Man: A Course of Study (MACOS)

# Context

## America

The escalation of the Cold War in the late 1950s and the launch of Sputnik in 1957 created quite a storm in the US. The Americans blamed the 'pathetic’ state of their schooling system for losing the technological space race against the Russians. A debate about the schooling system resulted in the [National Defence Education Act](http://wwwedu.oulu.fi/tohtorikoulutus/jarjestettava_opetus/Troehler/NDEA_1958.pdf) (NDEA) of 1958. The NDEA ensured that there were enough funds for revamping and refocusing the curriculum in order to ensure greater academic and intellectual rigour. Empiricism and scientism were the objectives of this reappraisal.

A conference with the top US scientists and academics, including Robert Gagnė and B.F. Skinner, was called to consider how to embed this empiricism and scientism into the American school curriculum. The conference was chaired by the eminent cognitive psychologist/Harvard academic, Jerome Bruner. Bruner introduced his theories of meaningful learning through an understanding of concepts (not facts) in order to develop critical thinking. He wrote about his theories soon after the conference in his book, *Process of Education,* (1962)*.* Bruner realised this concept in a unique, federally-funded curriculum project for social studies called Man: A Course of Study or MACOS.

For more information, see: Fitchett, Paul G. and Russell, William Benedict. (2012). "[Reflecting on MACOS: why it failed and what we can learn from its demise](http://ucl-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/UCL_VU1:CSCOP_UCL:TN_ericEJ975417)". *Paedagogica Historica* 48(3), pp. 469-484.

## Great Britain

The UK also went through a crisis in education due to the unfairness of the selective system of education (grammar vs. secondary modern) and the 11+ examinations that determined the future of young children and which caused a great deal of unhappiness among the growing middle class. Under Harold Wilson’s leadership, the economy was buoyant and for the first time more was spent on education than on defence as the government realised the importance of educating the young for the future of the country. The government’s investment in education resulted in 1,800 new secondary schools being built in England and Wales from the mid-60s onwards. During this time, the benefits of child centred education were discussed widely and this resulted in the rise of many subject and age specific curriculum development projects. It is for this reason that the 60s are generally considered the ‘Golden Age of Curriculum Development’.

The promise of secondary education for all was fulfilled and the school leaving age was finally raised to 16 in 1972. Provision of life skills for the older children resulted in discussions about a development programme. A comparable programme to MACOS was the Humanities Curriculum Project which was developed under the auspicious of the Schools Council (established in 1964 by the Secretary of State for Education and who took responsibility for curriculum and examinations) which was a powerful body dominated by teacher representatives.

For more information, see: Gillard, D. Chapter 6 : 1951-1970 : The wind of change. *Education in England: a brief history*. Available at: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/history/chapter06.html>.