

# Coming of Age in the United States

MARJORIE PAGE SCHAUFFLER

Teachers and pupils need to learn "international living," according to Marjorie P. Schauffler, Director of the School Affiliation Service of the American Friends Service Committee, Philadelphia.

A FEW WEEKS AGO, Isidore Lubin, head of the U. N. program for underdeveloped countries, stated that the chief problem in planning such a program is not lack of funds. The critical problem lies in the shortage of people able to administer it.

Such a staff must combine technical skill—in agriculture, dam building, medicine—not only with knowledge of a given country's language, but also with a deep understanding of the way her people live and feel. They must be persons who realize that a new technique, to be useful, must be acceptable and accepted *in the terms of the users*. The man who is *only* a specialist in animal husbandry, when faced with the problem of India's shortage of food and pasture, might see an answer in slaughtering thousands of Sacred Cows. This might be a logical plan "scientifically speaking" but it overlooks India's religious heritage and the consequent impact of such action on her people. The United Nations needs for this Point Four effort staff members who know how to feel their way into differing cultures and, with imagination and sensitivity, apply their technical competence within the social structure to which it must contribute *acceptably* or be, in the long run, of little worth.

The United States has a critical shortage of persons needed not only in

this constructive U. N. program which the United States itself initiated, but in most of the international endeavors that look toward peace. It would appear that we have the world's greatest store of technical resources and perhaps, at present, its widest range of technical skills in engineering, research, administration, social work. But few of us thus far have had opportunity to live intimately with people of other lands, hence to learn how to share with them acceptably in their terms our skills and our resources. We have little experience in sensing the attitudes created by a different way of living.

## Teachers Learn International Living

We need to develop Americans who are technicians and linguists and who are, above all, deeply aware of other people, their history and concepts, and sensitive to their feelings about Americans and the moves we are making on the world stage.

How can we develop such people fast enough?

Teachers must now lay hold on every opportunity to live internationally, both for themselves and for their students. Unfortunately, we have thus far taken little leadership in this vital area of educational development. Some of us have "taken trips abroad" in sum-

mer. Some of us have discussed "International Relations" in study groups with other American teachers.

Belatedly we are waking up to the importance of exchange experience. Too many of us still think of it as the chance to extend the benefits of American education to other countries. But we are learning fast. Governments and school systems are helping by releasing teachers in many lands to spend periods in other countries and providing funds to make this possible. These programs recognize that before teachers can help students toward world-mindedness they must gain this state themselves.

For this reason teachers have a great chance to set up a project of joint learning with their students. We can freely admit that in our own school period there was little emphasis on international relationships, but that the rapid pace of history has thrust all of us together into this urgent study, where every person of every age can help the others with ideas, with organizing ability and with the hard, consistent work involved.

#### **American Friends Service Program**

The American Friends Service Committee has for a number of years been experimenting with several programs through which students can begin to feel and to live in world terms and through which teachers can gain experience in guiding such learning. In our limited sphere we run into the same difficulties as the U. N. and the United States with Point Four: shortage of funds, of course, but primarily shortage of people—people so sensitive and informed about other cultures that they can work *with* the people of

that group, rather than *for* them; that they can, in mutual contact, offer whatever our American history and resources have happened to provide, to be pooled with the experience, the skills, the art, the wisdom of living that the others bring.

In cooperation with the American Friends Service Committee, elementary school children and their teachers have been making the acquaintance of children in countries devastated by World War II ever since Quaker relief teams entered those areas. Reports have been sent back of children's lives and children's needs and these have been published in a small monthly "Newsletter for Boys and Girls" as human interest stories for American children, together with project suggestions. Some of these projects: soon after the war, collecting buttons from family button boxes and stringing them in sets to be sent to countries where no buttons could be bought; later, gathering 50 cents for purchase of enough vegetable seeds to make a whole family garden; making stuffed animals for comforting small toyleless friends; a score of ideas—equally simple to send and helpful to receive.

Later copies of the "Newsletter" carried pictures and stories of the arrival of the gifts and of the children's enjoyment of the "gardens" and other offerings. A "Guide for Parents and Teachers" is prepared to parallel the "Newsletter", giving detailed suggestions on how to carry out the projects, useful activities that can be associated with them and other sources for ideas such as book lists, available maps, occasional exhibits, cut-out books for home or school.

Similar possibilities are offered high school students to aid some of the boys

and girls of their own age who come to Quaker Neighborhood Centers in countries that met the war directly. A pamphlet tells something of young people's life and needs in those settings and lists things that are practically helpful.

Opportunities for high school students to discuss world affairs in person with national and international leaders are offered in weekend seminars in Washington and at Lake Success. Groups of 25 or 30 meet under able leadership. There are eight or ten such "Seminars for Teen Ageds" during the year, each running from Thursday night to Sunday noon, under the leadership of AFSC staff. The 25 or 30 young people are able to talk seriously and at length with senators, representatives, ranking government officials and representatives of other governments about the problems of our world relationships, and the attempted solutions. They also explore together how the individual or group can work through government to play a useful part in world affairs.

#### School Affiliation Services

Through its School Affiliation Service the Committee offers to a small number of schools keenly interested in direct international contact the chance for relationship with a school abroad of generally similar character and size. Schools overseas, largely located in France and Germany, are selected and visited periodically by staff members who are chosen for the qualifications of cultural and educational understanding and language ability discussed earlier. These visitors not only help to describe the American partner school

to the students and teachers in the school abroad but carry with them such materials as maps, photographs, slides and records of American folk music, and are increasingly used as valued resources to interpret the whole pattern of home and school life of this country. At the same time it is clear to teachers and students there that these visitors are seeking some of the cultural wealth of the countries they visit to bring back to schools here.

#### Various Forms of Exchange

Valuable as these staff members are as aids, the chief value in the program is the exchange directly between school and school. It takes every conceivable form, from finished examples of wood-turning from a French carpentry shop to a group of nine boys and girls and two teachers in Germany this past summer from an American school for a joint work camp with boys and girls and teachers from its two European affiliates, one in West Germany and one in Berlin. The project for the camp was digging a water system for a colony of refugee families.

Individual letter writing is a big part of the exchange, though many American students have found that they have much to learn before they can develop the art of correspondence as practiced and expected in Europe. Some high school teachers can bring such practice into the English classroom without sacrificing spontaneity but most of this occurs outside the school. In elementary schools, group letters composed in class may give much greater satisfaction for all concerned.

The cultural contrast between letter writing in Europe and in the United

States is evidenced in part by tactful comments from a European teacher who wrote to his American colleague: "Our students are keenly interested in all items concerning self-government at school, because it is the slogan of the day and being put into practice in many German schools. Letters of this kind call for similar information on German ways of living, German history, civilisation and education, and make it imperative to our boys to clarify their own ideas on these items."

Content of social studies classes comes from personal letters, classwork sent by the school abroad, postcards of their town's architecture and industries, a comprehension of what "war devastation" means, studying without heat, one's father still "missing," no chance for university. These are real matters in the lives of one's friends, not "facts" out of books.

A hundred uses of the relationship occur to the imaginative teacher and pupil group—high school languages classes translate letters for the neighboring elementary school, parents take movies of the school to send, or make a tape recording of a student council group. A collection of local flowers is pressed, mounted, and sent and a return collection is asked for. Exchanges of art, history, stamps, science, school news reporting—each one that takes place adds another breadth to the cloth of understanding. We have yet to find any phase of school life that can't become part of such interplay.

The School Affiliation staff try to act as a clearing house of good ideas among the schools in both areas and to scout for additional resources at home and abroad which may further vivify the in-

tercultural experience. For example, we can often advise schools of teachers from their affiliate's country who are studying nearby and can be invited to share with students the experiences of their upbringing. At the same time the teacher has a chance to observe American methods among friendly persons who know something already of his background and are eager to know more.

### Visitors from Partner Schools

Before long most schools want a visitor of their own from their partner school—teacher or student. Some 25 have already come to affiliated schools, an even larger number is planned for '51-'52. The State Department and Federal Office of Education help with arrangements for teachers, the American Field Service with those for students of high school age. In '50-'51 three American students will be spending the school year with their European affiliate. Summer travel in Europe can include brief visits to partner schools. These visits can cement friendships and show the way around obstacles.

For make no mistake, there are plenty of difficulties, failures to understand, busy schedules that crowd out awaited answers, resulting in disappointment and heartache. One American school scraped hard to raise money for basketballs for their friends in a desperately poor war-ridden town in Northern France. The Americans were dashed to receive only the most perfunctory thanks.

A year later when a teacher from the American partner school, in some doubt of her reception, hesitatingly paid a summer visit to the home of the

French school director, she was received with warmest hospitality. Among many discoveries made was this: the French students had been eager to take part in interschool tournament basketball and counted heavily on the arrival of the promised American gift. When the American balls arrived, they had rubber content—"the best rubber"—but no rubber is allowed in French tournament play! This disappointment was so keen that though the French school could be *polite* in rendering thanks—too polite to explain—they could not be enthusiastic.

Americans are prone to offer friendship quickly and generously and then pass lightly on to newer interests. The European student or teacher is less accustomed to making quick friendships. If he finally accepts the overture, however, he has confidence that a long standing tie has been formed. If this does not prove to be the case he will be deeply disappointed and have his worst suspicions of Americans confirmed. For this reason the Friends Service Committee encourages teachers and students to begin with shorter term activities with international and intercultural content such as those suggested earlier. Even after some experience of that nature they should consider earnestly together whether they are ready for a real endeavor in intercultural and international learning, before tackling the responsibilities as well as the opportunities of affiliation.

### Experimental Programs Set Up

A nucleus of member schools will

work with the staff particularly closely this coming year to explore these maximum possibilities, through student and teacher visits, through inter-school conferences, through international workshops of teachers and students, such as the two for teachers which took place in the United States and in Germany this past summer, and through discussion with staff visitors returned from overseas and with Affiliation Consultants in the fields of social psychology and education. The staff will endeavor to put as much as possible of the experience of this experimental group into written form for the use of other member schools.

The School Affiliation Service and its programs mentioned briefly above affect only a comparatively small number of pupils. They may serve, however, as examples of international and intercultural living which young Americans must experience if our human understanding is to match our fertile physical resources and our facile technical imaginations. Otherwise we as a nation will continue to be judged by others as "throwing our weight around" when in reality we may only be trying to offer our help.

By the time this article appears, the United States may be in an even more hazardous international position. All the more urgently should those whose work has the "long view" of education seek the opportunities, spend the time and enlist all efforts to develop grown-up Americans, Americans with a world outlook *upon us* and upon our fellow citizens in this world.

Copyright © 1950 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.