

WITH EYES TO SEE



PEACE AND JUSTICE CONCEPT: INTERDEPENDENCE

ideas for
teachers
who want
to
integrate
social
justice
concepts
into what
and how
they teach

December
2000

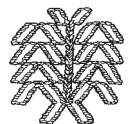
"There are no schools because so many folks like cheap french-fries."

In order to modernize and improve its economy, a country chose to focus on foreign capital and business (a standard practice throughout the world). Cheap land, tax breaks, no unions, lax environmental laws, etc. were offered to entice agribusiness to locate there, forcing thousands of peasants off their land and into cities; potatoes grown to make french-fries for export are one of the big businesses. Though these large farms are very successful, they are predominantly worked by machines and the profits go to only a few wealthy individuals. As a result, for the expanding populations of its city's slums, there is little money for schools, health care, water and sewage systems, etc. (Apple, Michael W. Cultural Politics & Education. New York: Teacher College Press. 1996. 4)

For most of us, we don't consider a trip to the local fast-food restaurant as a perpetuation of suffering on the other side of the world; what could be more American than french-fries and hamburgers (the beef for which often comes from cattle raised in clear-cut tropical rainforests). Yet, as our global economy continues to grow, the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the electronics that entertain us, the oil that fuels our lives, etc. undeniably connect our existence to that of billions of people we will never see and to the earth that sustains all of us. Do we have a responsibility in this? What is our relationship to countries we will never visit, people we will never meet? Can children in the United States help to humanize our global economy? What does the peace and justice concept of "Interdependence" mean to us?

The Infusion Methodology defines Interdependence as, "The extent to which events occurring in any one part or within a component of the world system affect (either physically or perceptually) events taking place in other parts or components of the system. Recognition of mutuality - being sustained and supported by others and sustaining and supporting them." Such a definition encourages us to look at both the local and international examples of interdependence in our lives. One only has to drive a few miles in this area of our country to see migrant farm workers picking the fruits and vegetables that grace our tables; our local "communities" are full of interconnected lives, recognized and not.

The following pages contain ideas of classroom activities and resources for exploring AND acting on the theme of Interdependence, with the hope that each of us will feel more connected to others in our communities, around the world, and to our planet. Hopefully we can be empowered to make this world a better place for all of us.



INTERDEPENDENCE: IDEAS

"We are
one, after
all, you and
I;
together
we suffer,
together
exist, and
forever
will
recreate
each
other."
-Teilhard
de Chardin

"Our lives
extend
beyond our
skins, in
radical
interde-
pendence
with the
rest of the
world."
-Joanna
Rogers
Macy

The overall goal of the following activities is to encourage students and their teachers to explore their interdependence with the environment and with people around the world. When implementing such activities, however, there is a tendency to reduce discourse to any number of the following perceptions, potentially stifling meaningful action: the oppressed are seen as one dimensional stick figures that need our pity and help; the problems are so overwhelming that nothing "we" can do will help; there are either "good guys" or "bad guys"; "we" have it good and "they" have it bad. In order to move past such stereotypes, discussions of Interdependence must recognize oppressed peoples as partners in a global struggle for social justice and that the world is made up of a system of structures, not simply individual acts of "good" and "bad" people. (Bigelow, Bill. "The Human Lives Behind the Labels: The Global Sweatshop, Nike, and the Race to the Bottom." *Teaching for Social Justice*. Ed. W. Ayers, J. A. Hunt, and T. Quinn. New York: Teacher College Press, 1998. 34-36)

THE INVISIBLE LIVES OF SOCCER BALLS

<<Find a beat-up soccer ball that was made in a materially poor country (not hard to do--most today are made in China or Pakistan). Gather background information on labor practices in that country--especially in terms of children (on the web, search with key words "child labor," or add "Pakistan," "China," or "soccer balls" to narrow the search).>>

ACTIVITY: Place the soccer ball where all students can see it. Instruct them to write a description of the ball, about a paragraph in length, encouraging them to get up and look at it if they would like. There are no right or wrong answers. Most likely, the descriptions will be straightforward. Have a few students read what they wrote. Then read the following poem by Bertolt Brecht, "Questions From a Worker Who Reads."

Who built the seven gates of Thebes?
The books are filled with names of
kings.
Was it kings who hauled the craggy
blocks of stone? . . .
In the evening when the Chinese wall
was finished
Where did the masons go? Imperial
Rome
Is full of arcs of triumph. Who reared
them up? . . .

Young Alexander conquered India.
He alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Was there not even a cook in his
army? . . .

Each page a victory.
At whose expense the victory ball?
Every ten years a great man,
Who paid the piper?

Keeping Brecht's questions in mind, ask the students to "resee" the ball. They can write from the point of view of the ball, or ask the ball questions, but ask them to look at the ball more deeply. What was missed the first time around? The new descriptions will most likely explore the humanity inside the ball with questions like who made the ball, what were the conditions like, etc., prompting a discussion about the "global sweatshop," child labor, and our consumerism. At the end of this lesson, students can be asked to act, to do something to support their stance on the issues (write letters, make calls, encourage school to purchase only non child-labor soccer balls, etc.). (Bigelow, Bill. 21-23)

A NEW PLEDGE? "With liberty and justice for all," the last line of the Pledge of Allegiance, did not speak to the reality of the materially poor students of a teacher in Washington D.C. Instead, her class would share the simple "Pledge to the World." It began: "I pledge allegiance to the world, and every creature living, to earth and sea and sky above, respect is what I'm giving." Try creating your own with your students. (Carger, Chris. *Teaching for Social Justice*. 242)

CYCLES OF INTERACTION

<<This is a good activity for science class.>>

1. Divide the students into five groups, each representing one of the following: **AIR**, **WATER**, **LIVING THINGS** (plants and animals), **EARTH** (soil), **ENERGY** (heat, light, movement).
2. Each group will explore the patterns of movement of their cycle. To get students going use questions such as: Where does it come from?... Where does it go?... How does it change in the process?
3. Have the groups create collages to illustrate their cycle using magazine clippings, markers, drawings, etc.
4. Place the collages around a globe in a way that all students can see them. Encourage the students to make connections between the cycles; pieces of yarn can be used to connect the cycles.
5. Have each student write an essay which explores the relationship between the cycles and humans, including the theme of Interdependence. The essays can vary from free-form creative stories (creative writing) to scientific discussions of the web of life (facts and technical concepts). (Hope, Anne and Timmel, Sally. Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers. Book IV. London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1999. 14)



SMALL WORLD

<<A related activity to the Soccer ball exercise.>>

Have the students write a description of what they have done today, including a list of the objects with which they had contact (clothing, food, car, bus, etc.). Next, have the students determine where the objects came from. Use this information as a springboard for any number of activities based on our dependence on the rest of the world.

"When we try to pick out something by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe."
-John Muir

"Live Simply that others may simply live."
-Elizabeth Seton

CREATE A CLASSROOM STORY

<<The Storyline Method was developed by teachers in Scotland to "help children see the world as a connected whole." Its premise is that social justice education must connect with students' emotions and "bring the whole of him-herself to the table of learning." Choose a topic about which students talk but lack understanding (e.g. homelessness, immigration, gangs, teachers/adults, people with disabilities, etc.). In one classroom, students had for weeks talked about the homeless people in the park near school (students feared them and some even bullied them), so that topic was chosen.>>

- 1) Start with questions like What words come to mind when I say Homeless?, and Why are people Homeless do you think?
- 2) Each student becomes a "character" in the story (homeless person), creating their person physically (art) and through a biography (writing). Each shares their character and they all begin to interact--a community is created.
- 3) To stimulate discussion, more questions are posed like Today you became homeless. What will you take with you (that will fit into one bag)? Students share answers and discuss each others' choices. Use various questions over several days.
- 4) Eventually, students may want more information about homelessness and invite someone to speak with them (a current/former homeless person, social worker, etc.).
- 5) In the end, students have been able "to explore their own worries and fears about social issues that impact their own lives," and in the process have begun to see the "homeless" as real people with many of their same fears, joys, families, and hearts.

The is much more information about Storyline easily found on the internet (search using the key words "storyline method"). (Hutchinson, Jaylynn N. and Romano, Rosalie M. Teaching for Social Justice. 254-269)

"In every man there is something wherein I may learn of him, and in that I am his pupil."
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

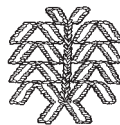
RECOMMENDED

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING INTERDEPENDENCE

1. An excellent book for thinking and teaching about social justice is cited in the previous pages: *Teaching for Social Justice*. It is full of stories, ideas, and thoughts on the subject by many educators including Maxine Green, Jonathan Kozol, Mike Rose, and many others.

2. Two movies that deal engagingly and with humor with the issues of interdependence of workers and their communities, big business and foreign labor, are Michael Moore's *Roger and Me* and his more recent *The Big One* (with a great section with Michael Knight, the CEO of Nike). Both can be found at most video stores.

3. The internet is a good way to get new ideas about teaching Interdependence, including some lesson plans for their implementation. Simply search using the key words "lesson plans and interdependence."



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, 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

"The things that make us alike are stronger than the things that make us different."
-Jane Addams

"Human beings don't only search for meanings, they are themselves units of meaning; but we can mean something only within the fabric of larger significations."
-Eva Hoffman

To learn more about efforts to improve the working conditions for the people around the world who make our clothing (for companies like the Gap, Disney, Nike), the **National Labor Committee** is a great place to start. Their website is <www.nlcnet.org>, or their phone number is (212) 242-3002. They have many resources for use in classrooms, including videos, posters, and information packets. One recent campaign showed a picture of a clothing tag, which begins like most "Size 12. Made in El Salvador. 50% Cotton. 50% Polyester. 100% Sweatshop labor. 14 hour shifts, Seven day week. 28 cents per hour. No right to speak out. Dry Clean Only."

GOT A GREAT IDEA TO SHARE? Send us a description of a Peace/Justice lesson or project that worked well for you and we will include it in a future edition of **WITH EYES TO SEE**. We look forward to hearing from you!