

# WITH EYES TO SEE



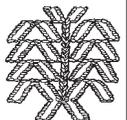
## PEACE AND JUSTICE CONCEPT: STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION

When I give food to the poor they call me a saint.  
When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.  
-Dom Helder Camara

The Brazilian Bishop Dom Helder Camara's powerful statement gets to the heart of "Structural Transformation" and our resistance to examine our lives or our societies on such a level. Many of us volunteer at soup kitchens, for example, or support organizations that provide direct hunger relief to millions of people in our country and throughout the world, and for doing so we are seen as good citizens. Such services are vital to a person who lacks sufficient food. However, when we begin to question why in our wealthy society hunger exists, we are branded as radicals, rabble rousers, unpatriotic, communists, and the list goes on. Why does looking at society on a structural level cause such a negative reaction, both from the powers that be and often from ourselves and our own neighbors? Why is it so important?

"Feeding" (or any other charitable deed), no matter how necessary it is for the "hungry," maintains the status quo. Asking Why takes us to the root causes of the problem, and forces us to see the part each of us plays in causing "hunger." To make a lasting change, therefore, necessitates that each of us change how we live. It means that powerful corporations must change the way they do business. It requires our government to change many of its policies. In short, a complete end to economic poverty and suffering means a radical overhaul of the way we do things, of what seems "normal." What could be more scary? What could be more necessary?

How does this relate to our schools, and where do we start? If a goal of our classrooms is to help build a better society for everyone both inside and outside of the school, and to help students become thoughtful citizens of a participatory democracy, then we must look at the structural level of our schools, the curriculum, how we teach and how we relate with our students, and then move on to our communities and the world. Educator Herb Kohl challenges teachers in this way: "As educators we need to root our struggles for social justice in the work we do on an everyday level in a particular community with a particular group of students." He continues, "Teaching is fundamentally a moral craft and makes the same demands on our sensibilities, values, and energies that any moral calling does. That means, in a society where there is too much institutionalized inequity and daily suffering, you have to understand the importance of being part of larger struggles. It is not enough to teach well and create a social justice classroom separate from the larger community." (Kohl, Herbert. "Some Reflections On Teaching for Social Justice." Teaching for Social Justice. Ed. W. Ayers, J. A. Hunt, and T. Quinn. New York: Teacher College Press, 1998. 286-287)



ideas for  
teachers

who want  
to  
integrate  
social  
justice  
concepts

into what  
and how  
they teach

April  
2001

## STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION

"Basic change in organizations, institutions, systems, patterns and cultures. Root causes must be addressed at the institutional level. Direct service is necessary, but is not sufficient to produce structural change." (definition from the Infusion Methodology)

### "What is the relationship between what we do in the classroom and our effort to build a better society?"

The following ideas are aimed at helping teachers and students look at this question. It is hoped that such activities, and the multitude of others that exist, will encourage us to:

- Explore how our lives are intertwined with those we do not meet face-to-face; and
- Change the structures, systems and relationships which de-humanize, victimize, or objectify persons.

(question posed by Peter McLaren in the preface to his book *Life in Schools*. New York: Longman, 1998.)

"Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way."  
-Edward de Bono

### BUT WHY?

The question game "But Why...?" is a good way to get students to explore the often complex reasons for why things happen, helping them to zero in on the **ROOT CAUSES** of the problems they are addressing. Consider this example:

A teacher reads to her/his students a newspaper story about gang violence in the area. The teacher begins the discussion by asking "What causes gang violence?" The exchange goes as follows:

A: Gangs.

Q: Why are there gangs?

A: To sell drugs.

Q: But why?

A: To make money.

Q: But why drugs?

A: Because you can't live on minimum wage.

Q: But why do people only make minimum wage?

A: Because they don't have good educations.

Q: But why not?

A: Because they are poor.

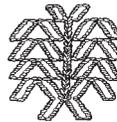
Q: What does poverty have to do with education?

A: Schools in poor neighborhoods are bad.

Q: But why...? And the conversation continues.

In this way, violent gangs are not seen as the sole reason for the problems in communities, but are instead understood within the context of the societal structures which led to their creation. As such, students' actions aimed at eliminating gang violence in their neighborhoods will focus on the root causes of the violence, and as a result, be more effective.

(Adapted from Werner, David and Bower, Bill. *Helping Health Workers Learn*. Palo Alto, CA: The Hesperian Foundation, 1991. 26-4)



### HUMANIZE

Last year, newspapers reported the death of a 17 year-old Indian girl in Berkeley. This anonymous death disturbed two students at Berkeley High, and they wanted to put a human face to the tragedy. After talking with many people in the South Asian community, they uncovered that she was actually an indentured servant. Their story exposed a slave trade affecting many young girls and shocked the nation.

There is often so much violence and death in our news that we are numb to such stories, as if violent death and suffering are unavoidable realities. By putting a face with and naming such violence, we are drawn together to make a difference in our common humanity. Try **creating classroom activities in which students are able to "humanize" the news they hear** by looking beyond the stories and learning about the lives behind the violence.

One class at a Chicago jr. high focused on the death of a boy they didn't know killed by a stray bullet. They wrote poems and stories to him which they presented to his family.

"Questions, not answers, stimulate the mind."  
-Richard Paul

## READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Another way to dig deeper into the news that surrounds us each day in terms of the news events themselves and the way a reporter tells the stories is to use the "Reading the Signs of the Times" exercise of the Infusion Methodology (IM). The activity is as follows:

- Read a news article and relate it to one of the IM's Basic Justice/Peace Concepts\* (which include human dignity, cooperation, non-violence, human rights, liberation, etc.).
- Summarize the story and note how the concept is being AFFIRMED or DENIED.
- This can be done in small groups, and then each group can present what they have found to the class. This will lead to a discussion on how we "read" the news and how we relate to the events it portrays.

\*(Feel free to call the Concern America office for a copy of the "Basic Peace/Justice Concepts")

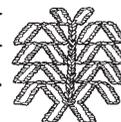
## "ARE MY HANDS CLEAN?"

How are our lives related to people in El Salvador, Venezuela, Trinidad and Tabago, and Haiti? Short of having family or friends in those countries, most of us do not feel connected to people there, nor do we equate our lifestyles with their well-being. The following activity, which includes a moving song by Sweet Honey in the Rock (a political and spiritual women's vocal group which has been active and inspirational for many years), is meant to get students to make connections between themselves and others they will never see. The song, entitled "Are My Hands Clean?", traces the path our clothing takes to arrive in stores in this country. Cotton from El Salvador, oil for polyester from Venezuela, the sewing of the clothes in Haiti, etc., and each stage is marked by unsafe working conditions and poor wages. [The song is from Sweet Honey in the Rock's album *Live at Carnegie Hall* (Flying High Records, Inc. 1988), and can be borrowed from the Concern America office.]

- (1) Ask the students to check the tags on each others shirts. Using a world map, plot the origins of their clothes. Discuss.
- (2) Hand out copies of the lyrics and play the song "Are My Hands Clean?" by Sweet Honey in the Rock. Define unfamiliar terms/unfamiliar references.
- (3) Have the students think about the song and write on the question: "Are My Hands Clean?" The resulting discussion should lead to the need to find out more, and hopefully, to act.

## PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY AND SCHOOL

"If the desire and capacity to respond to social needs are prerequisites for participatory democracy, young people need to have experiences which develop this orientation and foster these abilities." A good way for students to learn both the tools for active citizenship and the skills/information mandated by most curriculums, is to combine the two. Place a social issue of importance to the students/community as the starting point. Throughout the unit, students can keep learning logs (journals), do oral presentations, write reports, evaluate their work and that of working on a team. In addition, most issues will require the use of multiple disciplines in order to understand them well and to make changes, enabling a large amount of interdisciplinary coordination among teachers. Try it by starting small--maybe a mini-unit of a week long. Evaluate together with the students to decide if it worked for everyone, and go from there. (Teaching for Social Justice. 9-10)



"Activism pays the rent on being alive and being here on the planet."  
-Alice Walker

"We cannot afford...to think of the problems of our own society as if we were alone in the world."  
-Peter Berger

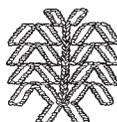
# RECOMMENDED

## RESOURCES

1. Take advantage of a free subscription to the Teaching Tolerance Magazine. Every issue is filled with stories of youth and schools making a difference in the world, including quick ideas for social justice activities in the classroom and listings of resources for teachers and students. The most recent issue offers a free video-and-text kit for a unit entitled "A PLACE AT THE TABLE: Struggles for Equality in America," a \$350 value. Get information at 400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36014, or at [www.teachingtolerance.org](http://www.teachingtolerance.org).

2. A great website for teachers and students is [www.kidscanmakeadifference.org](http://www.kidscanmakeadifference.org). The site focuses on getting kids involved in our communities and the world to end hunger and poverty. The site contains copies of their newsletter filled with information and ideas, and they put out a teacher guide for use in the classroom.

3. An organization dedicated to peace around the world is the San Antonio, Texas based **peaceCENTER**. They can be accessed through their website, [www.salsa.net/peace](http://www.salsa.net/peace). The site is packed with articles, information, teacher tools (lesson plans), peace history, hundreds of peace quotes, and much more. A great place to get new ideas to use in any activity surrounding peace and social justice.



"If you think you're too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito in the room."  
-Anita Koddick

"Aye, fight! But not your neighbor. Fight rather all the things that cause you and your neighbor to fight."  
-Mikhail Naim

## 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 (**see below**)
- \* "Training for Transformation" Workshops for adults (**see below**)
- \* 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

**IT'S HERE!** Concern America's annual **Walk Out Of Poverty** takes place on April 7. **JOIN US!** Call Janine or Eli at Concern America to get more information.

**Join the upcoming Training for Transformation (TFT) workshop.** The TFT methodology is based on the ideas of the great Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. The workshop invites participants to consider that tasks and decisions in the workplace take on a new dimension of excitement and satisfaction when they incorporate principles of global justice. Call for more information. The next workshop is in June.

Many teachers receiving this newsletter have already participated in an **Infusion Method Workshop**. The Infusion Method aims to help teachers "infuse" peace and justice concepts into their existing curriculum. If you would like information on the workshop and/or schedule a training in your school, call for more details.