The cultural approach to the teaching of social studies program for the seventh grade level was developed by the teachers of Montgomery, Alabama under an ESEA Title III grant. Major objectives of the program are to stimulate students to develop an awareness of their place in history by studying the cultures preceding them, and to encourage students to develop a method of analyzing cultures which would enable them to systematically appraise any society. Each student is provided with a student learning unit containing many resource materials. After gathering data through the use of readings and audio-visual materials, the student interprets and uses the data in many activities such as simulations, individual research, oral reports, and dramatic presentations. The curriculum begins with a study of the culture, community and history of Montgomery, Alabama, and then takes up tribal man and proceeds chronologically from that time forward. All major world cultures are included. The method of analyzing each culture, a three-step process, involves the student in locating the culture geographically and placing it in a time perspective, overviewing the culture and determining its principal characteristics and unique qualities, and examining the social, economic, political, religious, aesthetic, and intellectual aspects of the culture. Evaluation results indicate a larger gain in social studies knowledge for cultural approach students. (Author/RM)
A Cultural Approach to the Teaching of Social Studies

From ancient Mesopotamia to modern Montgomery, Alabama, is a long way—intellectually as well as geographically. But seventh graders in the Montgomery school system have been involved in a program called the Cultural Approach to Social Studies for the past three years. The program, "A Cultural Approach to Social Studies," has been taught in ten junior high schools in the system, and it was designed to provide a more participatory approach to teaching social studies. In Montgomery, they began by enlisting the assistance of Dr. Oliver Ivey, Professor Emeritus from Auburn University. Dr. Frey and Frances Havel, Supervisor of Social Studies for the Montgomery Public Schools, developed a proposal for a new seventh grade social studies curriculum that would supplement all other seventh grade social studies programs in the county. The approach they proposed was a multicultural study of human history from tribal to modern man. They chose the seventh grade level because every seventh grade child is required to take social studies and because it was an appropriate grade level for introducing young students to cultural concepts.

The first step in developing the program was taken in the summer of 1971 by those teachers who were participating in an eight-week institute. Compensation for the teachers was paid by grant funds.

During the first two weeks of the institute, directed by Dr. Frey, the teachers plotted the course of the program by defining the major goals of the course and deciding on the major cultures which would be studied. They also determined the major problems which would be presented to the students and the major method of analyzing cultures which would enable them to systematically approach any society. The major approach to the study of cultures in the new program has been designated by Dr. Frey as "the approach of cultures as studied in a sequence of cultural history."

All the major world cultures are in the curriculum so students will gain a broad overview of the history of civilization. The curriculum begins with the study of the culture which is most familiar to the students, and it is to be expected that these students will gain a better understanding of their own culture. After exploring this culture, the curriculum then takes up tribal man and proceeds chronologically from that time forward. Although the jump from Montgomery culture to the study of the culture in ancient civilization is a major one, the students and their activities with tribal man. In this comparison, students begin to see some of the similarities of all cultures.

The curriculum outline developed in the first summer institute is as follows:

Unit I: Introduction to the Cultural Approach

Unit II: Developmental Stage of Civilization

Unit III: Classical Stage of Civilization

Unit IV: Intermediate Stage of Civilization
Having developed a curriculum outline, the teachers were ready to tackle the second objective: providing the students with a method of analyzing culture. They wanted a method that would be applicable to all cultures and help students see a broad view of a culture, but one that would also enable the students to "get inside" a culture and explore what life was like for its citizens.

The method they developed is a three-step process. When approaching a new culture, the first step is to locate the culture geographically and to place it in a time perspective. The second step is to get an overview of the culture, to determine its principal characteristics and its unique qualities. The final step is to examine the details of life in the culture. This detailed examination is made by studying aspects of six human activities:

- Social: family, tribe, marriage, home, festivals, recreation, class...
- Economic: market, labor, contract, production, ownership, commerce...
- Political: state, government, legislative, executive, judicial...
- Religious: church, sacred writings, ritual, ethics, congregation...
- Aesthetic: arts, architecture, dance, drama, crafts, music, painting...
- Intellectual: school, science, technology, literature, communication...

When teachers had determined the basic curriculum and the method of analysis they had the foundation for the "cultural approach." The remainder of the first summer was spent planning and organizing materials and activities which would be used in the classroom.

**DEVELOPING MATERIALS**

Teachers agreed early in the program development that a single textbook would not be appropriate for their curriculum. They felt students needed to draw on many sources in their study of culture. With the guidance of Dr. Andrew Weaver from Auburn University, the teachers undertook the task of developing Student Learning Units (S.L.U.) which would be based on many resource materials. The S.L.U.s were subsequently printed and made available to every seventh grader in the program for classroom use.

There are five S.L.U.s, corresponding with the five major divisions of the curriculum outline shown above. Within an S.L.U. each culture is considered individually. The study of a culture begins with geographic and time-line data. Next an overview of the culture is presented. The culture is then examined in terms of the six human activities.

In developing the S.L.U.s the teachers drew on a large number of resource materials. A bibliography of the sources used is available from the Montgomery Public Schools. In addition to the S.L.U.s, a library of supplementary sources has been provided for each classroom. Students are encouraged to draw on these materials in preparing their class assignments.

The production of map sets has been important to the program. A local art teacher prepared a set of 10 acetate transparencies for use with each culture. Each set includes the basic map of the civilization on heavy acetate; lighter overlays show changes in boundaries that occurred as the civilization progressed.

Every teacher receives a master set of slides for each culture. These slides are used in the study of the aesthetic activities of the culture and show important works of art and architecture. Slides were made by photographing pictures from books and are accompanied by information about each picture.

Each classroom is equipped with a listening station and six headphones. A set of tapes, developed for use in the stations, is used to supplement the students' reading. For example, there are recordings of music played on instruments that were popular in certain civilizations. Another set of tapes is designed to help students who are slow readers. Tapes of a teacher reading the overview material from the S.L.U. allow the student to hear the material as he reads it.

Developing the material for the "cultural approach" program occupied much of the teachers' time in the summer institutes. The materials produced in the first institute were field-tested during the following school year. At the end of the year the materials were evaluated by each teacher and revisions of the materials were made in the second institute. The third institute was devoted to preparing additional materials and activities. During the 1973 institute, the materials and preparations were displayed at a drive-in conference attended by 125 teachers from the state of Alabama.

**THE CULTURAL APPROACH IN THE CLASSROOM**

To understand how the cultural approach is used in the classroom we can follow the curriculum for the Egyptian civilization. The first task the students have is to study the geography of ancient Egypt. At the beginning, students have the option to repeat this task, using a geographical map of Egypt. Each student is provided with a grid and a piece of tracing paper. Following the directions of the teacher, who shows a transparency map of Egypt on the overhead projector, students draw a map of the country by locating points of reference on the grid. From this activity, the students learn the geographical boundaries of the country and its relationship to surrounding areas such as Arabia and the Mediterranean. Students also study the topographical features of the land to evaluate the natural resources and protection available to the Egyptians.

Students then place the Egyptian civilization within a time frame. On a time line chart posted in the classroom, students indicate the period of 5,000
B.C. to 3,000 B.C. as the time span of the culture. As the school year progresses students can see the time relationship of various civilizations by studying the time line chart.

Information in the Student Learning Unit provides the youngsters with an overview of the Egyptian culture. Students learn that Egypt flourished in an area with "good natural protection and developed a way of life unusually resistant to change." They learn that the Egyptian people probably had the first true civilization and consequently had no previous experiences to draw upon in setting up their institutions. Students are cautioned to consider this limitation in any judgment of the civilization. The Egyptian culture is visually summarized for the students in the drawing shown below.

When students have a broad prospective of ancient Egypt, they begin their detailed study of the activities of the people who lived in the culture. They study the political system first, learning about the theocratic form of government and the role of the ruling pharaohs. To understand how the system worked, some classes have set up a class government based on the Egyptian model. One student imagined he was a newspaper reporter interviewing the Pharaoh Menes about military operations in lower Egypt and wrote a news release based on the interview.

Religion in ancient Egypt is examined. Students study the general concepts of polytheism and monotheism and read excerpts from Egyptian religious writings. One group of students studied in depth the Egyptian practice of mummification and gave a report to the class on their findings, complete with a simulated demonstration of how the process worked.

Students learn that the Egyptian civilization was responsible for the beginnings of many of our present day intellectual tools, such as the calendar, geometry, and chemistry. Some students have prepared illustrations of Egyptian hieroglyphics and explained to the class how these early writings influenced our own language.

To understand the social structure of ancient Egypt, students learn about the matriarchal nature of the Egyptian family. They study the life style of the people, as displayed in their homes, dress, and recreation. A skit, highlighted with period costumes, was presented by a group of students to illustrate what a day in the life of an Egyptian youngster must have been like.

Economics of Egyptian life are examined in terms of the agricultural nature of the civilization. Students also learn that early mercantile and manufacturing activities began in Egypt. To better understand these economic concepts, some students have written research papers on the irrigation systems and the ship-building industry in Egypt.

Perhaps the highlight of Egyptian aesthetic development was the massive pyramids. Students examine the architectural principles of pyramid construction by building models of the pyramids with sugar cubes. Classes also study other aspects of Egyptian aesthetics, such as painting and sculpture. Students with artistic talent have produced original art work in the style of Egyptian artisans.

During the weeks that the students study Egypt, the classroom takes on as much Egyptian atmosphere as it is possible to create. Bulletin boards and posters are designed to highlight characteristics of the culture. The art work and models produced by the students are displayed. The net effect is to help the students experience some of the flavor of Egyptian culture.

The study of each civilization is concluded by students summarizing what they have learned about the culture on prepared summary forms. There are seven summary forms, one for the geographical and time structure of the civilization and one for each of the six human activities studied below is a sample of a student summary form.

**Summary of Intellectual Structure and Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State or Country</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Technology (Inventions)</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Philosophy</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Values from any or all of the above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**EVALUATION**

Grading of students taking the cultural approach classes is left up to the individual teacher. Final grades are based on an A through F scale. In the summer institutes teachers were encouraged to use methods other than traditional subject matter tests to make their evaluations. Because the cultural approach is activity oriented a teacher has opportunity to see a student perform in many capacities: teachers can use all forms of a student's participation in determining his final grade.

Before classes began in the first year of the cultural approach, a random sampling of students was selected from both cultural approach and control classes. These students were tested, using an instrument developed by Dr. Ivey to measure social studies knowledge. At the end of the year post-tests were administered to the same students. While there was an overall gain for all students, the youngsters in the cultural approach group made a larger gain than did students in the control group. A similar testing design was used, the second year of the program, with cultural approach students still showing a slightly larger gain, though not as large as in the first year.
RESPONSE TO THE CULTURAL APPROACH

Thank goodness I have been 'in' on this. Never again will I go back to "read, answer the questions at the end of the chapter, test the following day." How bored my students must have been! How bored I must have been!

This enthusiastic statement was offered by one of the cultural approach teachers when the program participants were asked to evaluate the program. Mrs. Mantel, who has compiled these evaluations, reports that most teachers share this kind of enthusiasm for the program. They feel the approach involves and interests the students more than traditional approaches. One teacher felt that "...skills in critical thinking are more likely to be developed through the use of this method." Several teachers noted that the cultural approach has helped them organize their teaching not only in their seventh grade cultural approach classes but in their other courses as well.

When students were asked to evaluate the program there were some negative reactions. One dissatisfaction was the lack of a textbook. "Last year we studied by answering questions at the end of the chapter. I like a textbook," said one youngster. Another student expressed boredom with approaching every culture in the same way. "I don't think that every civilization should be taught with the six categories." One student said plainly, "I just don't like social studies."

The dissatisfaction students were a minority, however. A number of youngsters felt the cultural approach made their learning easier. "I like it because it is easier to study. The information falls into a certain category instead of just one bunch," said one participant. Another expressed the opinion of several when he wrote, "It has helped me understand the differences in my life compared to others, and why I have the culture I do, where it came from, and where it may end up." Perhaps the most succinct approval of the program was this statement: "I think the cultural approach makes me think a little harder and do a little better."

Parents of participating students have also been asked to express their opinions of the program. As with the students, there were parents who felt a traditional, textbook-oriented approach would be more effective; again, these dissatisfied voices seemed to be a minority. Several parents reported that their children were quite enthusiastic about the program and often talked about their cultural approach class at home. Other parents were impressed with the use of multiple sources and the activity orientation in the class. One parent seemed to summarize the opinion of many in this statement:

We thought your program for this year was excellent. Your students were encouraged to probe, study, and research on their own; and we can't think of a better way to prepare them for the future.

The Cultural Approach program which has been developed in Montgomery is complex. It has required considerable extra time and study by teachers. It has required students to think of learning in a new way and parents to be receptive to new experiences for their children. There have been logistical problems in getting materials organized and distributed; there have been problems convincing some teachers to adopt flexible methods of teaching and evaluating. Yet most participants feel the program has produced positive results; it has made social studies come alive and have new relevance for seventh grade youngsters. A program which inspires a student to write "history is not a bore any more, but an experience," seems to be worth the effort.

EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION

- religious
- aesthetic
- economic
- intellectual
- political
- social