



vance, and community service. Again, the emphasis is on meaningful content designed to affect practices involved with daily living, environmental issues, community, and career choices (Penick and Meinhard-Pellens, 1984).

School science can be more than academic preparation. These notable programs¹ represent major efforts undertaken in three goal areas rarely included in typical programs.

¹*Project Life Lab, Human Ecology, and Topics in Applied Science* were identified

in the Search for Excellence program of the National Science Teachers Association.

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Social Studies

WALTER C. PARKER

Community Inquiry

The essence of social studies, as the name implies, is the study of society. Social studies programs, however, often ask students not to study society but merely to listen to or read the

results of studies conducted by others (especially their teachers and the authors of their texts). To revive the notion of social studies as active inquiry into social life, many schools are creating firsthand opportunities for

students to study their own communities.

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Two thoughtful examples come from the city school district of Allentown, Pennsylvania.¹ The first engages 3rd graders in an active, in-depth study of their community. Social studies coordinator Robert Foster and many of the district's 3rd grade teachers developed a three-ring notebook containing nearly 100 activities that focus on the social, economic, governmental, and physical characteristics of Allentown. The activities are practical, lively, and diverse. Several engage students in the study of Allentown's multiethnic population as well as its global connections. Some bring community members into the classroom. One builds students' understanding of the difficulties facing their non-English-speaking classmates. Another has students compare and contrast Allentown with Bombay and Tokyo.

Meanwhile, middle school students are making one-to-one contact with Allentown's elderly citizens—trying to bridge stereotypes with interaction and information. The youngsters meet with their older "partners" over a four-week period. They interview them and together attend a slide show about the community and special programs on crime, volunteer services, hospice care, and drug abuse. Later, the students write lengthy biographies and poetry. Eighth grader Grace Cannon was paired with Ethel Wass. Grace writes that Ethel was a student in Allentown's Franklin Elementary School during World War I and began high school in 1921. "The school's dances were sponsored by the clubs, such as the Spanish Club and the Girls' Basketball Club. Ethel was a member of both. The dances were held at night at one of the club members' homes. When she described it to me, she said, 'Everyone had a piano. You rolled up the rugs, then your father would sprinkle whatever the stuff was on the floor, and you'd dance.'"

Adam Kuder was struck by something else while interviewing his partner. Adam's poem, "Afraid," begins:

*I am so afraid to go out tonight,
with all
the violence and crime
With all the news of rape and murder,
I'm better*

off not going to Senior Citizens tonight.

Elsewhere, high school teachers take students to Washington, D.C., for the Close-Up Foundation's intensive study of the federal government and sponsor annual local programs as well. This year in the Dallas-Fort Worth "Metroplex," social studies students from several of the area's school districts will prepare "master plans" for the Metroplex for the year 2001. The plans must concentrate on transportation, environment, intergovernmental cooperation, and social services. Student delegates will be sent to a metrowide convocation where the plans will be presented and debated.²

Some local World Affairs Councils are sponsoring community studies that reinforce the local/global connection. Mindful of the adage, "Act locally, think globally," the Philadelphia Council arranged for elementary students to visit community resources that teach global lessons. Students visited the Museum of the Philadelphia Civic Center to learn about regions of the world; a trip to the Philadelphia Zoo followed, to extend students' concepts of regional differences; and a visit to Independence National Historical Park gave students a chance to explore shelters at home and around the globe. The Columbus Council operates a referral service, Resources International, which brings area residents with a global perspective into contact with students and their teachers. This Council also distributes a volume of ten lessons for 8th through 12th graders. Each lesson is community-based, enabling students to study how their local area affects, and is affected by, international events.³

Innovative commercial publishers are also focusing on community study. School districts in Aldine, Texas; Vancouver, Washington; and Santa Anna, California, are working with a small company named Graphic Learning to tailor-make curriculum materials for their communities. Members of the Graphic Learning staff work with local teacher committees to create a map, acquire historical materials and photos, and develop activities. The staff then pulls these together and publish-

es a "localized" set of colorful, durable social studies materials. Students use stories and photos of their own communities to learn about their hometowns, as well as hometowns in general.⁴

Are community inquiries worth the extra time needed to plan and coordinate them? Definitely. If encouraged to examine their own communities, wrestle with the very idea of community, and envision *better* communities, students just might build critical understandings of public life that will help them create a public life that is better for everyone.^{5, 6}

¹Contact Robert M. Foster, Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator, The School District of Allentown, 31 S. Penn St., Box 328, Allentown, PA 18105.

²Contact Sharon Walker, 9231 Dove Meadow, Dallas, TX 75243.

³Robert B. Woyach, *Making Decisions: Our Global Connection*. Columbus Council on World Affairs, The International Center, 57 Jefferson Ave., Columbus, OH 43215. Price: \$5.50.

⁴Contact Sharryl Davis Hawke, Graphic Learning Corporation, 855 Broadway, Boulder, CO 80302.

⁵John Dewey wrote in *The Public and Its Problems* (1927) that the industrial age was "an invasion of the community" and that the cultivation of a renewed sense of community shouldn't be left to chance.

⁶For other programs and rationales, see *Community Study: Applications and Opportunities*, NCSS Bulletin No. 73, ed. Mark Schug and R. Berry (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1984).

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