

The International Dimension of Elementary Schools • LEONARD S. KENWORTHY

Mr. Kenworthy, for years a prolific author of elementary curriculum materials, presents here 10 characteristics of elementary schooling designed to include the world dimension. He describes in some detail two approaches to study of the world through the social studies.

WHAT a world we live in today! And what a world it promises to be tomorrow! In his recent book on *The Meaning of the Twentieth Century* (Harper), Kenneth Boulding calls attention to the fact that 25 percent of the people who ever lived are now alive and that 90 percent of the scientists who ever worked are now living somewhere on our globe.

Today there are a little more than three billion people on our planet; by the year 2000 there will probably be between six and seven billion of us clamoring for food, clean air, space, and higher standards of living. Today there are approximately 120 nations; tomorrow there will undoubtedly be several more. At present regional

organizations and the United Nations are weak and often ineffective; tomorrow they are likely to be stronger and much more effective. Today there are two world powers; tomorrow there may be more. Certainly China, Japan, India, Brazil, Australia, Canada, and the Western European Community are challenging the world leaders for prestige and power. Today we are racing for the moon; tomorrow it may well be other parts of the solar system to which we will be flying. Today we are previewing the world of the future on global television by Telstar; tomorrow international communication by satellites may be commonplace. Today we are beginning to harness the wind, the sun, natural steam, and atomic power; tomorrow—what will it bring as sources of power? Today most of us live in villages; tomorrow most of us will live in cities and giant megalopoli. Today we are just beginning to explore the depths of the oceans; tomorrow they may be major sources of our food and minerals.

Continuity is a basic theme of life, but it, too, has a challenger. That is change. Even our reliance

on history for guidance sometimes seems misplaced.

A Changed World as Focus

Most of the children in elementary schools today will live well into the twenty-first century—to 2025 or 2030—or longer if science prolongs life, as it is likely to do. The vaunted aim of elementary schools is to prepare children to live more effectively today and tomorrow. Yet one wonders if we are really doing that. Are we preparing children now to live in the airplane and space and atomic energy and oceanography age—or are we preparing them for some bygone period like the 1920's or the 1940's?

Perhaps our science and math programs have caught up with the times. But have our social studies and art and music and language arts curriculum planners discovered the latter half of the twentieth century and the first part of the twenty-first? I doubt it. Even our most forward-looking programs barely scratch the surface of needed changes.

The day of the child-centered school is not over. The day of the community-centered school is not

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past. But to them we need now to add a new dimension—the world-centered school. Actually this is an extension of the concept of the community-centered school. By 1990 aeronautical engineers tell us that many of us will be traveling at a height of 70 miles at 17,000 miles an hour—and that any place on our globe will be within reach in two hours. That means that the community of tomorrow's children is going to be the whole world. What far-reaching changes in the programs of our elementary schools that demands!

The School-Wide Approach

Everyone connected with elementary schools today should be concerned about his or her responsibility to children regarding the six major segments of society which they need to study: individuals and families, the neighborhood-community, the wider metropolitan area and state, the United States, the world, and space. In regard to the world we need to be clear that we are developing a dimension of education rather than a separate program, for international understanding is primarily a point of view rather than a subject. What we need to do is take a hard look at the total experiences of children in our elementary schools and see how the international dimension can permeate every aspect of the curriculum. What we need to develop is a comprehensive and cumulative approach to the world. Here are 10 characteristics of such an approach:

1. *It should begin early and extend throughout the years in school.* The old idea of introducing children to the world in the sixth grade is now archaic, outmoded, ridiculous, and even dangerous. Children have been exposed to the world even before they come to school these days. They have watched television programs on other parts of the world. They have heard adults discussing the world. Many of them have met people from other countries. Many more have relatives or friends in other parts of the globe. A few have even lived or traveled in other nations.



They have some information and much misinformation and distorted impressions. They need help in sorting out what they have seen and heard.

Even in the primary grades, boys and girls need to have some simple introductions to the people of our planet. From then on, the international dimension needs to be highlighted throughout the elementary school—and into the secondary school—and throughout life. It should permeate every subject field, or at least almost every field, at every grade level. And it should include assembly programs, library and corridor exhibits, and other aspects of the total life of all elementary school pupils.

2. *It should concentrate on a few basic concepts and generalizations.* Much of our study of the world today lacks focus. Teachers and administrators seem to be satisfied and proud if anything is done under the broad rubric of international understanding. A yearly assembly program on Pan American Day or during United Nations Week adds little if anything to the lives of most children. What we need to do is to select a few concepts, generalizations, or “big ideas” on which we all concentrate.

In the elementary school people and their relationships should be highlighted. Here are a few suggestions as a start:

- a. There are 3½ billion people in the world. They are all neighbors of ours.
- b. The people of the world are alike in many ways—and also different.
- c. People everywhere live in families and in communities.
- d. Large groups of people are organized into nations.
- e. The people of the world are

interdependent. We depend upon them and they depend upon us.

- f. People—and nations—have problems. They are working on their problems just as we are working on ours. We share some basic problems.

- g. People everywhere enjoy and create fun and beauty.

- h. People belong to different religious groups. We share some ideals.

In scores of ways these and other important concepts can be discovered by children at various levels in our elementary schools.

3. *It should introduce children to the entire world, not merely some segments of it.* In the past we have stressed the so-called “Western world” in social studies, in art, in music, and in literature. Such an approach was satisfactory in the world children lived in in the past. But today they are living and will continue to live in a much wider world. We need to widen our approach and consider how children can be introduced to the whole world—non-Western as well as Western.

4. *It should be based on a mental hygiene approach to education.* Unless children feel relatively secure with themselves, they cannot reach out to others. Unless they like themselves, they cannot like others. Unless they have developed a strong self-image, they cannot identify with others. Therefore any program of teaching about the world must be built upon a base of security in children. Then, and only then, can they accept the selves of others.

5. *It should utilize a wide variety of methods, stressing feelings as well as facts, skills and attitudes as well as knowledge.* We are so often anxious that children know about the rest of the world that we ignore or minimize how they feel about the people on our planet. Knowledge is of course important. There is much boys and girls need to discover about people everywhere, their institutions, their ideas, and their relationships. Such knowledge needs to be concentrated around certain basic concepts and generalizations, such as

those we have already suggested. But there is a deeper level which is even more important and that is the feeling-tone towards other people. One might call it "gut-level" teaching. In its international dimension, as in its other dimensions, such teaching concentrates upon the acceptance of strangeness or difference.

Such learning does not mean that children have to accept the values of others. It merely means that they need to try to understand why others act as they do and respect them, despite differences. But what a big word "merely" is in that context. Often it takes a lifetime of learning to understand and to respect differences. But the task can be made easier if it begins with children.

They should learn that people elsewhere are not quaint folks who do strange things. They should learn that they do them for a reason. If they sit on the floor most of the time, then they want thick rugs and pillows and dresses. If they live in a warm climate and work in rice paddies, they do not need many clothes. If they value beautiful wooden floors, they take their shoes off when entering their homes. Children need to learn that people who are different are not just crazy people doing crazy things.

The exposure of elementary school children to the world should be through a variety of methods. People come first. As Margaret Mead has pointed out, you can have education *about* international understanding without people but not education *in* international understanding.

All kinds of pictorial materials should receive high priority—films, filmstrips, posters, and flat pictures.

Along with these visuals should be realia of various types. A beautiful Chinese vase or a delicate silver bowl from Thailand will sometimes do more to develop appreciation of others than scores of pages of reading in textbooks and trade books.

Music, art, the dance, plays, and choral speaking can often do more than anything else to help children

to understand and respect other people.

Role playing and problem solving should receive high priority, too. Through them children can begin "to walk in the moccasins" of other people, as the old Indian proverb says.

6. *It should use a wide variety of materials.* Fortunately there is now a wealth of materials on the people of the world. Others are badly needed, but teachers are too often unaware of all that now exists to help children study the world. There are very large picture portfolios of families in six parts of the world, produced by the Silver Burdett Company. There are kits of materials on the people of various parts of the world, sold by the International Communications Foundation in Monterey Park, California. There are the excellent songbooks of the Cooperative Recreation Service in Delaware, Ohio, and the superb book for teachers on music, entitled *Toward World Understanding With Song*, written by the Nyes and published by the Wadsworth Publishing Company. There are lists of books for children and audio-visual materials for them on Asia, prepared by the Asia Society (112 East 64th Street, New York, N.Y. 10020). And there is the list of outstanding materials for schools published by the World Affairs Materials Center and sold by them, available from that Center at Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11210. Most of the materials teachers want are now available—if they know where to find them.

7. *It should be experimental in nature, with a program of evaluation written into it.* Very little experimentation has been conducted yet on how children's horizons are

widened and how we can promote international understanding best. This is a field for much experimentation and many new methods of evaluation. Any attempt to add the international dimension to existing programs in the elementary school should be considered experimental at the present time. So far as possible, the means of evaluation should be written into such programs.

8. *It should have administrative support and community approval.* Without administrative and community support, most efforts to break down the walls of the school and include the world will come to naught. With support from those two essential groups, much can be done. Anyone working on an approach which will include the international dimension in elementary schools needs to consider carefully how the support of these separate but interrelated groups can be won. One practical suggestion is to begin by enlisting the aid of a powerful group to demand strengthening of programs about the world, instead of waiting to get support after a total approach has been made in local schools.

9. *It should be carried on by informed and imaginative, world-minded teachers.* No program will succeed without the fundamental help of classroom teachers. There are many teachers now in elementary schools who are already carrying on programs about the world. Many of them would welcome support and suggestions to improve their work, if they are presented in a sympathetic way. Many other teachers are ready for in-service courses, workshops, and talks by outside experts to give them further background for introducing children to the world. Many school systems are providing increment and in-service credit to teachers for travel abroad; many more could do this. Anything which is done to support teachers who are already at work and to arouse others to experiment with new approaches is worth doing.

10. *It should be carried on parallel with programs about the United States.* It should be very clear to



teachers, to administrators, to members of boards of education, to parents, and to other interested adults in the local community that the international dimension of elementary school programs is only one dimension, albeit an important one. Such teaching is not intended to supplant teaching about the United States but to supplement it. It is not intended to undermine loyalty to the United States but to complement that loyalty with loyalty to the family of man. Everyone should make it very clear that such teaching today is not subversive. It is basic education, fundamental education, even education for survival. Loyal Americans today must be informed about the world and knowledgeable about international issues.

Social Studies: the 'Carrier'

Every subject in the elementary school has its international dimensions, with the possible exception of mathematics. However, it is the social studies field which is chiefly concerned with this aspect of the curriculum, enriched and enhanced by art, music, literature, and to some extent by science.

There are two main approaches to studying the world in elementary schools. One is by global themes; the other is by studies of families, communities, and countries. Let us look briefly at these two general approaches.

1. The Approach by Themes. The approach by global themes is the easier of the two to introduce into an elementary school curriculum because it means primarily the extension of themes already taught about the United States to include the world. Thus the topic of food is examined first as a topic in our own country and then in selected parts of the world. Or the theme of transportation is viewed locally, nationally, and then internationally.

In my book on *Introducing Children to the World* (Harper), I suggest 10 such global themes. They are 1) The Earth as the Home of Man, 2) Three Billion Neighbors, 3) Ways of Living Around the World, 4) A World of Fun and Beauty, 5) An Interdependent World, 6) A World of Many Coun-

tries and Cultures, 7) A World of Poverty and Plenty, 8) A World with Many Forms of Government, 9) A World with Many Religions and Value Systems, and 10) A World of Conflict and Cooperation.

In my picture book on *Three Billion Neighbors* (Ginn), 16 themes are used, with a spin around the world to illustrate each of these basic topics.

The Silver Burdett volumes on *Pets Around the World*, *Fun Around the World*, *Homes Around the World*, *Schools Around the World*, and *Work Around the World* follow this general pattern.

Such an approach has much merit but it does not give children a total picture of one locale and help them understand people in a given setting. This is probably done better by the second approach.

2. The Approach by Families, Communities, and Countries. This approach calls for a drastic revision of the elementary school social studies curriculum to up-date it and to break the warped and out-dated

"concentric circles" basis of curriculum planning. It calls for a study of families locally and in the United States in the kindergarten and first grade, followed by a study of selected families in various parts of the world in second grade. In the third grade children would study their own community and selected communities in other parts of the U.S., followed by a study of a few carefully selected communities in other parts of the world in the fourth grade. In the fifth grade pupils would study the United States today and yesterday. Then in the sixth grade they would study a few selected nations of the world, largely in their contemporary setting, but with some history explored, too.

In chart form such an approach is as shown below.

Pupils would then go on in the ninth and tenth grades to study the eight major *cultures* of the world. In the eleventh and twelfth grades they would again look at the United States but this time in a global

Grade	Basic Theme	Application Locally and to Selected Parts of the U.S.	Application to Selected Parts of the Rest of the World
<i>Individuals and Families</i>			
K-1	Individuals and Families Locally and in the U.S.	X	
2	Individuals and Families in Other Parts of the World		X
<i>Communities</i>			
3	The Local Community and Selected Communities in the U.S.	X	
4	Selected Communities in Other Parts of the World		X
<i>Countries</i>			
5	The United States Today and Yesterday	X	
6	Selected Countries of the Rest of the World		X
<i>Basic Problems and Decisions in the U.S.</i>			
7	Problems and Decisions in the U.S. Today	X	
8	Problems and Decisions in the U.S. Yesterday	X	

setting, together with current national and international problems.

The families, communities, and countries to be studied would be chosen on several bases, but they would be selected especially to represent the eight major cultural areas of the world.

Such an approach has many advantages. It starts with the local and national scene. Then the skills learned in such studies are applied to people and places which are more distant.

It introduces children to the rest of the world much earlier than we now do, but the small units of families and communities are studied first, rather than the larger and more complex concept of countries.

Such a plan encourages depth by limiting the number of families, communities, and countries to be studied in a single year.

It also provides for two years on a general topic, which fits into a growing concern for ungraded classes and for middle school programs in grades four through eight.

This approach also introduces two other new elements into the

social studies curriculum. They are a half year on the contemporary scene in the United States in the fifth grade and a study of problems in our society in the seventh grade.

It also breaks the repetition of U.S. history in grades five and eight by providing for "post-holing" in the fifth grade and an approach through 30 basic decisions in our history in grade eight.

This plan assumes that concepts and generalizations from all the social sciences will be discovered by children in problem-solving situations in studying families, communities, and countries.

The plan is not just a dream of one person. It is now being carried on in several schools in the New York metropolitan area. These include Great Neck, Manhasset, and Locust Valley in New York; Fair Lawn and Ridgewood in New Jersey; and Greenwich, Connecticut. Each school has modified this basic plan to suit its own particular needs.

Through these two plans and others which local systems will certainly devise in the foreseeable fu-

ture, we should soon be able to do a far better job than we are now doing in developing the international dimension of education in elementary schools throughout the United States.

SOME BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS FOR TEACHERS

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