On the national educational scene, much is being said and written concerning educational pluralism. Efforts are being directed toward the eradication of one of the traditional roles of our schools, namely that of educating all for "Americanization." The old "melting pot" concept is slowly being abandoned in favor of a more realistic concept, the "Salad Bowl." This concept allows one to keep his individuality, have pride in his cultural heritage, and add flavor to the whole American scene. The movement toward this concept has been given impetus by the development of Black study programs, out of which grew the realization of numerous glaring omissions in social studies, history texts, and other social sciences. Other minority groups have begun demands for greater self-identity and more attention in the curriculum.

The initial effort of the Richmond Public Schools in developing ethnic studies was begun on the elementary level in an exciting learning experience called "The People Place." The Ethnic Studies Center was proposed by the former director of elementary education in the Richmond Public Schools to acquaint pupils with the richness of their own ethnic groups and to introduce them to the heritage of other groups. Ethnic groups, as we define them, are those whose members share a unique social or cultural heritage passed on from one generation to the next. This center is one way to make an imaginary trip to different countries of the world.

A pilot project, the center has been established through the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's Emergency School Assistance Program. Faculty and staff for "The People Place" were chosen on the basis of ethnic background and dedication to innovative education. After the initial curriculum developer at the center, many other organizational problems had to be solved. Of primary importance were the general objectives for "The People Place."

The following objectives were stated:

The learner will be able to:
1. Recognize that culture is learned, not inborn
2. Identify contributions of the specific ethnic groups represented
3. Express the uniqueness of each of these groups.

The center is funded by the federal government under the Emergency School Assistance Act (ESAA). Dr. Beatrice Clark-Jones was the initial curriculum developer at the center.
The Ethnic Studies Center acquaints pupils with the richness of their own ethnic groups and introduces them to the heritage of other groups.
The Ethnic Studies Center is an integral part of the overall social studies program in the Richmond Public Schools. Days are also set aside for schools in surrounding counties that are interested. The cooperation of principals and staff being necessary, certain steps are taken before these schools visit the center.

First, the principal of each school is sent a letter familiarizing him and his staff with the procedures of the center. Second, the teachers who are interested receive, and must sign, contracts. Once they sign, they are committed to: (a) make three visits to the center for study in two cultural areas per visit; (b) continue their learning experiences in the classroom in the six areas—India, Native America, Japan, Mexico, West Africa, and West Germany—by following the guidelines and suggested activities provided by the Ethnic Studies Center; and (c) become totally involved with the students and their activities during visits to “The People Place” and, if possible, bring parents or others who are also willing to become involved.

Continuing Involvement

To assist in this commitment, the teachers from the center make a pre-visit to each visiting class. There are three classes per period, two periods per day, with approximately 75 minutes per period. During the pre-visits, class teachers are given a pre-kit. The pre-kit includes a Resource Unit which contains subjects and suggested activities that teachers are asked to use in preparing the class for the visits. Subject matter for each cultural area is the same: Geography, Family Life, Food, Shelter, Clothing, Art, Music, Literature, Religion, Language-Communication, Transportation, Education, Economics-Work, Leisure, and Government.

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The pre-kits also include Artifacts representing each culture, a Pictionary, a Game Book, a Pen-Pal list, a booklet "Big, Big World and the People in It," and folio pictures of the six cultural areas. The teachers and students are also given a brief description of what to expect when they arrive at the center.

The rooms at "The People Place" are designed to simulate environments of the different cultural areas. Continental areas are represented, in most instances, by a single cultural group.

The rooms provide an elaborate exhibition area, and the exhibits are all manipulative. A "hands-on" environment encourages the natural curiosity of children. In each room there are numerous activities which, in the learning process, involve the pupils physically as well as mentally. Pupils touch, wear, taste, look, listen, dance, and sing, and are free to ask questions and explore on their own. The ethnic teacher in each cultural area wears the native dress of that country, and serves as facilitator.

The visits to the Ethnic Studies Center are supplemented by many learner activities which accommodate a broad range of age levels and resources. Special objectives are attached to each activity which are in conjunction with the three overall objectives previously indicated.

After a short introductory presentation, learners are allowed to choose their activities. The Ethnic Studies teacher circulates, using inquiry-style questions, individualized assistance, and motivational techniques. When the activity period is over, students again come together for discussion, assessment, and evaluation.

This activity-oriented learning process is designed to strengthen the learner's awareness of the cultures presented, and to maintain pride in his own culture. On each of the three visits, the class is divided between two countries in order that the children will be able to do comparative study and share experiences when they return to school.

At the end of the third visit, the three visiting classes are assembled together in the Richmond Room. In this local setting, attention is focused on the fact that more than 30 cultural groups are represented in the Richmond area. Contributions from these cultures, which have resulted in furthering the growth of our own culture, are stressed. Also, the idea that all human needs are basically the same (regardless of race, creed, or color) is emphasized.

Evaluation questionnaires are then given to the visiting teachers. Post-visits are made by the Ethnic Studies teachers for follow-up and evaluation. The evaluation is designed to test cognitive and affective gains. Exact measurements of learner achievements are not available at this time. However, they are now in the process of being compiled.

When these data are studied, we believe they will show that the Ethnic Studies Center, "The People Place," can be stamped "Very Successful—Project Approved."

—Compiled by the Staff of the Ethnic Studies Center, Richmond Public Schools, Richmond, Virginia.