

# Global Education Begins at Home

Students in Detroit learn about other ethnic groups using locally-developed materials.

## HAROLD KARBAL

As the nations of the world grow increasingly interdependent, education must take on more of a global perspective. But, understanding people from other cultures begins with the people in our own cities and states. My experience has been that as children (and adults, too) get to know people as people, differences tend to disappear and similarities take over. Odd customs become charming, beliefs become more understandable, and different religions more tolerable.

In the 1920s when my parents came to America, it was popular to poke fun at the greenhorns who didn't understand American language or customs. Their dress and speech separated the newly arrived from the rest of the population. Now, things have changed—but ethnic awareness is still very much alive. Many second and third generation Americans are proudly displaying their heritage. How to share these varying cultures with students becomes a challenge to curriculum makers. While it is relatively easy to find materials that deal with ethnicity in general, it is difficult to find materials that deal with a particular city and community.

Our first step was to identify ethnic groups living in our region of the Detroit Public Schools. We found Black-Americans, Polish-Americans, Italian-Americans, Chaldean-Americans, and Yugoslavian-Americans. One of the difficulties we hoped to avoid was the internecine battles stemming from bitter struggles in the homelands among several subgroups, such as southern Italians versus northern Italians and Arabs versus Chaldeans.

Harold Karbal is Curriculum Administrator in Region Six, Detroit Public Schools, Michigan.

We began with Polish-Americans, because we found a group of interested teachers already imbued with ethnic pride who were willing to devote the time and effort to share their culture with others. The result of their planning and hard work was *Christmas the Polish Way*, a resource book with original poems, stories, and drawings as well as descriptions of holiday customs, games, and recipes. In addition the committee brought together over 60 slides and prepared a sound tape to accompany the slides. The result has been extremely popular, as attested by the number of requests for copies we receive from around the country.

Our next project was *Black Personalities of Detroit*, a looseleaf collection picturing and describing various people living in Detroit who have contributed to the city's economic and cultural growth. The looseleaf format, the biographical information, and the photographs make the publication easy to use in the classroom.

Writing and publishing the *Arabic, Chaldean, English Picture Dictionary* wasn't easy; teachers, parents, and community people often disagreed about what the contents should be. However, when it was finally published, it was the first of its kind ever published: Chaldean is not traditionally a written language. Before embarking on such an ambitious project, school systems should carefully assess the human resources available.

Communicating with non-English-speaking parents is always difficult but necessary. Several events take place during the school year at which information must be shared: early dismissal, parent-teacher conferences, school closings for holidays, and the like. We devised a book of standard notes to parents and translated them into the necessary languages. The book also contains a number of everyday expressions and their English

equivalents which can either be pronounced or pointed to so as to quickly enroll a child or carry on a simple conversation.

This year we are preparing a film-strip series called "Our Neighbors." The first was "Our Neighbors: The Italian-Americans." Again a committee of teachers, parents, and administrators met to decide what to put on the screen that would give children a better understanding of the contributions of that ethnic group, as well as show the group in the milieu of Detroit. It was both easier and harder than we expected. It was easy because we agreed to use the 15 occupation clusters promoted by the U.S. Office of Education as the basis for gathering slides showing people at work. It was difficult because we had to leave out many slides that couldn't be accommodated in the 15-20-minute time span we thought would hold the attention of our students. The following guidelines were established:

—The slide film will not be a who's who of the Italian community.

—We will agree on the concepts we wish to share with both students of Italian background and other students.

—We will demonstrate to pupils that we are more alike than different while countering some of the stereotypes promoted by the media about this ethnic group.

—We will explain why this group came to America and especially to Detroit. What they found here will be shown and then referred to again in each of our subsequent filmstrips.

Happily, these studies are no longer relegated solely to the month of February, the traditional calendar time for studying brotherhood, black history, and the birthdays of Washington and Lincoln. At least this is true in the classrooms in this region.

There are too many living examples of newcomers to our city. Instead, these and other individuals are in evidence in the halls, on classroom bulletin boards, and classroom libraries. Chaldean pupils have even produced their own super-8mm films describing where their home was, what it looked like, and what some of their customs are.

Getting along with people from other lands far across the sea is no longer a remote problem for academic discussion. Our newspapers and televisions are too full of our interrelationships. Boatloads of Cubans landing on our shores are viewed in every living room. The boycott of the Olympic games is on everyone's tongue either pro or con. The recent vote in Quebec about separating from Canada made headline news. The examples of our interdependence are all around us.

Even more persuasive is the realization that our next-door neighbors have differing customs and practices. Children come to our schools from far away countries, and they sit in our classrooms and study with us. Other children have lived here all their lives but have ways of life that are different.

We take the view of Richard Remy (1980):

Unfortunately, in large measure citizenship education and "global, international, world-order, foreign affairs" education in the schools have been mutually isolated from one another. In the past, this state of affairs may have been both natural and tolerable. Today it is neither. If the expanding scope and scale of global interdependence is eradicating the boundaries that once separated foreign and domestic affairs, the same forces are eroding the boundaries that once separated education about U.S. society from education about the rest of the world (p. 67).

The approach we are taking in Detroit meets pupil needs and strengthens our school curriculum and our community. Knowing people is much more effective than merely knowing about them.

#### Reference

Remy, Richard C. *Handbook of Basic Citizenship Competencies*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1980.



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