CHAPTER 2

STUDYING OTHER COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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The World Community in Which We Live

A six-course dinner was recently given at the Commercial Club in San Francisco with the food for each course flown in that day by airlines from six different parts of the world. This was a dramatic way of demonstrating the kind of world in which we and our pupils live today.

A turn of the knob on the radio or television, a glance at the "date-lines" on the front page of any reputable newspaper, or a view of the newsreel in any theater will illustrate quickly the fact that we live in an Air Age, an Atomic Age, a troubleus, changing, global world.

Our "neighbors" are no longer just the people who live next door or down the street. They are the people who live in China, India, and Korea; in Argentina, Mexico, and Uruguay; in England, Germany, and the U.S.S.R.; in Egypt, Israel, and Iran; in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of Indonesia. Our "community" today is the world.

Such an extension of our concept of community of community demands changes in the elementary school curriculum. Pupils must still be taught how to live with their families, with their schoolmates, with people in the local community and in the United States. They must also be taught how to live with their new neighbors in the world community.

And what a complex community it is, with its peoples of many nationalities, many religions, many colors, many stages of industrialization, many value systems, many political and economic orientations, and many ways of living.

Parents and teachers know how difficult it is to help boys and girls to learn to live with the children and adults in their immediate environment, with the slight degrees

of differences which exist between people. They should therefore appreciate the much more difficult task of helping boys and girls to learn to understand and appreciate the children and adults of other countries, with their much more marked differences.

Yet, a beginning at least must be made in the elementary school before attitudes are formed which tend to be held for life, before misinformation is accepted which will be difficult to replace, and before habits are developed which it will be almost impossible to unlearn. As the Educational Policies Commission recently pointed out, "The elementary schools that will make the greatest contribution to life in the next generation will be those schools that are related to the world community, yet are anchored firmly in their home community." (Education for All American Children, 1948, p. 279).

Points of Emphasis in Studying Other Countries and Peoples

The geographer, J. Russell Smith, once reminded teachers that "There are two enduring things that you may hope to plant in the minds or spirits of children. The most important of these that endure is attitude. Attitudes help to decide how we interpret the facts of life. Attitudes are perhaps the most important residue (after thirty years). The second important residue . . . may be a few big ideas about countries, peoples, and places." (Journal of Geography, March 1947, p. 101).

What, then, are some of the attitudes and big ideas about other countries and peoples which elementary school teachers should strive to develop?

First of all, children should learn that they live in a world of different kinds of people. This is an extension on the world scale of a concept which children can learn in their community. They need to realise that people are fundamentally the same the world over and that there are few basic, biological differences. At the same time they should begin to understand that differences do exist in the way people look, live, and think, and that such differences are often valuable, bringing enrichment to the world just as differences between children in a classroom can make it a more interesting place in which to live.

Secondly, children should learn that people are affected by their environment and by the ways of living and thinking of their parents and other adults. It can be an

exciting and important experience for children to see a movie like Nomads of the Jungle (United World Film, 1948) and see how cleverly the children of the Malayan Peninsula have learned to adjust to their environment, or for boys and girls to try to figure out what they would do if they lived in a rocky, mountainous country like Norway. This is a part of the process of learning how people are affected by their environment and how they in turn alter the environment, not only in the United States, but in every part of the world.

Likewise, children can begin to understand how boys and girls in every country learn from their parents and other adults how to eat. The American boy may think the French boy who wears gloves on Sunday a "sissy", but he can learn that all French boys do this when paying a formal visit, and that all gentlemen do this in France, whether they are prize fighters or diplomats. Such a simple illustration is the beginning of understanding how people learn the ways they live whether in Philadelphia, Paris, or Persepolis.

Thirdly, children should learn that countries are very much like people and are affected by their size, history, and beliefs. Although there are dangers in such an analogy, it is probably one of the easiest ways of helping children to understand the different nations of the world and how they act. Children can think of small countries and large countries, old countries and young countries, and even relatively happy countries and relatively unhappy countries. They can begin to understand why a nation with centuries of history like China often acts differently from a young country like the Philippine Republic, or why a country like India, which has just cut loose from its parent, often acts differently from a nation like France. They can see why a small nation like Switzerland plays a far different role in the world than a large country like the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or how a poverty-stricken nation like India is concerned about different problems than ~~notoriously~~ rich countries like Sweden and the United States. They should learn, however, of the vast differences between people within any one nation.

Fourthly, children should learn about the increasing interdependence of countries and peoples. From almost the beginning of a child's life in school, he can learn how

nations and peoples depend upon each other. Whether it is the games he plays, the music he sings, the foods he eats, or the inventions he uses, the elementary school child can learn to some extent of his debt to other people. This is one of the ways of developing an appreciation of other countries and peoples and our reliance on them, as well as their dependence upon us. Carried a little further, this concept can lead boys and girls to see some of the problems which result from our "shrinking" world.

Fifthly, children should learn that we need to communicate with people of other countries. Growing out of the concept of interdependence is the realization of the need for many kinds of communication. For younger children this may be illustrated best through the exchange of food, clothing, games, songs, and other items of interest to them. With older children this concept may be enlarged to include the exchange of ideas, the need for learning languages to communicate, and the importance of the air waves and the air ways. Children need to act upon this idea as well as verbalize it. They may exchange drawings, write letters, earn money to assist the International Children's Emergency Fund, the Red Cross, and other worthy organizations, and in many ways actually communicate with the peoples of other parts of the world.

Lastly, children should learn that there are conflicts between countries, but that people in all parts of the world are trying to learn to live peacefully together in the world community. From the television screen and the radio, from the newsreel and the newspaper, from the conversation of older children and from adults, boys and girls are bound to hear about the international conflicts which plague the world. No realistic program of education for international understanding in the elementary school can ignore these conflicts. Without thrusting adult problems onto children, the story of conflicts can be discussed simply and understandingly. At the same time, children need to know the story of man's efforts to achieve international cooperation. These may include accounts of the peaceful settlement of the dispute between Norway and Sweden, of the cooperation of the United States and the U.S.S.R. in the cholera epidemic in Egypt, the work of the United Nations in helping victims of the earthquake in Ecuador, the work of the International Postal Union, and the undefended border between the United States and Canada. This is a part of the task of creating what Gordon Allport calls the "expectancy for peace." (Tensions That Cause Wars, 1950, ch. 2.)

Dangers to Avoid

In any program of study about other lands and peoples there are certain dangers which should be born in mind and avoided. One is the tendency to stress the bizarre, the unique, the colorful, instead of the accurate, everyday, realistic features of a country. This is a special danger for the elementary school where teachers are often looking for the colorful costumes and the strange customs which lend themselves to pageants and celebrations.

For some teachers there is the added danger of uncritical good will. There are features of every country which are bad. They may be understood, but there is no reason to accept them or to attempt to explain them away.

A third danger is that of attempting to study too many countries with the consequence that these studies turn into a cataloguing of factual information and a hodgepodge of learning.

Similar to this is the attempt to cover every aspect of the life of a country rather than selecting aspects of its life which can be meaningful to an elementary school child.

Probably the most difficult danger to avoid is that of judging others by our own standards. If they have good modern plumbing and are Christians, they are civilised; if they wear few clothes or believe in passive resistance they are "backward"!

In all these points, it is the attitude of the teacher which will largely determine the approach to a country or culture. Perhaps the best way to start in any such program is for teachers themselves to probe their own prejudices about other countries and peoples!

Characteristics of a Program for the Elementary School

To be successful, any program of study of other lands and peoples must conform to the same criteria which exist for any other aim of the elementary school. These are well known, but it may be important to review them briefly with particular reference to learning about other countries and peoples.

A Comprehensive Program. The study of other lands and peoples should be an integral part of the elementary school curriculum, intended for every child, but adapted to

the differences in children according to locality, intelligence, reading ability, past experience, and interests. It should be a continuous and cumulative program, starting with the pre-school or primary school child and his acceptance of himself and his adjustment to others, and growing into an understanding of those who live farther away and are more different. It should be a balanced program, complementing the study of the local community and the United States of America rather than replacing these important aspects of the elementary school curriculum or crowding them into an obscure corner of the curriculum.

Providing a Variety of Experiences. So far as we now know there is no one way of introducing children to other countries and peoples. Children need a variety of experiences. They need to meet people from other countries. They need to see films. They need to sing the songs and perform the dances of other peoples. They need to act out the fables and legends of other lands. They need to share with the children of other lands. In other words, they need experiences which combine emotional and intellectual approaches.

Stressing Attitudes. Knowledge may be easily forgotten, skills disappear with lack of use, but attitudes usually cling to a person for life. All three are important, but the greatest of these is attitudes. That is where the stress should be in presentation and evaluation of any program.

Leading to Action. Children learn what they live and do. This is a truism of education, but it is so often forgotten that the writer dares to mention it again. It is difficult to find realistic experiences involving action, but boys and girls should be engaged in some small project in connection with the study of another country, whether it be

the preparation of a scrapbook which will eventually be sent to a children's hospital in this country, the drawing of pictures or the recording of songs which will be sent to a school abroad, the preparation of a mural or play which may be shown to other children, or the staging of a bazaar to raise funds to help some boy or girl in another land. From such activities children tend to retain more than from more passive types of learning.

Including the Community. A child who learns at school to respect a Negro or Jew or Chinese is not likely to retain such an attitude if the home or community harbor prejudice against these groups. Such a situation has led social psychologists to emphasize the "total situation" approach to all kinds of learning, and has led educators to work much more closely with the home and community than they used to do. Difficult though it may be, the school which is really interested in a successful program of education about other countries and peoples, must include parents and others in the local community in their program. Through mothers' meetings, parent-teacher associations, local libraries, churches, labor organizations, and other groups, the elementary school must cooperate with the adult community in any realistic program of this kind.

Actively Supported by the School's Administration. To be sure, something can be accomplished with the tacit approval of the administration, but much more can be done where there is active support. Time, equipment, and money are important for any program; without the enthusiastic approval of the administrators who usually provide these essentials, a program can be handicapped or even wrecked. Any program in the elementary school needs to involve the principal, board of education, and superintendent of schools.

Embodying Experimentation and Evaluation. Teachers have taught about other lands and peoples for many years, but they have had little proof that they have really accomplished what they set out to do. They have taught as they were taught and the vicious cycle has continued. Teachers today need to be aware of the latest scientific data on the formation and change of attitudes. (For a summary of such research see Otto Klineberg's, Tensions Affecting International Understanding, 1950.) They need to experiment with and evaluate new approaches. They need to jot down anecdotal records of children's comments during a study of another country. They need to experiment with stories written by boys and girls about children in other lands before and after an intensive study of that country. (They need to prepare social distance and attitude tests before a unit, at the close of a unit, and possibly six months after the unit is terminated. They need to appraise the films they have used and their temporary and long-term effects on children. They need to utilize the socio-drama.) In such ways teachers can help in the important task of finding the most feasible ways of developing understanding and appreciation.

Selection of Countries or Topics to be Studied

There are over 70 countries, over 300 well-established cultures, and scores of topics dealing with various aspects of countries, which vie for attention in our schools. How can one choose from such a wealth of possibilities the few on which to concentrate in the elementary school?

In the primary grades it seems wise to make the study of other parts of the world largely incidental, introducing their stories, folk tales, songs, games and celebrations into the general program of those grades. Where there are children from other countries in the class, where visitors arouse an interest in another country, or where some special event

creates curiosity, brief and simple studies can be made of ways of living in other lands. These studies will probably be infrequent.

The Topical Approach. In the intermediate and upper grades of the elementary school there is much to be said for selecting topics which cut across national boundaries. Thus a study of food, clothing, transportation, communication, conservation, intercultural relations, or inventions might well start with the local community or the United States and lead children to the study of these topics in another country. The study of food could well include a comparison of the wheat and corn culture of the United States with the rice culture of parts of China. The study of intercultural understanding could include a study of ways in which people of different backgrounds live in Brazil, Hawaii, or New Zealand. Or the study of inventions could demonstrate the contribution of inventors from many nations.

Small Countries with Relatively Simple Cultures. Another commendable approach in the elementary school seems to be the study of a few smaller countries with relatively simple cultures or with cultures similar to that of the United States. This would mean the study of one of the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Australia or New Zealand, and possibly England. Children would thus be able to gain an understanding of some other countries without being plunged into the large and less easily understood cultures of China, India, or the U.S.S.R. to mention but three such examples.

Neighboring Nations. A study of Canada or Mexico has merit if well handled. Although not too simple to understand, they are still not completely foreign because of their proximity to the States. There is the added advantage of the presence of people in almost any community who have been to one of these countries, who can help children to

understand these lands. And there is some possibility that boys and girls, with their parents, may be able to visit parts of these nations. These countries also loom fairly large in any study of the history of the United States and may be chosen for that reason.

Countries in Which Pupils are Particularly Interested. A school with an Affiliated School (see Chapter) abroad might well want to study that country in the elementary grades despite the fact that it did not fit into any of the categories already listed. Likewise, a special interest growing out of an assembly program, a visit of a person from abroad, or a current happening might well turn the attention of a group of boys and girls to a particular nation. Sometimes the country from which their ancestors came to the United States has a special appeal. When such an interest has been aroused, it is usually important to capitalize upon it.

Countries Against Which Children are Prejudiced. Although this approach is seldom mentioned, it seems to the writer to have much merit. If the children have developed a great deal of prejudice against a certain country, it would be well for the teacher to consider a study of that nation, particularly if there is a good chance of changing their attitudes through the ensuing study. Such a criterion will only be possible where teachers have fairly objective data on the attitudes of their pupils.

General Methods of Teaching

There are many ways of approaching the study of other lands and peoples or of topics which involve other countries. Each teacher will need to select a method to suit his own teaching style and his particular group. However, teachers should bear in mind the findings of psychologists as to the methods most likely to result in better understanding of other lands and their inhabitants. They are presented in

the next few pages in the order of their assumed value.

Learning about Other Countries through Personal Contacts. Social psychologists are agreed that face to face contacts with persons of other races, religions, or nations under favorable circumstances are among the most valuable experiences in forming attitudes. They seem to feel that such face to face experiences should be with one's peers and so far as possible in situations where all are on an equal basis socially.

Many educators interested in developing international understanding are opposed to foreign travel for children, unless they have the psychological security of travelling with their families. Belgian educators take their elementary school pupils to France, where the language is the same and the culture quite similar, but postpone till later any trips to countries with different languages and sharper contrasts in culture. In the United States children seldom have the opportunity to visit other countries, although a recent issue of the National Education Association Journal of (November, 1949) carries brief accounts of fourth-grade children from the Laboratory School of the State Teachers College at Plattsburg, New York, taking a one-day trip with parents and teachers to Quebec, and pupils from the North Beach Elementary School in Miami, Florida, spending their Thanksgiving vacation in Cuba.

More schools make use of children in their schools who have come from abroad, of parents or other adults in the community who have been born abroad or who have lived there, or of students from other countries now studying in the United States, of whom there are now nearly 27,000. In her booklet on World Understanding Begins With Children (See bibliography at conclusion of chapter), Delia Goetz stresses the importance of

and techniques for the preparation of children for the visits of persons from other countries.

Loretta Klee describes with great understanding the experiences of a second grade in an Ithaca, New York, school which planned an imaginery trip to Chile as a result of the enrollment of a Chilean boy in their class. (Social Education, April 1949, pp. 163-165) Miss Klee has also vividly described the unpredictable results of a study of China and a visit of a Chinese student in a fourth grade, pointing out the advantages of first-hand contact as an essential part of a study of another nation. (Social Education, February, 1949, pp. 69-71.)

In the survey of Friends schools described in Chapter 1, the teacher expressed more interest in obtaining names of persons qualified to talk to children about other countries, than in obtaining any other types of help. Schools would do well to keep lists of such visitors from among their students, teachers, parents, adults, and students from abroad in nearby colleges and universities.

Learning about Other Countries through Audio-Visual Experiences. Psychologists and educators, including those with considerable experience in the intercultural education movement, agree upon the importance of the mass media in attitude formation and change. As yet there are not too many good films and few reliable and interesting filmstrips for use with boys and girls. Some teachers report effective use of the Encyclopedia Britannica films and filmstrips on Children in Many Lands. Some of these, however, are out of date and seem to stress the unusual rather than the usual. Elementary school teachers generally seem pleased with the value of Montevideo Family (United World- excellent realistic, 1953), Walt Disney's Grain That Built a Hemisphere (Institute of Inter-American Affairs, 1943. On loan from some State Extension Division libraries), and the various

titles of the United World Films on The Earth and Its People. The new series of filmstrips, People Are People, showing the life of twelve families around the world, has also received enthusiastic endorsement.

A very valuable contribution could be made by a group of teachers in rating films and filmstrips about other countries as to their value for use in the elementary school. Meantime teachers will need to rely on such listings as the Educational Film Guide and the Filmstrip Guide which are located in most school and public libraries.

Teachers will find help in the search for pictures from a booklet by Bruce Miller (Ontario, California) on Sources of Free and Inexpensive Pictures and from Units of Teaching Pictures of the Informative Classroom Picture Publishers (Grand Rapids 2, Michigan).

Learning about Other Countries Through Creative Activities. The resourceful teacher will find many ways in which to involve pupils in creative activities in conjunction with their studies of other countries and peoples. Their value was apparent in a recent survey of high school seniors which the writer made in fifteen schools across the United States (Progressive Education,). The only references which they made to elementary school experiences in arousing their interest in other parts of the world were in "projects" such as a pageant on China, a mural painted after a class had studied Sweden, a small classroom museum of Mexican objects started in connection with a study of that neighbor-nation, and a few similar activities. Herbert Read stresses the importance of such creative activities, pointing out that "A child's art ...is its passport to freedom", using art in its broadest sense (Education for Peace, 1949, p. 152). With modern psychologists he emphasizes the importance of creativity in channelling properly the aggressive tendencies of people.

Alert teachers will want to encourage their pupils to dramatize their readings, to create simple sociodramas, to paint murals, to make simple leather and woven goods, to collect stamps, to dress dolls in the costumes of other lands, to cook the foods of other nations, and to do various types of construction jobs. In this way they will begin to learn about other peoples through their hands as well as their heads.

Learning about Other Countries through Reading. Reading about other countries has value and no one of the approaches just discussed can be carried on adequately without reading. However, reading activities are probably not as valuable in themselves as many teachers would like to believe. That is why reading is placed last on this brief list of methods, although stress is laid upon it as one aspect of a multi-dimensional program. The intercultural education movement has laid great stress on stories about children of other races and religions as a means of developing and changing attitudes, and it is probably true that stories about children in other lands can be one of the most effective parts of a reading program in the elementary school.

Fortunately, there is a growing list of authentic and interesting books for children, including stories, folk tales and legends, poetry, and novels. Good biographies and plays are still quite rare.

The bibliography which follows lists several children's books. For other titles, teachers can easily consult such standard references as The Children's Catalogue and May Hill Arbuthnot's Children and Books, 1947.

Conclusion

Helping children to understand and appreciate other countries and peoples is an immense task, but it can also be a thrilling adventure for

teachers and pupils. As a Chinese philosopher has said, "One of the measures of a man is his ability to live in the wide house of the world." One of the measures of a teacher is his ability to help children to live in this "wide house of the world"--the world community. Such understanding and appreciation can begin in the elementary school through a many sided program which is both exciting and profitable.

Materials for Teachers and Pupils

General Resources

Kenworthy, Leonard S. "Developing World-Minded Children: Resources for Elementary School Teachers" The Author Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, New York, 1951, pp 36.

General Methods-Books

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Organizing the Elementary School for Living and Learning Washington National Education Association 1947 311 pp. Chapter 5 "Citizens of the World"

Kohn, Clyde F. (Editor) Geographic Approaches to Social Education Washington National Council for the Social Studies 1948 295 pp. Chapters 18, 19, and 20 deal with the elementary school.

National Association of Elementary School Principals Learning Goodwill in the Elementary School Washington National Education Association 1946 366 pp.

West, Edith Improving the Teaching of World History Washington National Council for the Social Studies 1949 275 pp. Chapters 5, 6, and 18 deal with the elementary school.

General Methods-Booklets

Coetz, Delia "World Understanding Begins With Children" Washington U.S. Office of Education 1949 30 pp. A "must" in this field.

"Neighboring in the Cause of World Peace" Washington Association for Childhood Education April, 1946, issue.

Free and Inexpensive Materials

"Free and Inexpensive Learning Materials" Nashville, Tenn. George Peabody College for Teachers 1950 162 pp. Includes some material on world affairs.

Kenworthy, Leonard S. "Free and Inexpensive Materials on World Affairs for Teachers" The Author Brooklyn College, Brooklyn 10, N.Y. 1951 112 pp. Includes many items for elementary schools.

Resource Units

Resource Units may be found in The Grade Teacher, The Instructor, Elementary English, Social Education, and other magazines through the Education Index.

Resource Units may be purchased from the F. A. Owen Publishing Company, Dansville, New York and the World Book Encyclopedia Reference Library, 35 East Wacker Drive, Chicago 1, Ill. The latter are very inexpensive.

Audio-Visual Materials

Hartley, William H. A Guide to Audio-Visual Materials for Elementary School Social Studies Brooklyn Rambler Press (50 Court Street) 1950 181 pp. Films, filmstrips and slides listed and annotated.

Lists of Children's Books on Other Lands

Altstetter, Mabel "Children's Books for Seventy-Five Cents or Less" Washington Association for Childhood Education 1950 49 pp.

Boust, Nora "Books to Help International Understanding" Washington U. S. Office of Education 1949 17 pp. Mimeographed. Free.

Kenworthy, Leonard S. "Asia in the Social Studies Curriculum" Brooklyn College Brooklyn, N.Y. The Author 1951 44 pp. Includes section on books for elementary school children, listed by countries.

"Let Them Face It: Today's World in Books for Boys and Girls" New York Child Study Association of America 1950 16 pp. Mimeographed

Sattley, Helen "Children's Books About Foreign Countries" Chicago National Council of Teachers of English 1950 40 pp. Lists, with annotations, on Canada, Africa, Russia, and India.

Series of Books for Boys and Girls

Holiday House Lands and Peoples Series
Knopf Made in....Series
Macmillan Around the World Series
Charles E. Merrill Company World Geography Readers Brief and inexpensive
Messner Adventures in....Series
Row Peterson and Company The Good Neighbor Series Beautifully illustrated

Bulletins for Teachers and Pupils

"Air Age Education News" Air Age Education Research 100 East 42nd St. N.Y.C. 17 Free.

"American Junior Red Cross News" American Red Cross 17th and D Sts., Washington, D. C.

"Geographic School Bulletin" National Geographic Society, Washington 6, D. C.

"Guide to Parents and Teachers" American Friends Service Committee 20 South 12th Street Philadelphia, Penna. Free with subscription to "Newsletter for Boys and Girls"

"Newsletter for Boys and Girls" American Friends Service Committee (address above)

Organizations for Special Materials

Foreign Policy Association 22 East 38th Street, New York City 16
Institute of Pacific Relations 1 East 54th Street, New York City 22
National Geographic Society 16th and M. Streets, N.W., Washington, D. C.
Pan American Union, Washington 6, D. C.
United States Office of Education Washington 25, D. C.