THE TEACHING OF THE SOCIAL STUDIES AND THE MIDDLE EAST
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With the ISIS war going on in Syria/Iraq, the reverberations against Islam has reached United States Schools with the following happenings involving Muslim students:

* a Muslim, fourteen years of age, brought a clock to school, resulting in the teacher alerting police on the suspicion that he was working on an explosive device. He was innocent and judged to be highly talented in working with mechanical objects
* a seventh grade Muslim girl was asked by the teacher if she was carrying an explosive in her back pack
* a thirteen year old Muslim student threatened another student due to the former being called a member of ISIS
* a school system was closed down for a day due to an uproar by parents objecting to a homework assignment in having students write the Islamic creed as well as its Arabic script in calligraphy form. This assignment was required by the state in a social studies unit and had been used previously in the same school in the preceding school year.
* a school board member resigned after his posted message appeared on Facebook that Muslims lacked in hygiene.

The above named incidences indicate a necessity for education and respect for the Muslim religion as well as for all religious denominations and sects. Biases and prejudice is not good for the perpetrator or receiver of these messages. Rather understanding and acceptance of all are needed to make for a more wholesome school and society environment.

The land formerly named Palestine, now Israel and the Occupied West Bank, contains The Walled City of Jerusalem which is holy to three faiths --- Christianity, Judaism, and the Muslim religions. Thus, the name Holy Land is given to this region. Inside the Walled City is the Church of the Holy Sepulcher containing the sites of the Crucifixion and the Tomb of Christ. Devout followers in reverence never turn their backs toward the Tomb when exiting its small enclosure. Directly east for approximately three miles is the Mount of Olives, adjacent to Jerusalem, with the Kidron Valley located in between. On the Mount of Olives is the Church of the Ascension, a Russian Orthodox Church. which has a tall spire pointing heavenward from which Christ ascended into heaven.

Also inside the walled city of Jerusalem is the Dome of the Rock, an octagonal structure with a gold plaited Dome. Inside the Dome is Mount Moriah upon which the Patriarch Abraham was tempted to offer his son (Isaac to the Jews and Ishmael to the Muslims) as a sacrifice to God. Outside the Dome of the Rock, and nearby is the Mosque El Aksa, the area from which the prophet Mohammed is said to have ascended into heaven and came down to earth again. From a minaret, devout Muslims are called to prayer five times a day. This entire region is holy to devout Muslims.

The Jewish Wailing Wall, where devout Jews come to worship and pray, is located next to the Dome of the Rock, but at a slightly lower elevation level. This Wall is the only remnant of
the ancient Jewish Temple built in the days of Herod the Great and originally dates back to the reign of King Solomon.

There are numerous other Holy sites inside of Jerusalem, let alone the rest of the land of Palestine. The Holy sites are wanted, especially, by both Jews and Arabs in their struggle for control of the land of Palestine.

Objectives and Learning Opportunities
In Middle East units of study, there need to be clearly written objectives for learner attainment. The objectives need to follow selected criteria such as

* being relevant and in this case the conflict between Palestinian Arabs and the Jews of Israel.
* promote learner interest in current events and the social studies
* provide age appropriate subject matter for pupil acquisition
* emphasize seamless content in ongoing learning opportunities
* meaning attached to objectives achievement.

Learning opportunities to achieve objectives should be varied to provide for individual needs and differences. Thus, from the basal text, primary sources, and related reference books, the social studies teacher needs to assist pupil learning through reading. Primary and secondary sources must be utilized with the teacher using advance organizers to assist pupils to acquire background information prior to the ensuing reading experience. New vocabulary terms need introduction and their contextual meanings attached. Problems and questions need identification at this point for pupils to locate necessary information and answers. The verification principle is salient here in that answers and hypotheses must be sound and subject to testing. Close reading is important in that pupils are not distracted but pay careful attention to what the print states. Ongoing assistance in word recognition must be provided as in utilizing context clues and phonics to recognize unknown words. In-depth learning and brain storming are goals of social studies teaching rather than shallow, survey approaches. From the accrued reading experience, pupils should achieve vital facts, concepts, and generalizations on the Middle East.

Knowledge and skills obtained must be utilized in diverse situations so that retention is encouraged. They might be emphasized in large and small group discussions, as well as in committee work when drawing a map and naming nations and capitol cities of the Middle East. Developing a mural or making a model of the Dome of the Rock might be interesting to selected learners in stressing a hands-on approach in learning through art work. Additional projects include doing a story book of what was studied. Drawing and including related illustrations to complement the script illumines the contents. In-Depth learnings are then desired in ongoing lessons and units of study. The writer in the early 1950s worked for the Mennonite Central Committee for two years as teacher and relief worker among Palestinian Arab refugees. The situation has changed very little, if anything positive, between settling the Palestinian/Israel disagreements during this span of time of time. As a teacher and relief worker, he had a plethora of chances to visit and assist in distributing clothing to refugees living in camps, and as university supervisor of student teachers in the public schools has assisted a plethora of students in planning lessons and showing slides and related objects pertaining to the Holy Land to learners in the school setting. Numerous return trips have been made to and in the Middle East.
Evaluation of Pupil Achievement

There are a plethora of procedures available to assess learner progress in the specific areas of the Middle East. Exciting discussions provide the classroom teacher with ongoing information as to the degree of pupil progress being made. To be effective, each discussion must stress

* growth in pupil interests as well as affective leanings acquired in an ongoing lesson/unit of study
* achievement of major concepts, generalizations, and main ideas, in-depth
* skill in working harmoniously in doing problem solve and projects
* participating wholeheartedly in small and large group discussions
* adequate attainment in mind set achievement
* presenting ideas clearly in speaking and in writing
* listening with involved purpose in ongoing experiences
* reading primary and secondary sources with understanding
* respecting others in the school and classroom setting.

Teacher observation is salient in noticing learner achievement in each of the above asterisked items. The social studies teacher must have those criteria in mind when assessing learner progress. Pupil progress made should be more optimal and seamless. Assisting learners in self appraisal, using appropriate criteria, needs to be emphasized in ongoing lessons and units of study.

High quality standardized test results assist in appraising learner achievement, and it is important for these tests to be valid and reliable. Over reaching in giving standardized tests needs avoidance, and once a school year is adequate in giving these tests. From feedback on test results, the teacher might well take careful note of what needs more emphasis in teaching; these subject matter and skills objectives are then emphasized in teaching and learning situations.

For a specific unit of study, such as the Middle East, the teacher needs to write valid test items which relate directly to the content taught. Here, face validity is important in that when teaching a lesson has been completed, test items may be written covering salient facts, concepts, and generalizations. What is taught then is tested upon. Each test item needs to possess clarity and be meaningfully written by the teacher. For example, the stem and each of the four plausible responses make for a complete sentence:

The capitol city of Jordan is a) Beirut, b) Damascus, c) Jerusalem, d) Ammon.

Each of the four distractors must be rational. It would be ridiculous to put in the city of Seattle as one of the four distractors. The distractors should generally be of the same/similar length to avoid giving clues as to which response is correct. Reliability, in addition to validity, is another key idea to stress in teacher written tests. Large testing corporations have the money, time, and many special writers and editors to develop their tests and evaluate for other means of ascertaining validity, in addition to face validity, and then also check for reliability. To indicate reliability, test/retest, and/or alternate forms of reliability may be emphasized. An approach available to teachers is to compare the even numbered responses versus the odd number scored items for pupils to notice consistency in how the test measures. If the number of items is few,
then it may not work properly in testing reliability. However, it is still good to think of reliability when writing teacher written test items since it emphasizes consistency in pupil test results should the pupil take the test over again.

Teacher written test items need to be clearly written with no grammatical errors. Higher levels of cognition should be measured. In the above test, the item pertaining to which is the capital city of Jordan, measures factual content. There are, of course, salient facts for pupils to know, but extending learning to critical and creative thinking, as well as problem solving are at the apex of cognition and should be emphasized in teaching and learning situations. The following is an example of a test item stressing higher levels of cognition:

* How did the Balfour Declaration of 1917 affect Arab versus Jewish relationships in the Holy Land?

In this test item, pupils need to recall facts with comprehension, and use those in cognition. Also, the test item emphasizes pupils making comparisons between opposing cultures, integrating ideas, and then synthesizing, resulting in evaluating the ensuing information. From teacher written test results, the conclusions realized provide feedback for ongoing instruction.

Teacher observation in the assessment process is rather continuous in taking notice of situations as the following:

* the pupil putting forth more optimal effort
* learners being actively involved in small group and committee endeavors
* learner respect for each other being in evidence
* pupils doing self-appraisal in achieving objectives of instruction
* pupils individually showing interest in the unit on the Middle East.
* transfer of acquired leanings to new situations and units of study.

References