



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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Social Issues Facing Children

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by Delci Lev

Introduction

The Betsy Ross Arts Magnet (BRAMS) is a middle school that draws its population from two separated pools: first through a lottery system which brings in students from the entire city and, secondly, neighborhood (local) students. BRAMS is considered the neighborhood middle school. The students attending are not required to be gifted in the arts, but must express an interest in the field. Admittance is not predicated on any specific academic criteria. As a result students who attend BRAMS are from every part of the city, from various socio-economic backgrounds, and have a wide range of academic abilities.

My current assignment involves the teaching of Social Studies and Language Arts to the middle school child. In most cases the same children are involved in both academic areas, permitting me to overlap both disciplines and allowing for more effective teaching. The unit has several components: the demographics of families, the evolution of the law reflecting these changes, the role of parents and parenting, the responsibilities of parents to children and the promotion of a better understanding of money and how its use can be optimized. These issues will be taught and presented in an integrated manner and will have the benefit of teaching and reinforcing the following skills, critical thinking, comprehension skills, and vocabulary development. All are considered weak areas for many of my students. In addition, students will be taught how public opinion, literature, social, economic, political and historic events impact the passage of law(s).

My personal journey as a single parent through the courts and the services provided by Child Support Enforcement Program, Title IV-D of the Social Security Act forced me to look at the system and evaluate the process one is forced to go through in an attempt to collect court ordered child support. I was more fortunate than most I had skills which allowed me to survive. Not all are that lucky. Over the years it occurred to me that if we taught children the process of evaluating options in the form of simulation games in the classroom setting they might be better prepared for life. Public opinion and the powers that be are still failing to see the connection between lack of child-support and its total effect on the society. According to published reports outstanding child-support in Connecticut stands at \$400 million, and \$29 billion on the national level. Nowhere do we see these monies translated into the costs to the society in terms of schools, medicine, social services, housing, food, clothing and the final product—that being the child, who grows into adulthood with multiple deficits and becomes a nonproductive member of society. As a classroom teacher I see students who are ill equipped to handle the adult responsibilities they have been saddled with due to the heavy burden their single parents carry. More often than not, the custodial parent is working two or more jobs, caring for children,

maintaining the home environment and if they are in their middle years, are often caring for their aging parents. The emotional burden for the child has a negative effect on the learning process, which further handicaps the child later on in life. It should be noted we see this phenomena in two parent households—the difference being it is more often than not elected, in that setting. The net effect on the child is the same—they have a poor family support system. We need to examine how we are spending our tax dollars and redirect this resource, concurrently educating our young in the hope that they will make more constructive and productive decisions than prior generations.

Curriculum Design

Under state law it is mandatory to provide students with educational information in the area of human growth and development, human sexuality and AIDS prevention. On the sixth grade level one semester of the Social Studies curriculum is devoted to the teaching of this material. It is hoped, by providing students with this information we will prevent the spread of AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases and reduce the number of teenage pregnancies. **Social Issues Facing Children Today**, will be incorporated into the above mandated material. It will give students the opportunity to view the family from multiple perspectives and use the classroom as a laboratory to study the effect of the material taught and then applied in each family setting using the families' ability to make choices based on the resources that each has at hand.

It is very difficult to survive in todays society however, we can benefit from the practice of budgeting our resources. In an attempt to begin this process students will be expected to maintain a ledger sheet listing expenditures for the week. At the end of this period of time they will categories and analyze their spending habits. This activity will precede the formation of the different family settings. The process will become the basis for budgeting family resources. Once families are formed students will be expected to budget, taking into account the cost of the following:

- food
- rent/mortgage
- utilities
- savings
- medical costs
- insurance—car, house
- clothing
- education
- entertainment

The local newspaper will be used as a guide for salaries, rents, food costs and expenses in general. Any additional information will be supplied by students and myself. It is hoped the process of budgeting money will be transferred to other aspects of the students' lives.

The students will be divided into the following types of family situations:

- a-two parent family
- b-divorced family with children
- c-single parent—never married
- d-childless household

Students will decide for themselves which family setting they would like to simulate. After a week they will rotate family settings, if they choose until they have experienced each life style. If they elect not to change settings they may remain with their initial choice however, they will be encouraged to experience each group setting. Each setting will bring another set of values, constraints, resources and responsibilities, resulting in different conclusions, in many instances. When a child is involved in one of the above settings the students will be expected to adopt an egg and care for it and provide for it as one would provide for a child. We will study the current demographics of the family and see how this factor affects the society as a whole. Students will read two novels, *The Scarlet Letter*, in illustrated form and *Mom The Wolf Man and Me* and compare the role of being a single parent in different time frames. To this end we will examine the phenomena of the growing number of single parent families in this country and the large number of teenage pregnancies in urban centers.

In this context we will study governments' attempt to insure financial support for children of single parents through the creation of the Child Support Enforcement Program, Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. Students will evaluate the effectiveness of this program based on the information given in class and will be asked to provide alternative suggestions to make the programs more effective and efficient.

I've taken the liberty of including the content of the statutes on child support enforcement to allow for the material to be used commensurate with sophistication and grade level.

At this juncture it is important to note that children might project their own family situations into the simulated family settings. The students need to understand information discussed in class is considered private and sensitive and to be treated with respect.

Objectives:

1. To better understand the nature of marriage.
2. To understand the concept of choice in family planning.
3. To better understand the role of parenting.
4. To gain an awareness of the needs of the child.

5. To gain a better understanding of the role of the parent and parenting.
6. To create an awareness of the responsibilities and rights of custodial and noncustodial parents in the event of divorce.
7. To promote a better understanding of the concept of money and what constitutes daily living costs and budgeting.
8. To acquire problem solving techniques.
9. To provide students with the history and basic content of the Child Support Enforcement Program.
10. To improve critical thinking skills.
11. To demonstrate cause and effect behavior.
12. To improve writing skills.

Strategies:

1. Create different family life styles .
 - a. two parent family
 - b. single parent family
 - c. divorced family
 - d. childless family
2. Students will raise a child (adopt an egg) in each of the above appropriate family settings.
3. Students will be presented with real life problems to be solved in each one of the above settings.
4. Students will compare the outcomes of each set of problems based on the family in which they live.
5. Students will evaluate the results.
6. Students will maintain ledger sheets for purpose of seeing how they spend their money.
7. Students will list family needs and develop budgets based on their resources.
8. Students will learn vocabulary and definitions to promote a better understanding of the legal process in the area of family law.
9. Students will gain an understanding of title IV-D of the Social Security Act established in 1975.
10. Students will maintain journals.

Demographics of Single-Parent Families:

In the United States today twenty-five percent of all families with children are headed by single women. Children in these settings are totally dependent on their mothers incomes, incomes that are generally lower than their male counterpart. Combine this with the expense of raising children, insufficient child support awards and ineffective collection of these awards, (Connecticut is currently looking at 400 million dollars in unpaid child support) and the picture for these children becomes very bleak.

Profile of Single Parent-Families

The following information was provided to me by **Ann Kolker, Director of Public Policy, National Womens Law Center, Washington, DC**. All information is based on 1987 census data; more current statistics are in the process of being compiled.

Women headed 88% of the 9.2 million single-parent families with children in the US in 1987.

Population experts estimate that less than half of all children born in the 1980s will spend their entire childhood living with both natural parents.

Both divorce and out-of-wedlock births have contributed to the prevalence of single-parent families. In the mid-1980s, over 1.8 million children annually had parents who divorced, and over 800,000 children annually were born to unmarried mothers.

In 1987, of the heads of single-parent families

- 42% were divorced
- 30% had never been married
- 22% were separated
- 6% were widowed

Well over half of the more than 5.5 million poor households with children in 1987—59.8%—were headed by women. Women headed 79.8% of the over 1.8 million Black households with children living below the poverty line.

In 1987, almost one-half—46.1%—of female-headed households with children were poor. That is almost six times the poverty rate for married couple households with children (7.8%) and more than two and one half times the rate for male-headed households with children (17.6%).

Minority households headed by women are especially likely to be poor. While the poverty rates of households with children headed by white women was 38.7% in 1987, the poverty rate of such households headed by Black women was 59.5%, and by Hispanic women, 60.5%.

Thirty-six percent (36%) of all female-headed families with children received AFDC or other forms of cash public assistance in 1986.

Poverty rates among children are generally high, 20% were poor in 1987. But the poverty rate for children in female-headed households—a striking 55%—is especially appalling.

Among all Black children, 45% were poor; 68% of those in female-headed household were poor.
Among Hispanic children, 39% were poor, 70% of those in female-headed households were poor.
Among all white children, 15% were poor; 46% of those in female headed households were poor.

In general households headed by women are poorer than other households. In 1987, the median annual income for married couple households was about \$36,000, for male-headed households, about \$21,000, while the income for the female-headed household averaged about \$11,200. In 1987, the median income in households for white females averaged \$13,000, for Black women \$8,500 and for Hispanic women about \$8,155.

Divorce alters the economic status of women, and in turn their children A 1977 study done in California revealed the year after a divorce the standard of living for the female dropped by 73% while the male s income rose by 42%. Studies done in Vermont and New Haven in the early 1980s indicated the same pattern of income change on the part of the male and female.

The above factors indicate a need to educate the general public concerning the current trends we are seeing. It is hoped that through education we can change some of these trends .

In an attempt to counter this growing problem in 1975 Congress enacted the Title IV-D of the Social Security Act, Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program. In 1984 Congress attempted to address some of the weaknesses of the program, and in 1988 passed the Family Support Act (FSA) in the hope of further correcting deficiencies. Each was a step in assisting custodial parents in the following areas:

- a. locating non-custodial parents
- b. establishing paternity
- c. establishing of child support orders
- d. collection of support payments

This is a federal/state partnership with states being reimbursed at a two-thirds rate for operational costs. States must comply with the requirements of Title IV-D in order to receive federal AFDC funds. The program is to serve AFDC and non-AFDC custodial parents alike. The Office of Child Support Enforcement of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is responsible for ensuring the programs success.

The program was created in direct response to the growing number of AFDC cases. It later included non-AFDC

custodial parents as they were considered at significant risk of becoming part of the welfare system due to non-payment of child support orders.

Other provisions of the legislation are:

- e. States are responsible for imposing liens against real and personal property in the collection of overdue support payments.
- f. States are required to have non-custodial parents post bonds or other security in appropriate situations if a pattern of non-compliance exists. Procedural protections in such situations exist.
- g. In response to a growing number of noncustodial parents who were not paying child support the 1984 legislation required that states effect procedures for the withholding of wages when arrearages exceeded one month or the individual states could select an earlier point in time. Automatic wage withholding must be made available in all child support cases by January 1, 1994(under FSA), whether or not enforced by the IV-D agency. Both parties retain the right to an alternative arrangement.
- h. States are required to release information of child support arrears of \$1000, or a lesser amount deemed by the state, to credit bureaus. Procedural protections in such situations exist.
- i. States that collect income tax must have procedures in place to intercept refunds of non-custodial parents who are in arrears. Procedural protections in such situations exist.
- j. Federal income tax refunds can be intercepted as well. Procedural protections in such situations exist.
- k. States are required to expedite procedures, whether judicial, quasi-judicial or administrative, for the establishment and enforcement of support orders.
- l. By October 1, 1995, all IV-D agencies must have an operational data processing and information retrieval system in place.
- m. Each IV-D agency must seek medical support as part of the support order when medical insurance is available to the non-custodial parent at a reasonable cost.
- n. States are required to collect child support for children in foster care.
- o. States are required to collect spousal support when both child and spousal support are included in a divorce decree.
- p. States are required to cooperate with each other in the collection and enforcement of child support and spousal support.
- q. States are required to charge a \$25 fee for application of services for non-AFDC cases, this can be modified to reflect one's ability to pay. The application fee is in addition to fees custodial parents must pay for use of certain services. States have the option of charging costs to non-AFDC custodial parents for services rendered.
- r. When child support payments make recipients of AFDC ineligible for AFDC benefits, these families continue to be eligible for IV-D enforcement services without having to pay additional fees.
- s. Medical benefits continue for four months after families have ceased to be eligible for AFDC benefits.
- t. The 1984 law required that states notify AFDC recipients annually of any support payments collected on their behalf.
- u. States are required to publicize the availability of the services offered by IV-D agencies.

Vocabulary:

The following is a list of vocabulary words for students. The list is designed to promote a greater understanding of the material being studied. The following material has been generated from a book entitled *A Divorce Dictionary A Book for You and Your Children* , written by Stuart B. Glass.

Abandonment : The permanent departure from home by one spouse without the other’s permission. It is a legal cause for divorce in most states.

Agreement: A specific legal document: a contract. Contract and agreement are interchangeable legal terms.

Alimony : Money paid to separated or divorced spouse for support.

Annulment : A legal proceeding to end a “marriage” that legally should not have taken place. Either the bride or groom was prohibited by law from marrying. It differs from separation and divorce, as those legal proceedings are based upon the existence of a valid marriage.

Best Interests of the Child : The legal rule that selects, as custodial parent, the parent who can provide a better life for the child.

Bigamy : Marrying for a second time before divorcing the first spouse. It is grounds for annulment of the second marriage in all states.

Child Support : The amount of money needed to bring up a child—to pay his/her necessary expenses.

Contract : A legal document containing promises of two or more persons made to each other and signed by each person. Contracts are referred to by their specific topics: marriage contract, sales contract, separation contract. It is the most common legal document, also called an agreement.

Court : The place in which disputed matters are decided. A judge is the person in charge.

Custodial Parent : In divorced families, the parent having the legal responsibility for raising the child; the parent who has custody and with whom the child lives.

Custody, Joint : The legal responsibility of bringing up a child is shared equally by both parents while married.

Dead marriage : A marriage in which the spouses no longer love each other.

Decree : A legal document signed by a judge. Decision of a case or proceeding in court.

Divorce : The legal end of a marriage between husband and wife. It is granted by a judge in court when a specific legal reason exists.

Document : Usually called legal document.

Drugs or Intoxication : Being either a drug addict or an alcoholic is a legal cause for divorce. In approximately half the states it is a separate ground. In the other states, this legal cause is considered cruelty.

Emancipation : The act of a minor that ends parental control and supervision forever. The act must be permitted by law, such as getting married, joining the army, or obtaining a full-time job.

Fraud : The act of lying about an important fact to trick someone into marriage. It is a legal cause for divorce in most states.

Going to Court : A phrase meaning that a dispute must be decided by a judge.

Grounds for Separation : The legal causes that permit a court to grant a separation. Abandonment, adultery, and cruelty are some of the most common causes.

Guardian : An individual legally responsible for the care and control of another person. This term can be used instead of custodial parent.

Incompatibility : The inability of a married couple to live together happily. The term describes the change in their relationship, usually caused by the development of different interests, ideas, and outlook about life. It is ground for divorce in most states. It is also the basis for a separation agreement.

Infant : See: Minor.

Judge : An individual with a knowledge of the law who decides disputed matters in court.

Law : Rules and regulations made up by government bodies—federal government, state legislatures, and even student organizations. Since its purpose is to achieve certain behavior or conduct, disobedience results in punishment.

Law, Natural : Instinctive human behavior—the basic feeling and emotions with which a person is born. An example is parental love.

Lawyer : A person having a special license to explain and to interpret the law to individuals, called clients, and to appear in court for them. It is a general term for someone who earns money by helping people in legal matters.

Legal Document : A general term for something written in a legal form. Contracts, leases, and wills are examples.

Marriage Contract : An agreement between a bride and groom. It includes the wedding vows—the promises made at their wedding—and the laws that tell a married couple how they must act toward each other.

Married Women's Property Acts : The laws that gave a married woman the right to own money and other property. They were passed in most states in the mid-nineteenth century. Until that time, a married woman's property belonged to her husband.

Minor : The legal term describing a person below a certain age. Depending upon the state, a minor is someone under the age of eighteen or twenty-one years.

Necessaries : The minimal elements—food, clothing, medical care, and housing—required to sustain a person's life.

No-Fault Divorce : A divorce in which neither spouse is guilty of disobeying the marriage contract. The legal

cause is irreconcilable differences or incompatibility. The divorce is granted because the marriage is dead—the couple no longer can live together happily.

Non-Custodial Parent : In separated or divorced families, the parent no longer having the legal responsibility and control over the child's upbringing. Also, the parent who has visitation rights.

Order of Protection : A legal document signed by a judge prohibiting one spouse from bothering the other spouse. The order is usually granted when physical or emotional harm may occur. In most instances, the spouses are separated or divorced when such an order is asked for.

Property : Anything that belongs to a person.

Property, Personal : Property that can be moved. Jewelry, furniture, money, and animals are typical examples.

Reconciliation : The decision of a separated couple to live together as husband and wife.

Separation : The legal permission for a married couple not to live together.

Separation Agreement : A contract that permits a married couple to be legally separated without going to court.

Separation by Agreement : A separation agreed to by a married couple. It is created by a contract between them.

Separation, Legal : A separation granted to an innocent spouse by a judge when a legal cause exists.

Spouse : The legal term describing either a husband or wife.

Support : Money needed by a person for necessities: housing, food, clothing, and medical care.

Tender Years Rule : The legal rule that selects the mother as custodial parent for children from infancy to eleven years old.

Testify : To make statements under oath, usually in court.

Visitation : The time a child spends with his non-custodial parent. This legal right is commonly called a visitation schedule. It is a schedule of the specific days, weekends, holidays, and school vacations that a child and his non-custodial parent see each other.

Visitation : A legal privilege given to a non-custodial parent to see his child regularly.

In preparation for dealing with basic economics students will be expected to become familiar with the following terms:

interest rates loans thrift
mortgage rates income tax borrower/lender

actual costs	consumer	Three kinds of money:
expenses	default	coin, paper currency,
collateral	barter	checkbook money

In preparation for the development of family units students will discuss the following terms and concepts:

family	affection	responsibility	goals
caring	fun	feelings	leisure time
sharing	fear	embarrassment	identity
support system	family life	school life	social life
positive behavior	sadness	success	kindness
capable	satisfy	happiness	

Students and teachers can and should add to the list.

Listed are sample problems facing families today.

1. You have received a phone call from your child’s teacher explaining that your son/daughter has not been completing homework assignments. How as a parent will you handle this problem?
2. You have been notified by your child’s school that he/she is exhibiting behavior problems in school. How will you handle this?
3. You have received a phone call from your child’s teacher indicating an improvement in work and behavior. How will you handle this?
4. Your child has not been doing his/her assigned chores at home. How will you solve the problem?
5. Your child’s friends have been doing things you don’t approve of—drinking, smoking and in general exhibiting behavior that your feel will lead to problems. As a parent, how will you guide your child?
6. Set up a family budget based on family needs and income.
7. Your child asks for a pair of Air Jordons—all of his/her friends have them. Your budget will not permit you to buy them. How will you explain this to your child?
8. You work and care for your family and home and there are many tasks during the course of the day that you need assistance with. How would you decide which tasks to assign to each child?
9. Your rent is going up and the children want a new video game. Your income is limited. How will you deal with this?
10. You are getting a divorce—how will you explain this to the children?
11. What changes do you think will occur in your life as the result of the divorce?

The following is a list generated by my students . They were instructed to make believe they were adults in one of the following settings and to think of a family problem they could imagine having. Children should be encouraged to generate more situations.

- single parent household, never married
- single parent household, divorced custodial parent
- married couple with children

Antoine

Parents never married, the child born of the union doesn't listen to anything the parent says. He does what he wants, answers back and is out of control. What can I do?

Andy

Andy is married and has three sons, ages 9, 11, and 12. The twelve year old acts "big and bad" and the nine year old wants to hang with the twelve year old. The eleven year old is alone, Andy would like all the boys to get along, doing constructive things together rather than fighting. What can he do to make this happen?

Latoi

A single mother (never married) is raising a 15 year old daughter. The child has not developed yet and feels different being the only "flat chested" girl in her group. What can her mother do to make her feel better about herself?

Justin(child's problem)

Parents are divorced and the child was never told why. Because of this the child is acting out and not working in school.

Raymond

Married man wants to start a family, wife does not want to. How can this problem be solved? Could it have been avoided?

A husband catches his wife cheating, he wants a divorce, and she wants to remain married. There are no children involved. How can this be resolved?

Scott

A parent has lost a child. How can this parent be helped?

Jorge

I am divorced male whose children refuse to see me. I think my exwife is behind this. How do I solve this

problem?

Resource List

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