

Understanding Other Lands Other Peoples

FIFTY years ago the Committee on Economy of Time, appointed by the Department of Superintendents, N.E.A., determined the scope of the geography curriculum. This the Committee did by assigning a score to each nation based on its area in square miles, population, value of imports from the United States, total value of imports, value of exports to the United States, and total value of exports. When the nations were ranked according to these scores, the large industrial countries were at the top of the list; the committee placed the first 21 nations on the minimum essential list.¹

As a result, generations of students learned about a narrow segment of the world that included primarily these industrialized and relatively developed countries. The study of these 21 nations provided students with geographic and economic facts. The study of the customs of the people often contrasted their patterns of behavior with those of Americans.

The procedure used 50 years ago to select nations to be studied is no longer appropriate. A concern for all humanity

¹ National Society for the Study of Education, 17th Yearbook, Part I, 1918. p. 33.

makes it equally important for students to understand the peasant in the underdeveloped areas of the world and the businessman in the capital cities of Europe. The threat of nuclear war in a world made small by Telstar and jet planes makes it mandatory that an international understanding program encompass all mankind.

The objectives for programs of international understanding must be expanded as well. In addition to providing information, such programs should help pupils develop positive but realistic attitudes toward people in other nations. The increasing interrelationships between various countries force political leaders in the United States to make many decisions that will have an international impact. These will be better decisions if the political leaders and the voters they represent have positive attitudes toward people in all parts of the world. Such attitudes will lead to a concern for the economic problems of the peasant in a developing nation. Such attitudes will also give a grasp of the very real threat

Arthur J. Lewis is Professor of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, New York.

of communism as it offers to relieve human suffering but at the price of human bondage. Such attitudes will provide insight into the work of the United Nations in raising the standards of living through such agencies as the World Health Organization.

Such attitudes will also lead to the support of a U.S. foreign aid program on terms defined by President Kennedy, "To those peoples in huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required—not because the communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right." Such attitudes will encourage the consideration of international issues on the basis of what is best for mankind, not just what is best for Americans. To help students develop positive attitudes toward other people in other nations is a large undertaking—the schools of America can not afford to do less.

The importance of these broader objectives has been recognized; many programs have been developed in the schools to improve understanding about and encourage positive attitudes toward other nations and their peoples. Glens Falls, New York, with assistance from the National Council for the Social Studies, has developed such a comprehensive school program. The evaluation of this program indicates² that it has had a positive effect on the "... cognitive knowledge and understanding of Social Studies and world affairs and on the development of interest in foreign people." However, the report goes on to say, "... there may have been no change in

attitudes of enlightened tolerance and permissiveness toward foreign people."

Although it is possible that there were changes in attitudes that were not revealed by the evaluation techniques used, it appears that the results at Glens Falls support the generalization that the development of understanding is easier than the changing of old or the formation of new attitudes.

Study in Depth

The purpose of this article is to suggest one approach that might be effective in helping students gain an understanding of other nations that will lead to the development of positive attitudes toward people in other nations. It is proposed that a limited number of nations be studied in sufficient detail to provide students with some depth of understanding. Such a study would focus on the people, their behavior, their cultural background, their institutions, their land and other resources, and the problems they face. Through the study, students would be helped to understand the reason for the behavior of the people in the nation being studied and to generalize from this learning to see a relationship between behavior and the cultural frame of reference. The study would utilize material from various disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, history, geography, economics and political science.

How might this proposal be translated into classroom practice? Suppose a senior high school teacher wishes to help students understand some of the opportunities and problems facing citizens in the new nations in Africa. Rather than to attempt a survey of a number of these nations, the teacher might have the students make a comprehensive study of the country of Kenya. There are a

² Robert N. King and Harold M. Long. *Improving the Teaching of World Affairs*. Washington, D. C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1964. p. 68.

number of facts the teacher would want students to know about Kenya, such as annual per capita income, amount of unemployment, extent of education, political system in use and the attitudes of Kenyans toward democracy and communism.

If the teacher were to follow the proposal made in this article, he would move beyond the presentation of such facts and help students understand the reason for these facts. For example, the student would learn from his study of geography that most areas of Kenya are useless for farming while some of the land is very productive; this would help him understand the reason for crowding in certain regions and the resulting economic and social problems. From history he would learn of the slave traders, of the advent of the missionaries and the Western education they brought and of the White Settlers who occupied the choice highland farming area. From anthropology he would learn of the various tribes living in Kenya and the variety of languages they use; he would learn of the strength of various social institutions such as the family, age-mates within a tribe and the tribe itself. As the student learns these and other facts he should begin to comprehend some of the reasons for the Mau-Mau uprising.

The understanding of the various tribal groups would help the student see the reasons for political developments in Kenya. As the student begins to appreciate some of the reasons for unemployment and underemployment, the need for more and better education, for the improvement of agriculture and for the expansion of industry would become apparent. The student should understand the ways in which communism is appealing to the Kenyans by promising to solve many of their social and economic prob-

lems. The study of Kenya might conclude by considering the ways in which the United States, through its Agency for International Development, is aiding in the expansion of educational opportunities, the improvement of agriculture and the alleviation of unemployment.

The teacher should select the material to be studied and conduct the class in such a way that a better understanding of the various disciplines used would result. For example, the use of anthropological studies should help the student to grasp some of the basic concepts in this discipline and provide him with insight into the method of inquiry employed by the anthropologist.

Need for Research

The study of Kenya as suggested here indicates that a comprehensive analysis of an individual nation will require a great deal of time. In view of the need for a program to encompass the world, is it appropriate to follow the proposal made in this article and study only a few nations in depth at the expense of a brief study of many nations? The proposal is advanced on the basis of three assumptions:

1. It is only as students understand the reasons for the behavior of people in other nations that they can empathize with them to the extent that positive attitudes develop.

2. As students develop empathy for people of one nation, they will tend to be more understanding of people in other nations.

3. As students gain insight into the major concepts in various disciplines, they will be able to draw on studies from these disciplines in order to understand other cultures.

These assumptions are untested and should be verified or refuted through classroom research studies; the results should serve as a basis for judging the value of the proposal. There are several reasons why this proposal appears to be worthy of such research efforts. Several universities are now conducting area studies programs that utilize various disciplines as a means of studying countries. Although such an approach is rare in high school, the George School, Pennsylvania, is conducting an Afro-Asian Studies program that focuses attention on a relatively few countries.³ Parsons has advocated a culture study that is ". . . a depth analysis of a total way of life of a people."⁴ "What is needed," he states, "is a shift from an information centered to an analytic and behavior centered approach."⁵ Parsons believes that such an approach will encourage students to develop desirable attitudes toward other people.

Change in Attitudes

The first assumption underlying the proposal is supported by the writer's experience in working with approximately 350 T.E.A. teachers (Teachers for East Africa) from the United States who were teaching in the secondary schools of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. As these teachers became familiar with the culture in which their students lived and as they understood the persistent and complex economic and social problems faced by the people, their attitudes toward the Africans changed. They saw them as in-

³ David S. Eldridge and Clark Moore. "An Approach to Afro-Asian Studies." *Educational Leadership* 19: 501-503; May 1962.

⁴ Theodore W. Parsons. "Cross-Cultural Understanding: Another Look." *Educational Leadership* 19: 528; May 1962.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 529.

dividuals rather than as a total group; they were less willing to generalize about all Africans and all Kenyans. As they comprehended the reasons for the behavior of students in their classes, most of the T.E.A. teachers developed a respect and appreciation for the Africans; many developed a real empathy for them.

By way of contrast, the casual visitor to East Africa, on a two week stop as part of his world tour, may develop very different attitudes. He may observe men sitting in the market place during the morning and generalize that the African is lazy; the tourist fails to realize that there is a limit to how much work a person can do on a small plot of land and that there is no chance for other employment. These Africans are, in effect, underemployed. The tourist observes the behavior without an opportunity to understand the reasons for the behavior.

Most of the present programs in international understanding, in an attempt to be global, provide a vicarious world tourist experience. Students are introduced to a large number of nations and given some information as to the customs of the people. They learn the *what* of the behavior of a large number of groups but have little opportunity to understand the *why* of their behavior. Yet the experience of individuals who have lived and worked in other lands indicates that it is through the understanding of the reasons for behavior, seeing the relation of behavior to the cultural frame of reference, that a sense of empathy develops. The detailed study of a few nations should provide an experience more analogous to living in another country than being a world tourist.

Although the proposal to make a detailed study of a few nations may seem to hold promise, there are two major

(Continued on page 327)

(Continued from page 292)

organized and sustained. Taken in their totality, they are the forces and forms within which men express and engage those motives "which draw them together and push them apart" and "reveal what is desirable and what is hurtful."⁵

If the social studies are to perform the synthesizing or coordinating function by which the intersection and interaction of the realms of poetics, politics and physics are to be made real, we must ask what modes of knowing they must employ and what universal questions they must shed light upon.

I wish to treat first the universal questions which the social studies must seek to answer if we would turn to them to explore and illuminate the realm of the social where, according to my thesis, the realms of the spiritual and material intersect and interact. They must tell us of the "what and how" of this convergence. This involves description and explanation. They must tell us the "why" which reveals the relation of cause-and-effect. They must also tell us about "what ought," which involves judging and assessing. To excuse the social studies from treating all these universal questions is to assign them less than their proper functions.

The modes of knowing involved in pressing social inquiry along these lines are those which employ fact, logic and imagination. Through fact, what is revealed. By the use of logic, facts are ordered and expressed in general propositions. Imagination is that mode of knowing which enters, creatively, into the modes of both fact and logic through

revealing to us what facts we need in order to make those general propositions which we believe to be most relevant and significant for knowing and improving the human adventure. It is this mode of knowing which man has always used to take him beyond the boundaries of his present facts and beliefs. Its nurture is the greatest challenge and opportunity which the social studies offer.⁶

The thesis which I have presented is meant for the social education of teachers as well as their students, for the quality of their minds and purposes will, if the school is the vital force we covet, be greatly influenced by ours.

—EARL S. JOHNSON, *Emeritus Professor of the Social Sciences, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, and Visiting Professor of Secondary Education, University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee.*

Understanding—Lewis

(Continued from page 309)

obstacles to its use. First, there is a dearth of material suitable for comprehensive studies that is available to schools. Second, most teachers lack confidence to undertake the detailed study of a country. There is a new asset on the educational scene that will help to overcome both of these problems. The first teachers to go overseas in the Teachers for East Africa Project are returning after two years of experience. Similarly, members of the first group of Peace Corps Volunteers are returning; approximately 25 percent of these volunteers plan to continue as teachers. The experience of working for two years in an overseas assignment has provided these teachers with a valuable background of information about the country in which

⁶ For a full elaboration of these modes of knowing see Earl S. Johnson, "Ways of Knowing," *Social Education*, January 1963.

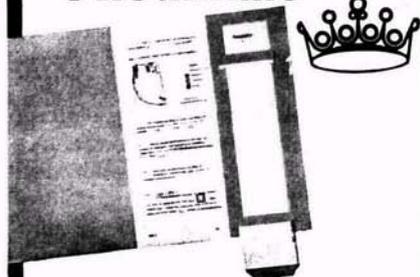
⁵ See John Dewey, *The School and Society*, Phoenix edition, with *The Child and the Curriculum*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 151.

they served; further, they have the kinds of attitudes and the enthusiasm that would help to achieve the goals of education for international understanding. Although only a few volunteers have returned, their talents and interests should be utilized. Butts has said, "And if many volunteers (T.E.A. and Peace Corps) could be drawn into teaching or into further international studies in the U.S. upon their return, the course of international development would be doubly served as the volunteers direct their energies at helping to develop American education and thereby contribute to a developing American nationhood."⁶

There are a limited number of other teachers whose training and experience would enable them to conduct a comprehensive study of a nation. These teachers and those returning from overseas service should be encouraged to use this approach on an experimental basis. Research studies should be designed to analyze the outcomes of such programs and to test the three basic assumptions underlying the proposal made in this article. If the results of research studies indicate that this curriculum proposal will significantly improve the development of international understanding, steps should be taken to encourage other teachers to use the depth approach. To facilitate this, curriculum workers should then address themselves to the task of developing appropriate materials and organizing necessary in-service education programs. The goal of improved international understanding is so important and the price of failure to achieve this goal is so great that the development of methods to improve teaching in this area is worthy of the best efforts.

⁶ R. Freeman Butts. *American Education in International Development*. New York: Harper and Row, 1963. p. 92.

CORONET LEARNING PROGRAMS



A unique series of 17 programmed text units for use in the intermediate grades & junior-senior high.

Programs are composed of 10 short sets of 25-50 frames, each designed to be worked in 15-20 minutes. The final set of each program consists of a review and a self-test. This flexible format permits the presentation of programmed material over a two week period, either in class or at home. Students can work independently, at their own pace—a boon to both rapid and slow learners.

Programs are now available in the following subject areas:

- Science Mathematics
- Guidance
- Social Studies
- Language Arts

Individual copies of each program are priced at \$1.50. In lots of 25 or more, the programs are \$1.20 each. For a free copy of our brochure which fully describes each Coronet Learning Program, write to . . .

Dept. EL-265

CORONET LEARNING PROGRAMS

65 E. South Water St. • Chicago, Ill. 60601

Copyright © 1965 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.