, "Without Douglas Oliver, 'Man: A Course of Study' would never have come to be" (1979:134).

There had been long and sometimes heated arguments between Jerrold Zacharias, whom Dow describes as the "driving force" (1979:86) behind the curriculum development movement of the times—and Jerome Bruner. Originating in a shared recognition of the sorry state of U.S. social science education, the debates covered what could be done to improve it, the role of curriculum content, the age levels at which children are most amenable to information relayed in particular ways, and how discipline-based to make the project. Bruner's concern was with the development of the learner's mind, rather than toward fostering a particular discipline.

From the beginning there was also a resolve to include as a major teaching strategy, cross-cultural comparison, to "learn about ourselves by looking at others." The project experienced an unfortunate loss of comparative material when a planned study of the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert was cancelled in response to the growing political correctness of the late 1960s, which de-emphasized the study of brown-skinned people half naked in the desert. But in spite of that setback, the program remained heavily weighted in favor of anthropology, and it seemed essential always to have anthropologist consultants available to any school district that intended to use MACOS.

Anthropologist G. James "Jim" Patterson was completing his doctorate at the University of Colorado at Boulder when he heard about the search for anthropologists to help with the dissemination effort, and applied for a position. He was hired for the Regional Center located at what was in the process of becoming Temple Buell College in Denver. Because of his prior experience as a high school anthropology teacher, the task of working with teachers to implement an anthropology curriculum was a natural fit for him.

It was not Jim's responsibility to seek out school districts or try to talk them into adopting MACOS; that was his director's assignment. His assignment was to work with districts that had already signed on and with teachers attending one of the summer training institutes being run in that region. Reflecting back, Jim noted that he "loved every minute" of the two years he devoted to the assignment.

Jim also had opportunities to visit Cambridge to interact with MACOS staff and learn more about the materials and their intended use. During our interviews, he was inclined to think of the people he met at Cambridge in terms of the roles they played

regarding the MACOS material. He mentioned the young sociobiologist Robert Trivers, who developed the salmon and herring gull units; anthropologist Irvén DeVore, who developed the baboon materials from his own fieldwork; and, finally, the Bulgarian-born anthropologist then at the University of Montreal, Asen Balikci, who by that time had been deeply engaged in photographing the Netsilik.

Jim was sent throughout the Rocky Mountain region as a MACOS trainer and troubleshooter. He attended local conferences wherever there was interest. His responsibility was primarily to talk with teachers—sometimes teachers already teaching MACOS, sometimes in school districts that were only considering it. As he stated, “I wasn’t there to sell the program. I was there to help implement it. I don’t recall any resistance—on the contrary, I recall great enthusiasm by everybody. This was before it became political. The educators loved it. The kids liked it. We were always greeted with great enthusiasm.”

Jim’s task was to answer questions raised by the films, to go into classrooms to talk or to play MACOS games with pupils, and to help teachers learn how best to present new materials. He recalled,

If they were in place, they were barely in place, and we worked through them together. Certainly there were teacher guides, but we would innovate whenever we needed. Sometimes it worked; sometimes it didn’t.

And I remember, in any context, 10 or 20 years later, if I happened to meet somebody who had gone through the program, they would say, ‘Oh, yeah, that was a great program. We had it where I grew up, and I still remember it.’ So I know it had an impact, although I can’t quantify that.

The “Usual Suspects” Again

Jim continued,

What happened early on, some conservative congressmen like John Conlan, or conservatives such as the John Birchers in Colorado, picked it up as something that was a threat to the Christian values they thought the schools should be teaching. Others argued that the Netsilik were “too primitive” to be a good example, and so forth. But the kids really liked the material. The criticism was outrageous. I mean, innocent fifth and sixth graders saw a culture—granted it was a reconstructed culture—that they thought was really cool. The kids never really had a problem with it. But some conservative adults did. Pat Robertson—the guy’s still at it after all these years—went after it because it was teaching “humanism.” And I remember being pleased that I was labeled a humanist and being told I was presenting a humanist perspective on the world. I remember standing in front of the school board in a town west of Denver, and an audience member who was trying to get MACOS withdrawn asked me if I was a humanist. I said, “Yes! I am a humanist!” and he blasted me for being un-American and trying to teach these things to children.

For another example, in the seagull film, at one point it shows a male kind of fluttering over a female and landing on her back. This is called mounting behavior. And one guy said, “What you are teaching is wrong.” And I said the students just take that for what it is, and it isn’t human sexuality. But I couldn’t communicate with him.

Another thing we had was a seal hunting game. The students would get little cutout pieces of paper that represented pieces of seal. Growing up in our system, kids tended to hoard the seal meat. And when they did, they lost the game, because in this game you had to share the seal in order to win. And that, according to the John Birch people, was teaching Socialism. And I said that reflected their values, and that upset them, too. So it was really hard to counter these people. They were coming from a worldview that really wasn’t mine, but,

unfortunately, they were successful in getting some school districts to drop MACOS. But not right away. And not universally. And I really don't know where that went, nationwide.

The program was still going when I left Temple Buell to go to Romania in 1970–71 to do fieldwork. When I returned, the program was still going strong. I could have gone back, but I had an offer to teach anthropology at Eastern Oregon College, and I went there instead. In my college teaching at Eastern, I used some of the MACOS stuff myself. The films, mostly. I had college kids do the same analysis that we did with the fifth graders. The results were very successful.

The material was absolutely innocent. There was no agenda. It was an opportunity to teach about another culture and about animal life. And the kids loved it. The instruction materials were damn good. We had some upper-class kids and schools, but we also taught it in working-class small towns, and we never seemed to have behavior problems or kids not wanting to learn. You'd have to be pretty much of a dud not to make anthropology interesting to kids. I felt the same way about MACOS—you'd have to be pretty much of a dud to teach it badly.

For those of us who were involved, it never crossed our minds that it would cause trouble. We didn't discuss whether we needed to water this down or be careful with it. I take that back, partly. With the business about the herring gull mounting, someone said, "Maybe some teachers will have trouble with this. Maybe we should leave it out." So they did.

But the idea that we were humanists, or had done a bad thing, or that this was a Socialist plot, weaning children away from biblical Christianity, never occurred. For most of us, it never crossed our minds that this might be controversial. Until the program started making noises, we didn't even discuss whether we should be careful about it.

Remembering MACOS

MACOS is dead! Long live MACOS! Describing MACOS to anyone today, the reaction is usually, "Well, it sounds really wonderful. Why don't they bring it back again?" I wish that could happen. The few people who still remember anything about it spoke of it fondly as something from the distant past. The enthusiasm it generated was passed on to everyone who worked with it, through the middlemen, as I have called them here, and on to the classroom teachers and pupils.

Today, even the films are often dismissed for being "reconstructions" (which they clearly were). And the once minor role the federal government played in U.S. education has shifted, so that now the feds call more of the shots, even while school boards appear to call for more local decision making. And although we are intent on leaving no child behind, we see how every child's future is narrowly dictated by scores on tests that have become the curriculum. The goals of inquiry and discovery now yield to answers that can be rapidly scored, where there is only one correct answer after all. The dominant educational philosophy is very far from that of MACOS.

Granted, MACOS did raise fiscal concerns about supporting a program that cost so much and took so long to develop. And it was indeed the environment of an "elite group of Cambridge intellectuals" that facilitated the dialogues out of which MACOS grew. But if we cannot accomplish anything like it today, at least we see what is capable of being done, because it has been done.

As for that teacher who remembered using Yanomami material with her class some 35 years ago—she has simply forgotten the exact materials she taught with which class. The Yanomami material came in a different package with a different set of teaching strategies. I am sure that the kids loved it, as she recalls, and I have no doubt she really did use some MACOS material at some point in her teaching career, as she insisted. Although she has the different programs confused, she was a beneficiary of

the influence MACOS had on the entire social studies curriculum. It does not really matter after all these years—she benefited from the infusion of anthropological content into the social studies curriculum and was influenced by the presence and instructional processes of MACOS, indirectly if not directly.

MACOS “contained materials that dealt with some of life’s most central issues—birth, death, reproduction, mate selection and marriage, conflict and cooperation, caring and sharing, learning, surviving, explaining, believing—and brought to the classroom topics central to the psychological well-being of the child” (Dow 1991:137). In our grim determination to leave no child behind, apparently we cannot afford the luxury of having children attend to such matters as the core question addressed in the MACOS project, “What is human about human beings?”

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Notes

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1. Relations between the fledgling Council on Anthropology and Education (CAE) and MACOS were of this same order. One of the original standing committees of CAE, which formally organized in 1969, was the Preparation of Educators and Educational Materials. But MACOS was already fully developed by then: it “hadn’t been our idea,” and as best I recall, no member of CAE was involved in its development. Nor did CAE have any intention of becoming so directly involved with precollegiate curriculum development at the time.

2. In addition to Oliver, there were anthropologists aplenty among the project’s distinguished consultants, including Robert Adams, Timothy Asch, Asen Balikci, Michael Coe, Ted Dethlefsen, Irven DeVore, Nick England, Hans Guggenheim, Allan Holmberg, Richard Lee, Elli Maranda, John Marshall, Lorna Marshall, Robert McNeish, Sherwood Washburn, and Bea Whiting, in addition to those tapped to develop material for particular grades.

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