

Curriculum Proposals for International Education

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Professor Lavone A. Hanna, San Francisco State College, proposes five principles basic to setting up a school program for furthering international understanding.

EVER SINCE THE CLOSE of World War II, most schools have given at least lip service to the idea that development of world-minded citizens is one of the primary functions of public education. National and state educational conferences have high-lighted the importance of this objective. Numerous books and magazine articles as well as whole issues of professional journals have been devoted to this aspect of the school's responsibility in these confused and troubled times. Suggestions and recommendations for what the schools should and can do have been made by the Committee on International Relations of the National Education Association, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and the National Council for the Social Studies in their excellent book, *Education for International Understanding in American Schools*, and by the Educational Policies Commission in their pamphlet, *American Education and International Tensions*.

In spite of these suggestions and recommendations, the curriculum and the methods of instruction used in most schools have undergone little change or modification. Many boys and girls graduate from our high schools with

little knowledge of world cultures or of problems facing the peoples of the world except that which they have gained in a traditional course in United States history and in a study of old world background in the seventh grade. In most schools an elective course in international relations, world history, or Latin-American history; a unit in a senior problems course; or a one-day-a-week current events discussion in the social studies or English class is the only concession made to the necessity of dealing with current world problems and international relations. The seriousness of our times, the confusion and uncertainty in the minds of most American citizens, the ignorance and apathy toward international problems shown by large numbers of adults require that schools drastically reorganize their curricula so that development of world-minded citizens may be given priority over other school functions.

Concerted Effort Needed

Reorganization is needed particularly at the secondary level. At present United States history is the only social studies course required in most high schools. Traditionally this course has been taught chronologically with little

or no time given to the postwar period or, for that matter, to the twentieth century. World history courses as now organized, even if required of all students, can hardly be expected to equip young people with the understandings and insights needed to cope with world problems and to make wise decisions.

Full understanding implies not only knowledge but identification with other people and emotional involvement in their problems, their achievements, their aspirations, and their fears. This requires a concerted effort on the part of the school. It must furnish opportunity for children and youth to meet again and again a few basic principles around which the total program of international teaching is organized so that these principles may be thoroughly understood and accepted as a basis for action.

FIVE BASIC PRINCIPLES

This means too that international education cannot be neglected at any grade level; that a continuous program must be developed even though time honored curriculum content is discarded and previously required courses are dropped. To say that there is no room in the curriculum for a required course in international relations, or to attempt to teach world understanding in a short unit of five or six weeks is to fail to understand the criticalness of the times and to meet the needs of youth in a rapidly changing world.

International education which attempts to equip children and youth to live intelligently in a world of rapid change and uncertainty might well focus on the following basic principles.

Science and technology have made

all people increasingly interdependent.

Young children in the elementary grades soon understand this generalization as they study about workers in their own community and learn that many of the things they like to eat and play with are produced in other communities and other parts of their world. As they sail their ships out of the harbor they have built on the schoolroom floor, or unload cargo from distant ports, visit the market, or fly their airplanes to the far parts of the world, this generalization becomes meaningful and real. Older children through a study of communication and transportation gain new insight into this principle as they see how time and space have shrunk, how strategic boundaries have become meaningless, and how all nations have become close neighbors.

A knowledge of economic geography is necessary to an understanding that the resources of the world are not equally distributed and that failure to have free access to goods and markets causes tension among peoples and nations. High school youth must learn too the effect of tariffs, bounties, cartels, and international investments on the relations between nations; the importance of exports and imports on their own economic well being; and the necessary work of the Economic and Social Council and other agencies of the United Nations.

Interdependence of people can also be understood through a study of scientific and medical achievements and of the art, music, and literary contributions which all nations have made to the cultural heritage of the world. A focus on current events helps youth to understand too that most domestic

problems have international implications and that failure of a crop on the other side of the earth or the fall of a government in a distant nation may affect the price of their food or the security of their jobs.

All people have the same basic needs but have learned different ways of satisfying their needs. This principle is easily grasped by boys and girls in the primary school if they reconstruct in their classroom a simple culture and identify themselves with a way of life which they can comprehend and emotionally accept. Seventh grade children in developing their concepts of family life can understand not only their own role in the family and the place of the family in American culture but contrasting patterns of family life in other parts of the world. Older children can study more complex cultures, selected because of their importance or because of a contrasting way of life or ideology. An attempt to make a comprehensive study of all peoples of the world is neither feasible nor desirable. An accurate, realistic, and scrupulously fair picture of a few cultures would do more to break down prejudices and stereotyped thinking and build international understanding than half truths and sketchy information about many.

Emphasis in the study of other countries must be placed on the similarities as well as the differences which exist among the nations of the world, on the characteristics and potentialities of peoples, on the ways people of various cultures are indebted to each other, and on the help they can give each other in the future. A study of the environment and the relationship of people to it should do much to help students under-

stand why people behave the way they do, their problems, their aspirations, and their fears.

Because it is seldom possible to give children direct experience in the way people live in other parts of the world, great use must be made of motion pictures, stories, drama, film strips, music, art, visitors who have lived abroad, and any community resource which exemplifies a different culture. The fact that America is a nation grown strong through contributions made by many ethnic and racial groups makes the community a laboratory in which children and youth can study the likenesses and differences existing among cultures and can develop appreciation of the rich contributions these differences have made to American life. The fact that America has not solved the problem of intercultural tensions, and that prejudices and scapegoating exist in our midst, is a challenge to the schools. Good international relations depend upon good intergroup relations at home.

Fiction builds understanding of other peoples by making clear the mores and folkways, the similarities and differences, and the reasons why people behave as they do. It also helps the reader to identify himself with another culture, to put himself in the place of another, and to become emotionally involved in the problems, hopes, and fears of the people in the story. Building an understanding of other cultures is thus not the sole task of the social studies teacher. It is one which the art, music, drama, and literature teacher must likewise share.

International organization and cooperation are necessary for peace and

world progress. The importance of cooperation and organization in face-to-face groups is readily seen by children in the elementary school as a result of their own group experience. The need for rules and laws and officers to enforce laws is also recognized through study of the school and community. The many experiences provided in the modern school for group planning, thinking, deciding, acting, and evaluating give children skills and attitudes needed for effective democratic participation. However, the problems of international organization, the background, structure, activities, achievements, deficiencies, and future of the United Nations and its subsidiary organizations are problems for secondary students rather than elementary.

Children in the junior high school as they consider the struggle of the thirteen colonies to form a strong union may draw comparisons and contrasts with the contemporary struggle of the nations of the world to organize and work together. Certainly much attention needs to be given throughout senior high school to the conflict between aggressive nationalism and world organization. Only in this manner can youth understand the forces which divide people and can come to think internationally rather than nationally, and make wise decisions as to the role the United States must play in world affairs—decisions regarding sovereign rights, economic aid to underdeveloped nations, international police force, atomic control, and war and peace.

Wars are not inevitable; they are futile and destructive. A study of the differences in cultures helps students to understand that wars are a learned be-

havior, not an inherent one, and that in some cultures wars have been unknown. Young people must become familiar with the reasons why men and nations fight; with the cost of wars in terms of their waste of human resources as well as in their destruction of natural resources and economic goods; and with the futility of attempting to solve international problems by war. Here both United States and world history can be drawn upon to show the causes, results, and cost of major wars.

With the advent of the atomic bomb, fear of future wars becomes more imminent. The schools need to teach the truth about atomic energy and the social and international implications of nuclear fission. "Unless the people learn their way around in the area in which decisions are necessary and are being made, their right and freedom to make such decisions may ultimately be abrogated."¹ Both science and social studies teachers have responsibility for providing such instruction.

Democracy and totalitarianism are conflicting ideologies which can exist together in the world only when nations feel secure from change imposed from without. The schools have an obligation to help young people to understand democratic principles, how they have been evolved, and what they mean in their own lives and in the life of the nation. While democracy is best learned by living democratically and the schools are therefore obligated to provide a democratic atmosphere and to use democratic processes, young people need to understand the evolution of the democratic ideal and basic hu-

¹ Will Burnett, "The Teacher and Atomic Energy," *Education*, 68 (May 1948), 541.

man rights as set forth in historical documents, and the growth of the tradition of civil liberties in the United States. They need also to understand what democracy means to the rest of the world and the provisions and implications of the Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations.

If youth are to understand the threats to democracy in the world today, opportunity must be provided also for young people to learn the principles and practices of totalitarianism, both fascism and communism. Study of comparative ideologies and governments at the twelfth grade level should be required in all high schools.

Youth also need to clarify their thinking on the role of the United States and other democratic nations in securing and guaranteeing human rights for all people throughout the world. In the days and years ahead crises will arise and decisions will have to be made. The safety of the nation and of the world may depend on how well young citizens have been taught to think through these problems and how well informed they are on international issues.

How international understanding is taught is probably more important than the curriculum pattern which is followed. The problems approached should be used in order that children will learn to recognize and analyze problems, search for accurate and pertinent information from many sources, examine evidence for bias and distortion, draw sound conclusions, and act on the basis of their conclusions. Newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, motion pictures, radio broadcasts and recordings, and current books should be used, interpreted and evaluated. Open-mindedness, avoidance of stereotyped thinking and prejudice are outcomes to be sought in any study of international relations. Democratic methods in the classroom which encourage class discussion and interaction among pupils, small group activities, and pupil-teacher planning should be used. Interest in world affairs, a willingness to accept change as desirable, ability to think critically, and faith in the democratic method for solving disputes are behaviors which world-minded citizens must possess and which the schools must develop before it is too late.

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