

Eighth Graders Approach

a World Outlook

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Account of an actual project in developing a better world outlook by and among junior high school pupils, as presented by Morton J. Sobel, teacher in the Detroit public schools and graduate student at Wayne University.

CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGY

of meaningful education have been enunciated, evaluated, restated, argued and discussed in many contradictory ways. The classroom teacher, therefore, sometimes finds himself in a state of complete confusion when he tries to set up an actual program of purposeful living with his group. Mere discussion of making education meaningful to the pupil at his own stage of development does not automatically make the theory become fact.

Often the teacher must determine within himself to begin to plan a program with his students, within the school and community situation as they actually exist at the present time. In so doing, he may find that while not all conditions are ideal, at least some of them will favor the success of the program if he and his group use what they have intelligently in their planning and doing.

The project described in this article did not develop many final answers, but did lead to the satisfaction of certain needs of the pupils and of the teacher. It was set up in accordance with actual conditions, and an attempt was made to utilize the very best available educational theories and resources.

Need for a World Outlook

An emotional needs test was administered to two eighth grade groups in a school in a large midwestern city. One surprising result of the test showed that *the need for a world outlook* was second only to the need for achievement and even superseded the need for economic security in the comparatively low-income district in which the school was located.

When the test results were revealed to the two groups, a lengthy and earnest discussion led to the decision to make up a unit on *The Proper Study of Mankind*. Accordingly, a list of study areas evolved. The two classes divided into ten small groups of five or six members each. Each group centered its work in one of the ten areas agreed upon.

One group concerned itself with man's religions, another with man's races, another with his governments, and others with his hopes, knowledge, beliefs, problems, organizations, recreations, and finally, man's great benefactors. Each group met as a unit from three to five times a week, determining what it ought to do in the way of study and how to demonstrate results to others.

Three Goals Undertaken

In class discussions with the teacher, it was decided that each group would undertake three goals, one to be something "seeable," one "touchable," and the third the responsibility for the room bulletin board for one to two weeks. "Seeable" projects might be plays, round-table discussions, or something similar; "touchable" projects might be along the lines of scrapbooks or written stories; and the bulletin board project would be a visual demonstration of what the group was concerned with in its study.

One period was spent on a class discussion of group organization and its mechanics, and it was decided that the group would elect a chairman and a secretary who would keep complete notes for reference and evaluation. When the project was well on its way, it became necessary, in the teacher's opinion, to hold a sort of critique and review of group procedure. A socio-drama of a democratic group in operation was the basic feature of this period. This proved helpful at a time when interest seemed to be lagging and the whole tenor of the job appeared to be bogging down. It proved to be a rather successful procedure, as the youngsters were becoming so enmeshed in the unfamiliar mechanics of group process that the entire success of the project seemed endangered.

The Groups Report

The group on religions drew a mural denoting the three large religious groups in the United States, and also those of the Moslem, Confucian, and Hindu beliefs. Each member of the group wrote a short report on one of

the religions. This group also gave a play which had been obtained from the United Nations by mail, and prepared a most interesting and informative bulletin board on the subject of religions.

The group on races drew pictures and wrote a commentary for showing through the opaque projector. Much of their information was obtained from material written by Ruth Benedict and by Eva Knox, and from a booklet called *Peoples of the Earth*. Also, they produced a book comprising five chapters written by various members of the group. The thirty pages of the book told of the adventures of two girls who won an essay contest and were awarded a trip around the world.

The group studying governments gave oral reports on the various characteristics of different systems of governments, including democracy, communism, socialism, fascism, monarchy, and feudalism. In addition, they compiled a scrapbook which showed through pictures and written commentaries some of the aspects of the different forms of government which they had studied.

Some Groups Run Into Difficulties

The group on organizations did only one portion of the job which they had set for themselves. They spent their time in writing a play which they presented as a puppet show. They made hand puppets from scraps of material and bits of waste products. Before they had their puppet show ready for performance, most of their time was gone, and they felt that their attempt at giving oral reports was a pretty sad affair. However, there seemed little doubt that they had participated in the learn-

ing process at least to the same extent as their classmates, and perhaps more. They considered organizations in broad general groupings, such as international, fraternal, youth, charity, and a number of other classifications, each of which they illustrated with appropriate examples, such as the United Nations, Boy Scouts of America, and the like.

The recreations group, too, had difficulties. This seemed due in part to the fact that it included the fairly large number of nine pupils, and also to the fact that it was made up mostly of boys who expected only to discuss various kinds of sports. Eventually, they succeeded in working up a fairly good round-table discussion on recreation, including not only sports, but reading, movies, radio, hobbies, and music. This group required more teacher guidance than any other.

The group concerned with great men studied six men and women whose contributions to world progress had been most notable. These included people such as Pasteur, Jane Addams, Confucius and others whose contributions lay in varied fields. In their oral reports and scrapbooks, the group attempted to link the contributions of these great people to modern life and to the progress of mankind toward better living.

The children who considered man's hopes drew a mural which depicted various aspects of health, crime, education, war, prejudice, and the like. A scrapbook which they made encompassed these subjects, with a section devoted to each. The well-organized, carefully collected pictures and commentaries illustrated high idealism.

Man's problems were defined in several areas, including atomic energy,

world trade, peace, social advances, child-adult relationships, and economic security. Each pupil took one organization which specialized in the study and solution of the problems. He wrote to the organization for materials, which were then compiled into written reports to be discussed and clarified in a round-table conference. An extremely lively class discussion followed this presentation.

Man's knowledge was grouped into four large areas: science, industry, agriculture, and transportation. The teacher suggested the inclusion of philosophy or ethics, but the children did not wish to go into areas which seemed rather illusory to them and no point was made of the issue. These children drew a mural illustrating the four areas and some of the accomplishments in each, and also wrote and presented a radio script discussing not only man's knowledge, but also his use of it in ways considered constructive and destructive.

The group concerned with beliefs wrote a play on superstitions called "The Superstitious Teacher." By slightly disguising the teacher's name, they demonstrated certain incidents of daily occurrence in the classroom which would have been performed in other ways, if the actions of pupils and teacher had been guided solely by logic. The play was given as a radio script in order to do away with the necessity for scenery and props. It was performed, as were all the group projects which lent themselves to such presentation, in the school auditorium before other sections. The other project of this group involved the use of very large sheets of construction paper on which were pasted pictures illustrating some of the

common beliefs of mankind. These tended to be more on the positive side, demonstrating belief in the equality of man, in freedom of speech and of worship, and concepts of this general nature.

Class Discussions Invaluable

One of the most valuable features of the entire project was the class discussion which developed after each group presentation. Each of these discussions tended to be of a constructive nature, emphasizing not only improvement in the particular group's technical work, but also a general broadening of the concepts presented by the reporting group. Ideas and ideals which were generated not only from home influences, but also from reflective thinking and talking on the part of the child himself, became a commonly accepted part of the procedure. This seemed most worthwhile.

As the project drew to a close, general discussions of the unit by the pupils took place to determine what had been learned and what benefits had been derived from the endeavors of the preceding eight weeks. Comments of a derogatory nature were few, either because of the presence of the teacher or because of a firm belief on the part of the pupils in the worth of the entire project. It is difficult to determine precisely the cause for this lack of adverse criticism, although a knowledge of the reason for this lack might be of great value to the teacher for future reference.

The Groups Evaluate

Advantages cited by the boys and girls were: the opportunity to express themselves freely about their own feel-

ings in regard to their neighbors; a new point of view of themselves as a part of a big, wide world; the chance to work and plan as rapidly or as slowly as they wished; the feeling of new respect for their classmates because they had worked profitably in the small groups; the opportunity for contact with some of the organizations doing constructive work in the fields which they had studied; a realization that democratic living involves many more responsibilities than they had ever known of before; and, perhaps most important of all, a realization of the true importance of teamwork and what it can accomplish, either in small groups such as theirs or in the world as a whole. This concept of cooperative thinking was an unlooked-for by-product of the original planning, yet certainly a very important one. The boys and girls were also encouraged to write anonymous evaluations of the project. Much evidence of original and creative thinking appeared in the oral and written evaluations.

The Teacher Evaluates

Opportunities for written and oral expression were numerous, fulfilling to some extent "requirements" for English study and practice. When reports were being prepared for presentation, the children in the various groups criticized sentence structure, capitalization, punctuation, and other features of purely mechanical nature in each other's papers. On at least three occasions, English textbooks were taken down from the shelves and used for reference purposes. The ability to express oneself ably became very important to many of the youngsters.

Since much of the reading the chil-

dren did for the project was motivated by personal need, it became of vital importance to them and in many cases, books were attempted which would ordinarily be considered out of the reach of these children. No complaints of reading difficulties came to the attention of the teacher, although he watched very carefully for such cases.

The amount of creative writing and speaking involved in the project made available to all pupils an opportunity for trying their own hands at literary accomplishment. Some of these efforts were highly successful. Readings outside of class in connection with the project were recorded for each of the group members.

If the aim of a general language program is understanding and knowledge of other peoples of the earth and a feeling of closer kinship with them, the teacher felt that this particular unit was quite satisfactory.

Other types of work performed by the groups included outlining of materials read, and practice in the use of dictionaries, atlases, encyclopedias, and other reference books.

One notable deficiency of the entire project was the fact that it took place primarily in one classroom of the school. Though it boiled over into the auditorium and the library, still for all practical purposes it was conceived, planned, and executed with the assistance of one teacher only, representing one specialized field and one point of view. There seems little doubt that greater success could have resulted if the project had been broader in scope.

One other result of this project was the noticeable improvement in human relationships in the classroom. Tensions were lessened, academic achievement was increased, teacher-pupil rapport was improved, and behavior was on a much higher plane than before.

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