

Resources for

Teaching about the World: Elementary

HELPING children to achieve intercultural learning is, at best, a complex goal. Constraints operate from a variety of sources and require clear thinking regarding both the possibilities and the limitations in the programs we design. This article will examine one such area of constraint, that of the teaching resources elementary teachers will find available, and will consider how these materials might more effectively be incorporated into programs supportive of intercultural learning.

Concepts of Culture

A number of recent contributions to the field of intercultural education have emphasized the importance of approaching the study of cultures from a sound, anthropological base. The concepts of culture, of cultural variability, continuity and change, provide the social scientist particularly potent tools for the analysis and explanation of human behavior. Culture, we now realize, constitutes a complex solution to certain common problems shared by man (4).

If we would help children to understand of and respect for the peoples

of the world, we do so not by ignoring real differences in the belief systems, values, and culturally determined adaptations peoples have made to common sets of problems. Yet we must seek, with children, ways of bridging these differences, of finding the avenues whereby children can develop understanding and acceptance of cultural variability in today's world.

This objective is one best viewed in developmental terms. The elementary school child is already busy with the task of establishing systems of self-relatedness in his world, of incorporating the cooperatively shared meanings and values his culture holds to be good.

Cross-cultural learning requires, now, extension of the child's world, that he may realize peoples in the world live with different sets of meanings, different ways of interpreting the good life and achieving satisfaction of needs we all share. Cross-cultural learning involves, at the same time, extension of feelings and sensitivities, of capacities for relating self to others across these

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barriers of cultural distance. The problem, Frank suggests (3), is no small one for children at once engaged in the process of establishing order, stability, and definition of self within one set of culturally defined meanings. It is a problem for which schools must be prepared to give strong and adequate support.

The problem of materials and instructional resources, in this frame of reference, is not simply one of reviewing "what is available." The more important problem is one of judging how resources can be used—with *what supporting or constraining influence*—in achieving these larger instructional ends. It is with this challenge the remainder of this article is concerned.

Relating Cross-Culturally

Helping children relate cross-culturally presents certain problems. One of these is that of finding the bridges over which the journey is to be made. Where children can be helped to discover a core of shared needs and shared experiences, they have taken first steps to cultural understanding. Because family life and the experiences of childhood provide children a common language of understanding, the first and earliest cross-cultural learnings are probably best nurtured through such an approach.

Fortunately, resources are developing in this area, and teachers will find a growing fund of materials on which to draw. Films of family life, when sensitively produced, can communicate to children unfamiliar folkways in understandable terms.

A growing market in fine trade books makes available today some studies of family life and childhood in cultures other than our own. Many teachers use these materials to help children explore

observed differences in family life, and to help them respond to those differences as "cultural equivalents" for behaviors their own culture supports. In so doing, these teachers have taken important steps toward building with children the comparative method anthropologists support.

Understanding the culture, developing sensitivity for how it "feels" to be a member of that culture, are problems posing special challenge to schools. With young children the analogical approach is perhaps the most effective to these ends. Stories of childhood, communicating the poignancy of dreams held and shattered, wants yearned for and won, may serve as effective vehicles in this regard. Stories such as these evoke extensions in sensitivity and feeling, and communicate, perhaps intuitively, the cultural ethos which prescribes these needs to be the ones responded to, these ends the ones to be sought, these the behaviors finally to be realized as right and good.

Developing Studies in Depth

In developing these, and other, opportunities it is important that teachers do so within some systematically planned program. It is clearly not enough to introduce explorations into aspects of a culture, and to lose, at the same time, opportunities to relate these learnings within the cultural framework which gives them meaning. If cultural studies are undertaken, they are best developed in depth, and pursued over sufficient time to permit the extension of these higher conceptual systems with children.

One method teachers are using to accomplish this purpose in the middle grades is to center culture studies in specific communities, in communities about which they have been able to ac-

quire information in depth. Schools can obtain authoritative assistance in this task by seeking, as district consultants, specialists in geography or anthropology whose field work has brought them into contact with specialized regions of the world. Authoritative resources are available through a valuable bibliography (Mandelbaum, 1963), recently published, and useful in its listing of large numbers of anthropological studies centered in specific communities.

Providing children information concerning the life patterns and customs of these cultures is a problem generally approached through a variety of means. Films, filmstrips, artifacts, and the resources of ethnic recordings and folklore are increasingly available to schools, and can be located through a variety of means. Bibliographies (1, 2, 5, 9, 10), the resources of lending museums and libraries, as well as the consulting services of colleges and universities are productive places to begin. In all these activities, teachers are cautioned to select with care, making certain the materials chosen are those which communicate, authentically and vividly, significant information concerning basic processes and values in the culture under study. One set of guidelines to such selection has appeared (7), and offers hope we may see more of such practical assistance in the future.

Opportunities To Participate

In seeking to bring children into current contact with a selected culture, teachers have used a variety of approaches. Programs of exchange between schools of art products, artifacts, letters and photographs can be useful, provided they are incorporated into significant cultural studies, and supported by open

discussions more meaningful than simple platitudes about our shared likenesses. Foreign visitors, invited to discuss and—hopefully—to involve children in some aspects of the culture, can offer extension of the classroom study, provided children are first prepared for a profitable experience, and provided guests and children together seek the bases of shared understanding.

Despite efforts to the contrary, a large majority of our resources remain secondary, depending on a fund of prior experience to make meaningful the concepts we explore. Shaftel (8) has noted the particular challenge this problem presents to teachers of children in highly urbanized, industrial societies, when the cultures under study are those of the pre-industrial and developing nations of the non-Western world. Helping children "move into" these cultures with understanding and sensitivity for their traditions, life patterns, and aspirations requires a fuller involvement of teaching effort than has commonly been recognized.

Teachers, concerned with the importance of providing children the opportunities which make such understandings available, are including within their studies certain basic industrial arts processes which introduce children to the core technology of a people. Participating, for example, in basic food-getting processes of a pre-technological society—usually at an unanticipated cost in personal labor—children may experience the meaning and reality of work in a manual culture. Relating experiences such as these to changing culture-ways, as nations industrialize, opens for children opportunities for perhaps the most critical learnings cultural studies can support—insights into the aspirations of

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developing nations, and the vast dislocations occasioned, within the culture and the world, as these efforts find consummation. Investments schools might make in the resources needed for developing industrial processes such as these would seem small cost indeed against the dividends paid in cross-cultural and world understanding.

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Secondary—Kenworthy

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year from the Columbia University Press (2960 Broadway, New York 27, N. Y.).

Paperback books are an increasingly important source for teaching about the world. Scores of books might be mentioned, yet we select two for special attention. They are both anthologies of African literature. One is Langston Hughes' *An African Treasury* (Pyramid) and the other is Peggy Rutherford's *African Voices* (Universal Library). English teachers will find these two small volumes inspiring and helpful.

These are only a few of the rich resources available to high school teachers today to help boys and girls live effectively in the emerging international community of our time. Yet they are also some of the outstanding resources we can all obtain with little effort and little cost.

Alternative—Gorman

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If we fail notably to raise the cultural level of our teachers, we shall surely shape in our twentieth century schools minds admirably fitted to live only in the nineteenth century.

American humanity does indeed need to pull itself up by its bootstraps. Only through its schools can it create a generation of persons who may be capable of looking at another people and judging them on some bases other than the number and quality of material things they do or do not have. This aspiration will fail American education unless its leaders and thinkers help American teachers to find better yardsticks for measuring their own and their pupils' humanity. This is the fashioning of an alternative to an ignorance we can ill afford.

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