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USING MATERIALS RELATED TO 'OTHER' PEOPLES AND PLACES - GEOGRAPHY'S CONTRIBUTION

Internationally, geography teachers and curriculum designers motivate the inclusion of geography in the school curriculum on the grounds that it "deepens pupils' appreciation of other peoples' way of life" and "fosters international goodwill" (Carnie, 1972). The TED primary and secondary syllabuses echo similar sentiments, emphasizing the acquisition of "tolerant attitudes towards others with different social, economic and political circumstances".

In many ways the geography teacher is set a very difficult task. Children acquire images of, and attitudes toward 'other' people and places from a wide variety of sources (the home, the media) from a very early age. For many children 'foreign' conjures up stereotyped images, unacceptable even when positive, and even more unacceptable when negative, racist and associated with ethnocentric evaluations.

The difficulty of the teacher's task is compounded by the fact that much teaching material related to 'other' peoples and places contains myths, stereotypes and ethnocentric viewpoints that can serve to compound those notions already held by pupils.

While all 'foreign' places suffer from stereotype 'images' and ethnocentric evaluations, those set in the Third World (largely because of their non-European cultural traditions, Black popula-

tions and histories of colonialism) have generally been most poorly dealt with and it is on images of, or attitudes toward, these that this article will focus.

There is little teachers can do about images and attitudes towards places and peoples that children bring with them to the classroom. There is, however, a great deal that they can do about the nature of materials used in the classroom, the ways in which they require children to engage both these materials and their own attitudes towards them and their content.

Of fundamental importance is the teacher's awareness of types of bias likely to be found in textbooks. David Hicks (1980), after an extensive analysis of geography textbooks in current use in Britain, suggests that by and large what they teach about the Third World are such ideas as:

- i) Poverty is due to inbuilt obstacles and/or chance. It is often the 'fault' of the poor, a result of their inadequacy or their inability to cope with a harsh physical environment. The role of socio-political factors is not examined.
- ii) Do the right thing and 'take-off' to development will occur. Underdevelopment is seen as an indigenous state which Third World countries happen to be in. No reference is made to underdevelopment as a process arising out of colonialism and continuing as neo-colonialism. Little value is ascribed to traditional cultures and achievement. Development means becoming more like the USA and Britain, and the limitations

of this definition are not considered.

- iii) Population is seen as the problem and described entirely as explosive. Overpopulation is seen as arising out of ignorance and is seen as a direct cause of poverty. Little attempt is made to explore alternative views such as that expressed in the slogan "Development is the best contraceptive".
- iv) Peasant farmers need education and everyone needs help. Europeans are seen as experts, especially good at advising the natives on their problems. Agricultural difficulties are linked with physical impediments and with ignorance which leads to mismanagement and overgrazing. The Green Revolution is posited as the solution. Scant attention is given to the role of colonial powers in disrupting traditional agricultural patterns nor to the role of multinational agribusiness corporations in dispossessing people of their subsistence farming activities and in exploiting labour. No attention is paid to the ecological stability of many traditional farming practices - they are dismissed as 'primitive'.
- v) Colonialism didn't happen except for the benefit to those colonized. In fact most countries had not been discovered until the Europeans arrived.

At present, most third world countries would not survive without the generosity of the first world. Little mention is made of tariff barriers, commodity quotas, price manipulation or 'tied' aid.



vi) Minorities don't exist, or, if they do, they need our help in coping with change. Little attention is given to loss of land as mining companies and plantations take over, nor to the exploitive nature of labour relations employed here - work opportunities are all that are mentioned.

Geography textbooks which promote such images and explanations can be said to be contributing toward the fostering of racist rather than the tolerant attitudes propounded as aims of geographical education. The Rampton Report, 1986, described racism as:

a set of attitudes and behaviour towards people of another race which is based on the belief that people of a particular

colour or national origin are inherently inferior so that their identity, culture, self-esteem, views and feelings are of less value than his or her own.

Hicks' study related to books in use in Britain. A brief survey of books in use in this country will reveal many examples of the bias types suggested above. (see the appended set of quotations.) As with the books reviewed by Hicks, it seems that many books in general use in Transvaal Schools are implicitly eurocentric and racist in their approach. Often the problem lies as much with the omission of a perspective as with what is overtly stated. Third world countries are seen as backward, in need of European help in developing them, populated by people with little knowledge of any value. The books are thin on explanations of poverty and on considerations of the role of colonial powers and neo-colonial organisations in the process of underdevelopment. Symptoms of poverty are often seen as causes, and the poor are generally seen as largely responsible for their own poverty. Throughout, the explicit emphasis is on description rather than real exploration of explanations of what exists. It is likely that S.A. textbook sections on Third World countries and Black people in general contribute to the formation of stereotyped and negative images in the minds of their readers.

Given the teacher's awareness of the potential negative contribution of textbooks and existing images held by children, what can he/she do about it?

One of the most obvious steps a teacher can take is to read a textbook critically his/herself,

omit reference to unsatisfactory sections and provide instead material drawn from more satisfactory sources. While this might prevent further entrenchment of negative views I would contend that this is insufficient. By stopping at this point the geography teacher is failing in a responsibility to develop in pupils independence of thought, and abilities to process material critically, detect bias, contextualize situations and reflect on personal attitudes and values.

Dawn Gill (1983) offers some suggestions designed to alert children to the ideas they hold that are to be found in textbooks (and other sources) and to offer them the opportunity to examine these critically.

The first exercise revolves around a short brainstorming session. Pupils sit in small groups and are asked to make a list of all the words and ideas (in short phrases) that come into their minds when a country is mentioned. After about 5 minutes the brainstorming activity is stopped and each group shares ideas with others and then the teacher compiles a chart recording the ideas of the whole class. (Appendix 2 provides an example of such a list).

This is followed by an analysis of the sort of image of the country that has been presented. Negative/positive? Stereotyped. Children are asked to consider the sources of their information and why they might be one-sided.

A variation on this is to use the brainstorming exercise, but leave the list unanalysed and to follow the exercise with slides chosen to reflect diversity in the country chosen. Children are then asked to brainstorm again and to compare

initial with 2nd lists - and then continue the analysis as before.

A second suggestion from Dawn Gill involves more direct analysis of textbook information. Several extracts, containing bias of the nature outlined earlier, are presented to children. They are asked to study them and to test the suggestions made about Europeans and non-Europeans contained within them. When the list is complete children should tick all the positive suggestions, put a cross against negative suggestions, count the ticks and crosses for each group and comment on their findings.

A third approach involves offering pupils material from sources other than the prescribed textbook and asking them to note and analyse differences in the content of each.

Simulation games offer good opportunities for getting into situations that are unfamiliar, feeling what it might be like to be someone else and growing closer to an understanding of processes that operate in the world economic system. A particularly useful game in this context is 'Star Power', while for younger children the 'paper bag game' offers some opportunity to understand that success is not necessarily related to hard work, and thus that the poor of the third world are not, by definition, lazy.

The references cited at the end of this article contain many examples of other useful teaching strategies and sources of resources. Several also contain checklists for assessing bias and eurocentricism in books.

Geography educators are increasingly attempting

to ensure that their subject is a 'light on the mind, rather than a burden on the memory'. The 1980s have seen what Huckle (1983) has described as the 'relevance revolution'. 'Relevance' applies not only to teaching content of significance in terms of understanding the world system in which the pupil lives, but also to the teaching of skills that enable the pupil to cope with the mass of data to which he/she will be exposed and the complexity of situations in which he will have to take decisions. Teaching about 'other' people and places afford ample opportunity for teachers who wish to engage in such teaching.

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APPENDIX 1 - Extracts from some geography textbooks.

Under European guidance Africa is at present being developed and her backward races are becoming civilized (van der Spuy, Barnard, Oosthuysen, 1968. p.1)

The greatest development (in African agriculture) actually took place where the plantations were started by white people (van der Spuy, et al. 1968. p.6.)

By the grace of stronger powers most of the native territories gained independence, although they have to be subsidised to function. (van der Spuy et al, p.11).

In the Benue Valley ... are numerous tribes who are very backward. (van der Spuy et al, p.28)

The economic development of the country is influenced by the physical conditions and by local production (Swanevelder et al std. 9. p.292)

Vasco da Gama discovered Mozambique on 1 March 1498 (Swanevelder, p.297).

Both territories suffer from hindrances which are typical of the less developed regions of the world today. The rate of population increase and the degree of illiteracy are high...(Swanevelder, p.298).

The development of many parts of the world depends on the economic aid wealthy countries are able to offer them.(Swanevelder, Std. 9, p.198)

The number of whites in both territories

is small. A civilised society is found alongside undeveloped tribal groups. The White man's task is therefore to uplift the blacks (Swanevelder, p.303).

These workers are housed by the mining industry and this housing together with medical and social services supplied without charge to the Africans, costs the industry over R30 million every year. (Nicholson & Morton, p.153, 1974).

The inflow of Bantu workers into the main industrial areas has caused many serious problems, and one of the greatest is the housing shortage and the growth of shanty towns. The unsalubrious and undisciplined atmosphere of these settlements has had such an adverse effect on the workers that most large municipalities have spent large sums on building neat townships on their outskirts (Nicholson and Morton, p.168).

Despite the favourable physical conditions, these homelands are at present unable to support their people. (Nicholson and Morton, p.192).

The enterprise and advanced technological knowledge of the Whites are of the utmost importance in ensuring work opportunities and increasing prosperity for all population groups. (Barnard and Nel, 1980, p.217.)

Concessions and plantations were granted... and these foreigners had to contend with a labour problem. (Swanevelder et al, Std. 9, p. 298).

One section of the population (of Mocambique) is mainly traditional, while the other is modern and efficient. (Swanevelder et al, Std. 9, p.298).