

Mission Geography

To plan curriculum one must clearly conceptualize what he or she wants to accomplish and how to do it.

Can an individual teacher really do his or her own curriculum planning? The answer is *yes!*

When I began my teaching career in a small rural school, I had no formal preparation, and no experienced teacher with whom to consult. Unaware of what resources were available, I felt disappointed with many of the textbooks. By my third year, I had taken some professional education courses and had attended a national teachers' convention where I was encouraged to try some curriculum innovations.

One concept I found particularly challenging: "Instead of burdening [students'] memories with an array of names and theories that have no bearing upon their lives, and to which, once outside the schoolroom, they rarely give a thought, *let them study*

By E. Stanley Chace

*all lands in the light of missionary effort, and become acquainted with the peoples and their needs."*¹ This was so unlike any social studies class I had ever taken or the con-

tent of the textbooks I was using that I decided to focus upon this principle.

I organized my first attempt at "multicultural education" around a United Nations theme. Twenty-five years later, when I returned to elementary school teaching, my organizing theme was the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Although I had earned a doctorate in curriculum, I used the same basic approach: (1) conceptualization, (2) organization, (3) integration/implementation, (4) culmination, and (5) evaluation.

Conceptualization

To plan curriculum one must clearly conceptualize what he or she wants to accomplish and how to do it. My five primary goals generated some related objectives: (1) to design a foreign mission-based social-studies program, (2) to allow students to engage in curriculum planning, (3) to engage students in a cooperative learning experience, (4) to develop a truly "integrated" curriculum, and (5) to motivate students to consider mission service.

To achieve the first goal, I decided that we would study many countries, rather than the few in the textbooks. Second, I would help students select what countries and features we would study. Third, I would have students work in teams of two to four. Fourth, I would integrate other classes, where feasible,

with social studies. Last, I would pray for the Holy Spirit to speak to the hearts of my students.

Organization

When I began this venture, I was teaching grades five through eight at a three-teacher school in British Columbia. More than half my students were non-Adventists, some of whom did not attend any church. The class included many cultures from Canadian society, including its native peoples.

Before school began, I drafted a general proposal which, I hoped, was detailed enough to answer anticipated questions, yet broad enough to involve students in curriculum planning. The principal endorsed the plan, subject to school board and conference approval. The school board and conference leadership expressed their support. However, they worried that the provincial authorities might disapprove of any deviation from their curriculum guidelines.

I began teaching general geographical concepts in anticipation of provincial approval. We integrated math and social studies as we related latitudinal and longitudinal measures to the X-Y graph in arithmetic. Even the fifth-grade students quickly learned to relate the “positive” and “negative” values of the graph to the “E-W/N-S” coordinates on the globe.

Each morning worship period I read mission stories from various books and journals. This included the then-popular book, *Peace Child*,² which I used to integrate Bible class content with social studies.

After I received provincial approval in mid-September under a policy encouraging locally developed initiatives, the conference superintendent of education asked me to keep a record of the program. This resulted in a collection of slides that subsequently have been used in workshops around the world.

Integration/Implementation

I introduced the new curriculum to students by saying that “this year we are going to do something entirely different.” Overcoming their initial skepticism, they elected two eighth-grade students to co-

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chair the program.

After much discussion, the students agreed that they would like to know what it would be like to live in a foreign culture and how, as Christians, they would “witness” to their friends. They concluded that they should learn about the family life, dress, education, recreation, religion, work, transportation, climate, and geography of each country they studied. This was a much more ambitious undertaking than I might have attempted if I had planned the curriculum.

The students felt that they should develop a theme. The morning worship

materials and Bible class discussions helped them choose “witnessing.” “To Know About Jesus” appeared on the first bulletin board that the class designed and constructed. The theme was further enhanced by the selection of a theme song, “More About Jesus.” We were able to get a beautiful taped accompaniment, which made our singing a source of delight.

The students divided the world into “divisions” and declared themselves “division officers.” Originally, the teams included two students, usually an Adventist and a non-Adventist. In most instances, older students were paired with younger students. By the following spring, one team had been reduced to a single person (with his approval), while others had increased to three or four as transfer students joined our class.

The Adventist students suggested a “General Conference Session” as a culminating activity. Although this concept was alien to most of the students, they accepted it after we invited a returned missionary and division officer to visit the class and describe it to them. We then organized the spring calendar to allow time for reports on each group’s respective division.

Since we could devote only a portion of each day to this social studies project, we allowed each team a full week to present its report. As part of that report, each team decorated the classroom, arranged for guest speakers, movies, and slide presentations, and gave personal reports. Each student had to present a 30-minute oral report on a specific country without reading from notes. This could be done in three 10-minute segments, two 15-minute segments,

or one 30-minute period. After each presentation, the student had to answer classmates' questions. During this question time, the student could refer to research material. Students not involved in the presentation were expected to take notes.

Each team had to select three countries in its respective division that would represent that part of the world. They then had to contact church and government officials or other persons, describing their project and asking for assistance. We spent one language-arts period drafting a "model" letter, which each team adapted to its own needs. I proofread each letter before it was mailed. The school board underwrote most of the postage costs.

I suggested that students use their home addresses on all correspondence so that each child could have the thrill of receiving overseas mail. This kept parents informed of what we were doing.

As they wrote their letters in September and October, students began planning how they might decorate the room, bulletin boards, and classroom walls in the spring. Although the school had very meager resources, it did provide corrugated paper and some art supplies.

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Students also began their search for information and resource people. Formal study focused on general concepts from the social studies textbooks, and climatic concepts from their science classes.

Many films were available from the public library, the provincial resource center in Victoria, foreign consulates in various Canadian cities, and various travel agencies. The president of the British Columbia Conference obtained approval for the purchase of all available Mission Spotlight programs, which were then loaned to us for the academic year.

A number of former missionaries, consulate personnel, and immigrants served as resource persons. In addition, we made extensive use of *National Geographic* magazines and reference books, picture books featuring various countries, encyclopedias, social study textbooks, and materials from the United Nations. One of our most important tools was the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, a near-marvel to many of the students. Upon learning about our project, the local librarian volunteered to spend several evenings helping students locate material for their reports.

By mid-October, it became clear that we would need more than regular class time to present the daily reports. The students decided to allow 30-90 minutes daily for each report. Other classes received extra attention during the fall and winter months, while the formal social studies period was reduced. This posed no real scheduling problem, as many of the project activities were integrated into other parts of the daily schedule.

Much of the language arts time was devoted to writing letters of request, researching encyclopedias and journals, and drafting reports. The older students helped me critique the material. As mentioned earlier, students spent a part of their science classes studying causes and effects of climate upon environment and life-style. Many math problems grew out of student research. Art classes studied the principles of design, color, sketching, and lettering. The students used these concepts to make room decorations and design bulletin boards. Spelling lists were revised to include new words from the social studies project.

Bible classes achieved a new vitality as children began to appreciate the significance of their theme: "To Know About Jesus; To Tell About Jesus." They now had a reason to study the Bible. They began to grasp the significance of Mrs. White's statement about Solomon, who "sought to honor God by adding to his mental and spiritual strength, and by continuing to impart to others the blessings he received."³

Implementation

Excitement grew as the first responses began to trickle in. By January it became a

flood. The Far Eastern and South Pacific divisions were most generous in their support. Among secular sources, the former Eastern Bloc nations were the most liberal.

We received posters, brochures, travel folders, calendars, artifacts, coins and currency, small products and clothes, food samples, movies and slides, tape recordings, school newspapers, and personal letters from both children and adults. Non-Adventist students and their parents were impressed that high SDA church officials from various world divisions would take the time to write letters of encouragement and support to students in such a small country school.

Of all the items received, the students most highly prized these three:

- A pidgin English Sabbath school quarterly from New Guinea. This generated a spate of unique pidgin English as students compared the biblical references of that publication with their own Bibles.

- A series of unmounted 35mm filmstrips smuggled out of East Germany reporting on progress of the work behind the Berlin Wall. This generated a sense of achievement, since the students received something not then available even through Mission Spotlight.

- A letter and slides from the prime minister of Australia. The students were excited to view scenes of the prime minister's office, the legislative chambers, and sketches of the new and architecturally unique capitol then under construction in Canberra.

Many students wrote more than the minimum number of letters. Extra postage costs were covered by private contributions. Some students paid for their own postage.

The student teams worked well together. Most generously shared their efforts with transfer students who arrived during the year, and readily helped members of other teams. The exception was in the only team comprised of two non-Adventists. The older member was a multiple-handicapped child. The younger child could not handle the frustration of working with him. With admirable understanding, the handicapped student volunteered to work alone. Interestingly, his efforts quickly became recognized by his classmates as among the best. His study

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area, the South Pacific Division, showered him with an abundance of materials unequalled by any other source.

As the year progressed, the students

scheduled films and relevant Mission Spotlight programs, editing them to fit their planned reports. They contacted individuals representing their respective countries, arranged for class visitors, and prepared decorative materials for their reports.

Culmination

Spring arrived all too quickly. We drew lots to determine the order of reports. Each Friday afternoon during April and May, students decorated the room and prepared for the following week's presentations. Some teams had received so much material that they had to change the three bulletin board displays daily.

The only "competition" was in the design of bulletin boards. The results showed great creativity and quality.

Without exception, students researched carefully and thoroughly, had well-documented references, and answered their classmates' questions with authority. Several teams made excellent use of Mission Spotlight materials, selecting and rearranging the slides and excerpting the tapes to suit their presentations.

Subsequent tests showed that the students improved significantly in some areas, particularly in research and study skills

Several students presented excellent movies, including the *Children of the World* series distributed by UNESCO.

We particularly appreciated the Adventist missionaries, government officials, parents, and immigrants who brought artifacts and dressed in the clothing of the country being studied. We also appreciated the many tapes made by overseas missionaries and students. These included monologues, greetings from students, ver-

bal tours of mission stations and institutions, choral music, native dances, and the sounds of native birds and animals. The students were so impressed with the description of the bamboo dance from the Philippines that they attempted to duplicate it.

A highlight was the appearance of a Russian immigrant. Overcoming his reluctance to appear in public, he described life in his homeland and conveyed the deep

Russian love of family. The students were so impressed that they asked him to return. The following year he enrolled his son in our church school.

Another highlight was the smuggled materials from East Germany. Although the accompanying script was in fractured English, the slides depicted beautiful chapels, a castle converted into a youth evangelistic center, various church services, a church saved from fiery destruction by a Russian soldier, and groups of young people in Sabbath school and participating in Sabbath afternoon hikes. Together, slides and commentary presented a powerful appeal to pray for Adventist Christians in communist countries.

The ethnic foods served by students and parents were a popular feature of some reports. This underscored the deep interest in the program by various parents.

Evaluation

What did the students learn from all this activity? Were the original goals realized? Did the results justify the extra work?

1. Feedback from students, parents, members of the school board, other teachers, and the conference director of education was uniformly positive.

2. Students demonstrated that they could conceptualize, design, and implement a mission-based social studies program. Only rarely did I have to make suggestions about things I felt the students had overlooked.

3. Students not only worked well together in teams, but also cooperated with other teams.

4. Curriculum integration of the pro-

gram frequently obscured the traditional class boundaries. Even more remarkable was the children's motivation as they pursued the project outside of school.

5. Achievement tests showed that the students improved significantly in some areas, particularly in research/study skills.

6. More importantly than any of the above, however, were the students' increased awareness and appreciation that children around the world were not much different from themselves, that "all children smile in the same language," and that mission work was a challenge to which they might aspire.

Will any of these students serve in other lands? Only time will tell. At the close of the year, one of the non-Adventist students who had initially been interested only in motorcycles and automobiles said he had decided to become a missionary.

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Until his recent retirement, Dr. E. Stanley Chace was Professor of Curriculum and Teacher Education at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

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