

WITH EYES TO SEE



PEACE AND JUSTICE CONCEPT: COMMUNICATION

COMMUNICATION:

A TWO-WAY Process - expressing thoughts and feelings clearly without distortion - receiving the communication of others and responding appropriately.

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A couple meets with a realtor who directs his attention to the man until he realizes that the woman is the person who knows about roofs, siding, dry wall, square footage, etc.; a family leaves a public aid office feeling degraded and unimportant after many hours waiting and being treated without respect; a secretary of 15 years is never asked her opinion on how to improve the company. What do each of these situations have in common? They all lack good communication. But why are women not acknowledged in certain situations, people on welfare treated disrespectfully, or workers kept separate from administration, and what does this have to do with communication?

A recent billboard for a hospital states, "Better Doctors Listen Better." This is an obvious prescription for good health care, yet to get to that state of "listening better," a health care provider must view her/his patient as a person with something to say that will help in making a diagnosis. There is more at work here than learning a few listening skills: communication is affected by how the "expert" sees and values the "other," and vice versa. The same is true in the above situations, and certainly in our schools. As a teacher, do I feel listened to and understood by the school administration (does the administration see me as an integral part of the school team)? How is my relationship with other teachers in the school (are we co-workers)? Do I have good communication with the parents of my students (are they part of our education team)? Do I value the ideas and needs of my students (allowing us to create an atmosphere of healthy communication in our classroom)?

The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire states: "Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence." While learning listening and speaking skills are essential to good communication and, as such, worthy topics for a newsletter on communication, this edition of *With Eyes to See* (the first of two that will explore this issue) will focus on the larger questions of how we value each other within education, and how we can achieve these "horizontal relationships." As Freire states, with mutual trust, good communication will follow.



ideas for teachers

who want to integrate social justice concepts

into what and how they teach

September 2001

## COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

"To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were."  
-Hans-Goerg Godamer

"Good teaching is the art, not of PUTTING IDEAS INTO people's heads, but of DRAWING IDEAS OUT."  
-David Werner, Bill Bower

Paulo Freire writes that "Through dialogue the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow." (Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Continuum: New York. 1993. 67.)

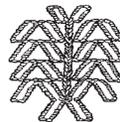
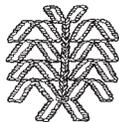
6-12

### Is This a Banking Classroom?

A classroom with a "teacher-student" and "students-teachers" is one that is more likely to facilitate good communication. This is the exact opposite of the "banking" concept of education in which the teacher "deposits" knowledge into the "empty" heads of students. Use the following list to ask yourself: is this my classroom? Show it to the students to get their impression.

**"BANKING" EDUCATION:** (Adapted from Freire, 54)

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen--meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she/he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- (j) the teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.



Deborah Stern, author of the book *Teaching English So it Matters: Creating Curriculum For and With High School Students*, states, "I teach with, not to my students . . . together, we create assignments, activities, and curriculum." (3) In order to have this "co-creative" classroom, as she calls it, one must internalize that distinction of "with, not to." Both teachers and students are at school to learn and teach, and everyone brings something valuable to the table that only s/he knows.

### Reality Theater

A fun way to see how students view their place in the classroom is for them to perform skits based on the dynamics of the classroom. Have the students divide into small groups, and each write and perform a skit on what their classroom would look like to an outsider. Encourage the students to be honest and fair in their interpretations and to include both themselves and the teacher in their skits.

After the presentations, talk about the common themes and issues that arose. Also talk about what type of classroom everyone wants, and if this is different from what was portrayed in the skits. Finally, set some short, medium and long range goals for making the classroom, together, a place where everyone wants to be.

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K-12

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS

K-12

House Calls

The idea of teachers visiting their students' homes is not new, but it rarely occurs at most schools. A handful of schools in Sacramento decided to implement such a program recently, pushed by parents who felt disconnected from their children's education. As a result of the visits, both teachers and parents say they feel more connected, and classroom behavior, grades, and test scores have improved since the program began.

Home visits help teachers and parents talk about a student's strengths and weaknesses. They also provide a great opportunity for teachers to see what is important to each family by what family members have displayed in their home, thus helping teachers better understand the child. Parents might feel more comfortable asking questions and discussing their children's education in their own home. With parents, teachers and students working as a team, children receive a better education. California has decided to expand the program to 450 schools around the state this year.

Try starting small--even a call to parents, especially when there is something positive to share with them about their child, can do wonders. (Adapted from a story on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, May 9, 2001)

"If there's someone who doesn't understand what I'm teaching, I try to understand who they are."
-Lisa Delpit

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TEACHERS (FOR STUDENTS)

K-12

Staff Reviews

Many Teachers comment that they feel isolated in their classrooms, often at a loss for ideas on how to meet the needs of various students. At the same time, staff and team meetings can be filled with the details of planning field trips and organizing fund raisers, with little time to talk about students in a supportive way. To reverse this trend, try organizing a "Staff Review," which "can be seen as a child-centered approach to staff development."

1. Gather together a group of committed teachers (more important than being like minded) to meet as often as needed or possible.
2. For each session, one teacher gathers together as much information about the student in question as possible (work samples, records, observations, etc.), and prepares a multiple perspective description of the child to "present" to the group.
3. The teacher then describes the central problem or issue of the child for which s/he needs support or recommendations.
4. Other teachers who know the child then give any additional information they may have.
5. After questions and comments have been discussed, the group gives recommendations for the presenting teacher.

Through Staff Reviews "we build collegueship and support around the central purpose of our professional lives--student learning." (Adapted from Pat Carini at Prospect School in North Bennington, Vermont. Ayers, William. *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher*. New York: Teachers College Press. 1993.)



"Dialogue is based on a faith in the capacity of all people as well as the recognition that I don't already know everything."
-Bill Ayers

RECOMMENDED

RECOMMENDED READING

The following books have been chosen for their engaging and critical examinations of the relationships between teachers and students.

1. The "Staff Review" exercise described on the previous page was taken from educator William Ayer's book *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher*. If you wonder some days why you became a teacher in the first place, want new ideas for your craft, or simply want to read a book which celebrates teaching, teachers and children, then this book is for you. Ayers is an engaging and very accessible writer whose ideas are wonderfully challenging.

2. For anyone who teaches children from ethnic backgrounds different from their own (that makes most teachers!), Lisa Delpit's book *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (New York: The New Press, 1995) is a must read. Delpit powerfully explores the varied ways children from different ethnic groups learn, and the implications for our classrooms. This book will change the way you see your students.

3. Deborah Meier's book, *The Power of Their Ideas* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) is an inspiring story of what can happen when dedicated teachers, administrators, students and parents team-up to create a school where all feel welcome and exceed what society's statistics say they can do.

"Teaching can still be world-changing work. And this, I believe, is finally the reason to teach."
-Bill Ayers

"The power of the liberatory classroom is in fact the power of the learning process, the work we do to establish a community."
-Ron Scaggs

CONCERN AMERICA

is an international development and refugee aid organization that sends doctors, nurses, engineers, educators, and nutritionists as volunteers to train and empower the materially poor in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Bolivia, Brazil, Guinea and Mozambique.

In support of these projects, Concern America offers educational services in Orange County which include:

- * the St. Nicholas Project
- * Walk Out of Poverty
- * Infusion Method Workshops for teachers
- * "Training for Transformation" Workshops for adults
- * school and parish consulting for the implementation of the Bishops' Pastoral: "Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions" (June, 1998)
- * Lending library for resources of peace and social justice

Information on any of these projects can be obtained by contacting:

Education Coordinator
Concern America
P.O. Box 1790
Santa Ana, CA 92702
(714) 953-8575

Columbus Day, Revisited-- The day chosen to celebrate Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of this part of the world is fast upon us. In our attempts to present students with as many "sides" of a story as possible, a great resource for looking at Columbus through varied lenses is *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years* (only \$10, or \$15 for two, published by Rethinking Schools, 1-800-669-4192), packed with essays, poems, short stories, interviews, historical vignettes, and lesson plans for kindergarten through college.

101 NEW IDEAS-- The Teaching Tolerance organization has a great list of ideas for teachers and students on how to get more involved in making a difference. Visit their web site at <<www.teachingtolerance.org>>, and click on the link entitled "101 Tools for Tolerance." The list is full of "Simple Ideas for Promoting Equity and Celebrating Diversity," written in a format appealing to children. While on-line, take advantage of the many other resources offered on the site.