

# WITH EYES TO SEE



## PEACE AND JUSTICE CONCEPT: COMMUNITY IN THE SCHOOL

### ~~THE GREAT LAW OF PEACE~~

The Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse), or the Iroquois Confederacy, is made up of six Native American nations: Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, and most recently the Tuscarora. Their constitution, known as the Great Law of Peace, has been orally passed down through carved wampum belts, dating back to the 1400s. The Great Law brought peace between the Iroquois nations and set up a government structure based on representation and consensus.

Though the Great Law of Peace and the Grand Council of Iroquois Confederacy have been around for centuries, it wasn't until recently that they have received attention from historians. Most notably are the relationships between the "founding fathers" of the United States (especially Benjamin Franklin) and the Iroquois Confederacy, and how these influenced the U.S. Constitution in terms of democracy, federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances, decision making, public opinion, and equality (though the Great Law of Peace is explicit about the equality of women, and it is the women who choose the chiefs who sit on the Confederacy's Grand Council, the U.S. Constitution didn't recognize women until 1920 when the 19th Amendment was passed).

Beyond learning about and recognizing the important contributions the Iroquois made towards the foundation of political thought in the U.S., the structures of government systems tell us a lot about the people they represent. The Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee, while it is made up of chiefs (all men), the chiefs are chosen by Clan Mothers, and it is the women who can impeach chiefs that are not acting in the best interest of their people. As well, all decisions regarding the Confederacy must be reached using consensus, while each nation has its own autonomy and system for governing on the local level. Even the Longhouse, the meeting place and symbol of the Iroquois Confederacy, is big enough to house the entire Grand Council, while each nation has its own hearth.

Bringing this home, what do the governing structures of our schools tell us about ourselves? Do we value the voices of students at school? Do teachers have input in the direction of the school? Is there a grand council where all come together to make collective decisions about curriculum, discipline, fundraising, etc.? Should there be? Part two of With Eyes to See for this school year, continuing on the theme of "Building Community from the Classroom to the World," focuses on the School Community. The following pages contain ideas for action and reflections on building school communities and more great law's of peace.

ideas for  
teachers

who want  
to  
integrate  
social  
justice  
concepts

into what  
and how  
they teach

November  
2003

CONCERN AMERICA

P.O. BOX 1790, SANTA ANA, CA 92702

(714) 953-8575--CONCAMERINC@EARTHLINK.NET--WWW.CONCERNAMERICA.ORG

# IDEAS: COMMUNITY IN THE SCHOOL

"When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."  
-Aldo Leopold, "A Sand County Almanac"

"One of the signs of passing youth is the birth of a sense of fellowship with other human beings as we take our place among them."  
-Virginia Woolf

## The School Community

The first edition of *With Eyes to See* this school year centered around Mara Sapon-Shevin's five characteristics of community in classrooms (paraphrased). The five characteristics, adapted here to reflect this edition, can help guide our work towards building a "School Community":

1. SECURITY: a safe place to be oneself
2. OPEN COMMUNICATION: among students, teachers, staff, and administration
3. MUTUAL LIKING: opportunities for everyone in a school to work together, support each other, leading to mutual respect and understanding
4. SHARED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: a sense of ownership among students for "our school," "our project," "our goals," etc.
5. CONNECTEDNESS AND TRUST: students feel part of a whole, and trust the school community

6-12

## Local Democracies (from *With Eyes to See*, May 2002)

It is generally agreed that in order to learn to do something, one must have hands-on practice: would it be possible to learn to ride a bicycle from a textbook without ever practicing on a real bike? Is the same true about citizenship and democracy? If so, should schools provide students with "democracy practice?" What would this look like?

Democratic schools do exist and take on many different forms. Some schools have councils made up of students and teachers who make many of the school's policies in collaboration with administration. Many classrooms collectively make decisions about their rules, disciplinary actions, activities, etc. through classroom meetings. Other schools hold town hall meetings with students, teachers, administrators, and parents to discuss problems, set school policy, and do vision planning for the school. All of the schools in various ways are practicing democracy. What about your classroom/school?

### What to do.....

Have students diagram the administrative structure of the school, identifying the powers of each level of administration (from the students on up to the school board and beyond). They will probably need to refer to their student handbooks and interview school administrators to complete the task. What do the students think? Is their school a democratic system? Should it be? What changes would they like to make? How could they make them (and what will they do about it)? For older grades that have studied democratic-based systems, specifically the United States, how does the school system and the U.S. government system compare? Can they be compared? Why or why not?

## The School's Grand Council

Are there school-wide issues that need to be addressed? Are there school events that need to be planned? Many schools already have student councils which may serve to deal with these issues (while teaching democratic/civic participation), but for those that don't, try holding a school-wide Grand Council modeled similarly after the Iroquois Federation. Have each class elect two representatives to the council (as well as the teachers and administrators) who will discuss the issues at hand. The representatives then return to their home "nations" (classrooms/constituents) to get feedback. The Council convenes once again to make decisions, which must be done through consensus. An interesting side-study could be to compare the school's Council to that of the Iroquois Confederacy. For example, should only boys be representatives, chosen by the girls? Why might the Iroquois have done this (and how does this fit into their concept of balance)?

6-12

## Environmental Health

4-12

As schools reopened around ground zero in New York City after the September 11 tragedies, there was concern as to the safety of the air and the environment in the area. In response, many horticultural and landscaping companies donated plants to the schools, both for the psychological boosts they provide to the students and teachers and to help clean the air they breath.

While most schools thankfully don't find themselves in such extreme situations, the "environmental health" of each school could be considered. School-based environmental health activities are great hands-on educational tools, and they may even lead to a healthier school. Start with the question: "What is the environmental health of the school?" Brainstorm ideas of what this means, and in what areas investigations would need to take place in order to answer this question: air and water quality (have any tests ever been done/what are the results); food served; building materials used in the school; cleaning products used in the school; paper and related products used (and disposed of); possible hazards in the community (factories, dump sites, etc.); and others. Have the class write a school environmental report card. What to do now with this information?

On a related note, the now infamous Erin Brokovich (of the Julia Robert's movie of the same name) is currently suing Beverly Hills High School for an unsafe school environment: the school receives \$275,000 each year for the 18 oil well heads in operation under the school campus, which, contends Brokovich, have caused concerns in former alumni, mostly student-athletes who spent much time outside on the sports fields.

"The challenge of social justice is to evoke a sense of community that we need to make our nation a better place, just as we make it a safer place."  
-Marian Wright Edelman

## School is an Open Book

K-12

Who is the school? A fun, appealing way to bring the school together and show who makes up the school is to do an *open book*. The book can take many forms, but the basic idea is to have each student create a one-page description of him/herself through text, images, and drawings. Each page is then connected together like an accordion, or an *open book*, stretching the length of the school. Try using home made paper to add color and a unique look (that each class can do, or one class can make all of them). What an impressive display for any visitor to the school! Check out [www.openbookpeaceproject.com](http://www.openbookpeaceproject.com) for ideas and an example of a similar project on a national scale.

"We need more light about each other. Light creates understanding. Understanding creates love, love creates patience, and patience creates Unity."  
-Malcolm X

## My Ideal School

4-12

What functions do schools serve in our society? Discuss the purpose of schools with the students, and together come up with a mission statement for schools. With this mission in hand, have students form groups of 3-4 and design their ideal school. While there are many directions this activity could take, possible design components can include architecture and location of the school building; class size and make up; who are the teachers; administrative structure; participation of students in the daily operations of the school; parental/community involvement; grades and assessments (for students, teachers, administration, and parents/community); subject areas; and much more. Have the students prepare pamphlets explaining their school, and then each group can present its concepts to the class. If the activity goes well, have the students take their ideas to the local school council and/or school board!

# RECOMMENDED

"Rain does not fall on one roof alone."  
Cameroon-ian Proverb

"When we come together to play and be we are truly ourselves. When we are truly ourselves it is wonderful, and when we act collectively in that wonder we do transformative work for our community and our world."  
-Brad Colby

## RESOURCES

1. A fun book for both young and old children that teaches how working together can bring about change is Doreen Cronin and Betsy Lewin's picture book entitled *Click, Clack, Moo Cows that Type*. When the cows on Farmer Brown's farm get a typewriter, they organize and write demands for better living conditions (electric blankets in the barn), and then go on strike to win concessions. There are many lesson plans available for the book (do a key word search with "Click, Clack, Moo lesson plans").

2. A wonderful retelling of an old tale is Jon J. Muth's *Stone Soup*. Set in China, Muth's version finds three monks searching for the meaning of happiness when they happen upon a village that has lost its sense of community. The stone soup brings the village together again.

3. Music is a great way to bring people together into community. There is a growing number of musicians playing fun, energetic music that appeals to young people but is also loved by adults. One such artist is Dan Zanes (formerly of the rock band the Del Fuegos). His music combines old favorites, little known gems, and original songs; guest performers include Rosanne Cash, Susane Vega, Sheryl Crow, Philip Glass, Deborah Harry, and many others. His four main releases, *Rocket Ship Beach*, *Family Dance*, *Night Time*, and *House Party* are all worthy of mention. Find Dan Zanes in your local record store or online at [www.festivalfive.com](http://www.festivalfive.com).

## 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, Nicaragua, 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

Feel free to contact the Education Coordinator at Concern America for more information on any of these projects.

**Mark Your Calenders Now for Concern America's Next WALK OUT OF POVERTY, April 3, 2004.** JOIN US! Call Janine or Eli at Concern America to get information, walk packets, posters, flyers, and/or to schedule a presentation for your group. The Walk provides education for the participants and a sense of solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world, while raising money for Concern America's development work in Latin America and Africa.

**Play for Peace!** Play for Peace is a relatively new organization that works around the world and in this country with communities in conflict. Through cooperative play, meaningful and peaceful relationships are developed in positive, fun environments. Whether a school is considered a conflict zone or not, play can be used as a powerful tool for building community. What ways can play be used in your school to break down barriers and add more peace to the world? For ideas, visit [www.playforpeace.org](http://www.playforpeace.org).