vision programs?” In the meantime before most of us have our own community educational stations to work with we ought to be using the commercial channels available. Are in-school programs for your students being broadcast? If not, what needs to be done to get such programs on the air? Here is where we must all begin to put this new educational tool to work for us.

Let us join with other interested groups in our area and help to get educational television programs on the air.

CHARLOTTE HUCK

Children Learn from Their Culture

This author reports on a study of the nature and the sources of children’s learnings as these relate to their culture. Implications of these learnings for the curriculum are also indicated.

More has happened to men and to the world in the past fifty years than in the preceding thousand years. Technological inventions which still amaze adults are commonly accepted by today’s children as part of their natural environment. In certain areas today, a child of six has never known a world without television. No longer is his physical environment limited to the confines of his own neighborhood. It is extended through the media of mass communication to include hurricanes on the Atlantic, the coronation of a Queen, the inauguration of the President, meetings of Congress, Senate investigations, the United Nations Assembly, and hydrogen bomb tests. A child may push back the barriers of time with a twist of the dial on a television set and witness the days of the dinosaurs or he may project himself into outer space through interplane-

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Sources of Learning

In a study recently completed by the author, an investigation was made of the information possessed by some 115 suburban children in the first grade with respect to certain areas of the social studies. An interview-form was devised which consisted of questions concerning seventy-five concepts. There were three questions per concept so each child was asked to respond to 225 questions during at least two interviews. Besides verbal questions, pictures and objects were utilized in order to make the interviews more interesting and varied. Wherever possible, the children were also asked to state what their sources for their information had been. The findings concerning these stated sources of information were most revealing and are certainly pertinent to the discussion of the influence of our culture upon children's learnings.

Information which was the result of active contact or direct experiencing with the concept was cited more frequently as a source of children's knowledge than was any other source. Some 19.4 per cent of the responses were attributed to it. The children's scores also proved that active contact was the most accurate source of information.

For example, all of the children recognized a picture of a farm and were able to name at least three different kinds of animals found on the farm, even though the animals were not pictured. A third sub-question concerned the way in which the farmer makes his living. This proved to be difficult for many of the children. They knew the farmer raised crops, that his cows produced milk, and his chickens laid eggs. However, when they were asked what the farmer did with these products, the usual answer was that he drank all the milk and ate the eggs. The exceptions to this rather typical answer came from the children who had had active contact with a farm. One such example follows:

Q. What is this?
A. A farm.
Q. What do you see on a farm?
A. Cows, pigs, goats, horses, chickens.
Q. How do farmers make a living?
A. People buy milk from them. They put it in a steel carton. They sell eggs, have to be the right kind, not the kind that turns into chickens. The farmer might be paid wages if someone else owned the farm.
Source: Visited a farm.

The next in importance as a source of children’s information was television. Some 19 per cent of the responses were attributed to this media. Nor was television as a source of information confined to any one category of questions but rather it was credited for providing the information for such items as elections, President Eisenhower, Russia, the Capitol, renting, banking, factories, farming, advertising, insurance, helicopters, oceans, mountains, deserts, etc.

The children themselves recognized television as a potential source of information as evidenced by the following comment:

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Q. What is this?
A. An ocean. Pirates used to sail on the ocean.

Q. Can you name an ocean?
A. The Atlantic and the Pacific.

Q. How is an ocean different from a lake?
A. Well, it is very much bigger and it has great big fishes in it like whales and octopus. Also, an ocean has salt water and a lake doesn't. I'll know more about oceans after I see Disneyland next week. They are going to show pictures taken under the ocean.

The children who were interviewed seemed surprisingly well-informed concerning national and international affairs. Television newscasts were frequently cited as the authority for their information. Sixty-nine of the children who gave correct responses to the picture of President Eisenhower had seen him on TV. One child, when asked where the President lived, replied "NBC Washington." Russia was recognized by over one half this group of first graders as being a country. One child described its geographical location as being across the North Pole. Several children mentioned the censorship of television and radio which exists in Russia today. The following response credited a TV newscast as the source of information:

Q. What is Russia?
A. It is a country.
Q. Where is it?
A. Someplace way out of the United States.

Q. What do you know about Russia?
A. Russia is trying to make war on us although we are not at war yet. It's really quite a deal. They have some American flyers in their prison camps and they want us to give them money to let the eleven men out. Otherwise, they will keep them and they'll make them Russians.

Television did not prove to be as accurate a source of information as was active contact with the concept. It is noteworthy that the same source of information can furnish certain children with accurate concepts while providing others with inaccurate ones. The following two responses show the extreme differences in understanding which were characteristic for the concept of a covered wagon. TV served as the source of information for both answers.

Q. What is this?
A. A stagecoach.
Q. Who used it?
A. The people in Texas use it. They don't have cars there—just jalopies but no cars like we have.
Q. Where were they going?
A. They had women in them and they decided where to go!

Q. What is this?
A. A covered wagon.
Q. Who used it?
A. Cowboys use them today and we call them chuck wagons. Early settlers used them and called them covered wagons in those olden days.

Q. Where were they going?
A. They were trying to find a new place to settle. That's their burying equipment on the side of the wagon. It was a hard life!

However, it should be noted that almost every single source of information provided some misconceptions, including parents, school, and Sunday School. It would seem that all sources of information can be sources of misinformation also. This is to be expected since even the most accurate source of information can be misinterpreted, especially by young children.

Nearly twice as many children cited
television as their source of information as they did their parents. The more a child knew concerning a particular concept the less likely he was to have derived his information from his parents. This probably means that as children begin to learn more about certain items, they come to depend less upon their parents as a source for their information and rely more upon outside contacts. There were exceptions to this statement as can be seen by a response to the question on taxes. This response was recorded verbatim as follows:

Q. What are taxes?
A. Well, I think I can tell you and I think I can't! Taxes are something that helped us build this school. When you buy a loaf of bread, you have to pay a penny tax. Dad has to pay taxes for the house. We have to buy a car license and one for our bikes—that's a kind of tax, too.

Source: Father.

It was found that the schools supplied slightly less than 5 per cent of the children's information concerning these social concepts. This percentage seems astonishingly low, unless it is recalled that the subjects were all first graders and so did not have a background of long school attendance. At the same time, all of the children had been to kindergarten the previous year.

One group of children had studied their school. The superintendent, the principal, school nurse, librarian, and janitor had been invited to visit their classroom in order to explain his or her particular function in the school. These children had a good understanding of the reason for their education and the means by which they received it. It was revealing to compare their responses concerning the question on how the schools were paid for with the misconceptions held by some of the other children on this item. Seven of these children thought the teachers paid for the schools, while fifteen of them thought the principals or superintendents did. Five of them delegated the responsibility to the janitors and one to the "kids" themselves. One child held George Washington solely responsible!

Books provided the information for 105 responses. This is not a large number but noteworthy in view of the fact that the children were in first grade. It also compares favorably with the eighteen children who gave comic books as their source of information. Either the children read fewer comic books than standard books, or comic books furnished fewer facts than did the other books. However, only ten children mentioned books which they had read or had had read to them at school as a source for their information. This would seem to indicate that the books which children have at home are more factual and challenging than the somewhat pallid diet of readers which first graders have at school. There are more beautiful and exciting books for children on the market today than ever before. Are we making the most of them in our classrooms?

**Implications for Schools**

These then are some of the sources from which children said they derived their information. Of what importance is this knowledge to educators? What implications does it have for school? Most important, it would appear that the immediate environment of
children of today has been extended to include much of the adult world. No longer is the six-year-old child’s knowledge confined to his home, his neighborhood, and community. He has gathered facts and fragments of facts from every corner of the universe. Does it not follow that the schools should utilize these vast resources which are within the experience of every child? There is no dearth of subject matter within our culture today, with the possible exception of some of our classrooms! Our children are being exposed to more current events, geography, history, science, art, music, and drama than ever before. The curriculum should help children to interpret, evaluate, and extend these concepts which they are meeting and learning about in their everyday world. We must refuse to create the over-simplified, the false “child’s world” which is so characteristic of primers and certain primary grades today. Children who recognize the philosophical differences between Russia and the United States, who can explain the mechanics of the helicopter, and who partially grasp the economics of taxation will not be intrigued by the contents of their first readers. Certainly school should be as challenging as children’s out-of-school contacts.

Our children are learning from their culture. They have had many teachers prior to meeting one in a classroom. We, as teachers, need to be cognizant of the vast amount of knowledge already possessed by the six-year-old at the beginning of his academic education. Let us utilize these learnings which have resulted from exposure to many sources, not decry them.

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