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By LEONARD S. KENWORTHY

EXTENDING THE STUDY OF FAMILIES

THE STUDY OF INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES has long been the focus for children in their preschool and primary-grade years. Almost everyone agrees that this approach should be continued, inasmuch as the family is the most significant segment of society for young children and a simple enough institution for them to analyze. However, many people are critical of the limitations of such studies as they are being carried on currently in most schools.

CRITICISMS OF CURRENT STUDIES

Five criticisms being levelled against the current treatment of individuals and families in social studies teaching today are as follows:

1. *We linger too long on local families.* In the past children spent their first-grade year getting acquainted with their own families and the families of other children in their class. Sometimes this study was even extended into the second grade. Then, when the kindergarten became more common, the family became the focus there, too. For some chil-

dren the family is also featured in the nursery school, although in a much more indirect way. Many people are wondering just how long children can profitably study these local families. Are we not teaching about families in the immediate environment "ad nauseum"? The implications of this question lead to a second criticism.

2. *We are not introducing children to a wide variety of families.* With more and more segregation of families by socio-economic levels inside large cities and in the suburbs, children today are being deprived of the opportunity of meeting, learning about, and studying a wide variety of families. They come in contact solely or largely with families very much like their own.

In textbooks, too, they are confronted with only a limited range of families. Usually such families are middle- or upper-class, white, nuclear city families living in single houses—or suburban

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families of much the same background, living in split-level or ranch houses.

Consequently many children are unable to identify with the cast of characters presented in textbooks. The children they see there and read about are white—when they are brown or black or yellow. Textbook children are rich or comfortably situated—whereas the readers are often poor. Boys and girls in books live in homes with picket fences, lawns and flowers—while the readers often live in tenements in ghettos or slums. Textbook characters always seem to have two parents at home; the readers often have only one parent—or none—at home.

Such limitations obviously militate against preparing boys and girls to live in the variegated, pluralistic society of our day, which is certainly a high priority aim of elementary (and secondary) education.

Closely associated with these two criticisms is a third charge.

3. *We do not expose children to the rich diversity of families throughout the United States.* There was a time, not too long ago, when most children lived out their lives in the locality where they were born. With the increasing mobility of our population, this is no longer true. Millions of children will move sometime during their lives, many of them during their childhood days.

Furthermore, children need to be exposed early to the wide variety of people in our country. Their lives can be enriched by such confrontations with others. Sympathetic attitudes toward others can be developed in these crucial years of early childhood. The acceptance of people with differing backgrounds and ways of living can be promoted. Later on, such an education should yield rich rewards to the nation in a better informed and more accepting citizenry.

But the background of children should not be limited to families in the U.S.A. This leads to a fourth criticism of current studies.

4. *We do not expose children to the rich diversity of families in other parts of the world.* In our increasingly small world it seems to many of us strange and even dangerous to delay until the sixth grade the introduction of children to the world, as is now done in most schools. Even before they come to school these days, they are exposed to the world by way of television, by relatives and friends abroad, and by visitors from other parts of our planet. Children are constantly picking up bits and pieces of information—and misinformation—and they need help in assembling the disparate pieces of the world puzzle in their minds into an integrated pattern. Why, then, should they not study a few carefully selected families in other parts of the globe in their primary-grade years, after having “met” and analyzed (as well as enjoyed) a variety of families in their own community and metropolitan region and in other parts of the United States? If properly developed, such an approach would enrich their lives and prepare them more effectively for the international community in which they will undoubtedly live in the years ahead.

5. *We do not fully utilize the various social science disciplines to enrich current studies of families.* Furthermore, critics of present practices are pointing out that most studies of families in schools today deprive children of a comprehensive picture of families, drawing upon all or almost all of the social sciences. They maintain, with a great deal of logic, that concepts and generalizations about families should be drawn from anthropology and sociology, geography,

government and economics and, to a much lesser degree, from history.

A close examination of the "wheel" (opposite page) on the dimensions of family life will reveal topics from all or almost all of the social sciences.

In recent years Lawrence Senash and others have rendered us all a great service in introducing and/or deepening the economics content in the study of families. Now we need to examine the other social science disciplines to see how they can contribute in a similar fashion to the extension, enrichment and deepening of studies by children of family life.

A CURRICULUM PROPOSAL

All these criticisms seem justified to many of us. If they are correct, they demand a new look at the study of families in the preschool and primary grades. If these criticisms were met, how might they change the current curriculum, you ask?

One proposal for the consideration of administrators, curriculum specialists and teachers follows.

Might we not concentrate in the nursery school and kindergarten on families of children in our classes and on families in the immediate environment? Then, in the first grade, children could be introduced to families in the wider metropolitan region and to a few carefully selected families in other parts of the United States. These could represent a diversity of people—with families chosen on the basis of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, different socio-economic levels, different geographical locales, different occupations, and different religious faiths. At least one migrant family might well be included and one family of newcomers to the United States or to the "mainland"—probably a

family from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico or from Mexico.

With the skills acquired in such studies and with the attitudes developed, children would then be ready to study a few carefully selected families in other parts of the world in second grade. These should probably be chosen from the major cultural areas of the world and represent the diversity of the world's people by race and ethnic background, by socio-economic level, by occupation, and by geographical location. Extended families as well as nuclear families could be included, too.

Then pupils would be ready to study the larger segment of society—the community—in grades three and four, with the focus in the third grade on the local community and a few communities of the United States and in the fourth grade on a few communities of the world. In the fifth grade children might well study the U.S.A.—today and yesterday—and then move on to the study of a few other nations of the world in the sixth grade.

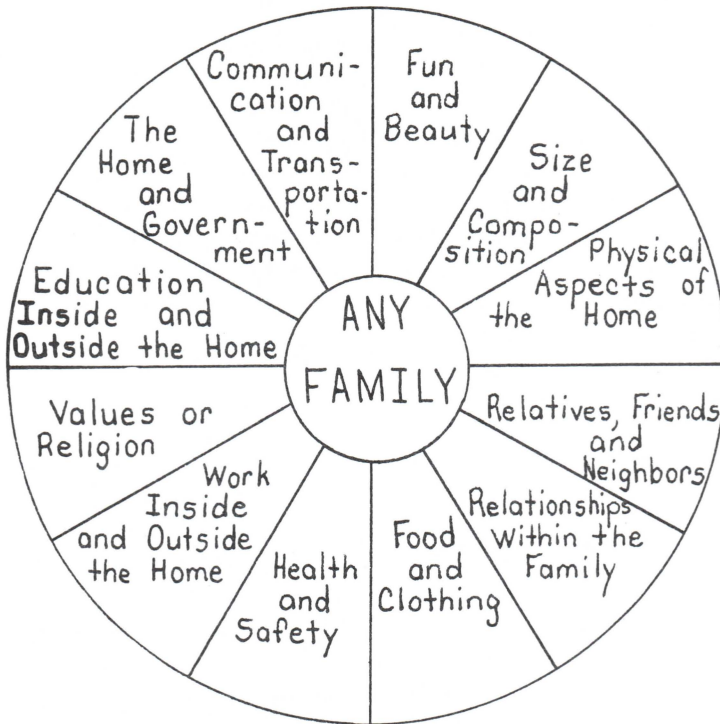
Such a plan would certainly extend and enrich the present programs in elementary school and prepare pupils to live more effectively in the world of the foreseeable future.

Is such a plan logical, practical, feasible? What modifications would you suggest? What alternatives would you propose?

SOME SUGGESTED METHODS

The methods used in studying the "new" families added should not differ perceptibly from those now used in the study of families, since all families have the same or similar needs and carry on the same or similar activities. Certainly all twelve of the aspects of family life shown in the chart should be studied in conjunction with most families, although the order would differ from family to family and the aspects highlighted would vary.

Different Aspects of a Family To Study



Probably more emphasis needs to be given now than has been done in the past to the *study* of pictures, to role-playing and spontaneous dramatics, to "maps" of houses, and to films and filmstrips, especially with families with which pupils have had little or no previous experience.

SOME USEFUL NEW MATERIALS

Fortunately publishers are issuing an increasing number of materials for use in studying families, especially on the long neglected study of individuals and families outside the United States.

On families in the United States there are the splendid, large pictures on "A Family Is . . ." in the Urban and the Rural Education Series of the John Day Company. Scott Foresman has a picture portfolio in color of a Puerto Rican family and Holt, Rinehart and Winston has a

large magnetic board with figures of families for use by children in the language arts and the social studies. The three new textbooks of Holt, Rinehart and Winston on *William, Andy and Ramon*, *Five Friends at School*, and *Living as Neighbors* offer real families rather than mythical ones of Negro, Caucasian and Latin-American backgrounds. The textbooks of several other companies now include some Negroes. Scores of trade books on individuals and families in the U.S.A. are now available, such as the superb volume on *Roosevelt Grady* (World), a migrant Negro boy; *Willie* (Atheneum), a volume on a lad in the lower East Side of New York City; and *No Biscuits at All* (Friendship Press), a book about a boy whose family moves from Appalachia to Baltimore.

Publishers are beginning to issue more materials, too, on families in other parts

of the world. Most of them are reliable and interesting and many of them are suitable for use with primary-grade children. When the text is too difficult, the pictures can be used and the text read by the teacher. Or children can listen to the text as recorded on tape.

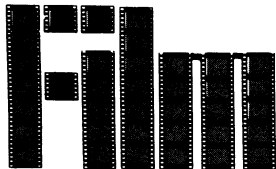
Several series of trade books on children in various parts of the world, with many references to their families, include books by Peter Buckley (Watts), Betty Cavana (Watts), Dominique Darbois (Follett), Anna Riwin-Brick (Macmillan), and G. Warren Schloat, Jr. (Knopf). The books on villages of the world by the Gidals (Pantheon) feature families in many locales.

Silver Burdett has recently issued large pictures on families in Brazil, France, Japan, Kenya, and the United

States; and a forthcoming textbook for the second grade to be published by Ginn will introduce second-grade children to several families around the world.

A good many films and filmstrips on children in other parts of our planet include a series of filmstrips published by the Encyclopaedia Britannica, McGraw-Hill, and the Society for Visual Education. UNICEF also has several filmstrips on the children of various continents.

For their own background for such studies, teachers should find helpful Margaret Mead and Ken Heyman's *Family* (Macmillan); Beatrice Whiting's *Six Cultures: Studies of Child Rearing* (Wiley); and "Four Families" (McGraw Hill), a film narrated by Margaret Mead on families in Canada, France, India and Japan.



**FOR YOUR PLEASURE
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DISCOVERING IDEAS FOR ART

Produced by: Paul Burnford and Jerry Samuelson, Department of Art,
California State College at Fullerton

Distributed by: Film Associates of California, 11559 Santa Monica Boulevard, West
Los Angeles, California 90025

DISCOVERING IDEAS FOR ART is a visual exploration of the idea process as it may be involved in the invention and execution of art projects. The first part of the film explores the quality of seeing as opposed to indifferent looking. The camera is used to investigate the exciting variety of several objects as examples showing a wide range of appearances. After establishing the variety concept, the selective eye of the camera is used to investigate shape, color, line, texture, pattern and value.

In the second half of the film emphasis is given to invention as the final step in discovering ideas for art. Through the use of visual examples the film explores how creative art can be simplified, how it can be changed by emphasizing one or another of the characteristics of the objects we see, or how new forms evolve from the things we see.

The primary purpose of this film is to stir children's imagination and to encourage careful observation, thus stimulating the creation of original art forms.

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