

WITH EYES TO SEE



PEACE AND JUSTICE CONCEPT: CONSCIENTIZATION MEXICO

ideas for
teachers

who want
to
integrate
social
justice
concepts

into what
and how
they teach

April
2005

The scene is repeated in schools across the country: students are in class or in the school auditorium, and they are watching slides and listening to a school visitor talk about life in another country. The questions asked of the visitor are familiar as well: Do they have T.V. there? Are there MacDonaldis? Is there electricity?

What do these questions say about children in this country? That they are obsessed with electronic media and junk food? Certainly, on one level it could be argued that this is true, especially considering the amount of TV and video games children are exposed to, and the growing problem of obesity in this country. More importantly, however, these questions point out that on a subconscious level, children want to know what they have in COMMON with their counterparts in other countries. They want to connect with other children, even those living thousands of miles away in different cultures, and they attempt to do this in such situations by saying, in essence, "I like TV and french fries. How about you?"

Despite the desire of children to connect with others seemingly unlike themselves, many classroom activities on other countries and peoples highlight the DIFFERENCES between us: in country "X," girls can't go to school; in country "Y," they speak Swahili; in country "Z," people live in mud huts. While learning about the aspects of life in other countries that are different from our own is a way for us to understand other peoples, it also has the tendency to set us apart from each other, to define us as "haves" and "have nots," which ultimately leads to a sense of feeling sorry for the "less fortunate" others. This negative feeling keeps us from acting to change injustice, or to learn more about other people, or even to question/ be self aware of our own beliefs and actions.

The theme this year for *With Eyes to See* has been **conscientization**, and how we see the "other" directly affects the level to which each of us strives to "raise awareness" and act. As stated in the first newsletter this year (September, 2004), Conscientization is a process of a repeating cycle of reflecting and acting: there is input (information) to learn from the experience of others; then growing awareness of a need for change (both within oneself and in one's surroundings); measured/appropriate actions to make changes; and regular evaluations of what has been accomplished and where consciousness has grown. The cycle then repeats.

May the cycle of learning and acting carry on for the rest of this school year and the summer until we meet again in the Fall with another edition of *With Eyes to See*.

~~Concern America in Mexico~~

Concern America (C/A) is a nonprofit, nonsectarian, nongovernmental development and refugee aid organization that partners with materially poor communities in "developing" countries in projects to assist them to move their communities out of poverty. In the U.S., C/A offers social justice education to groups of youth and adults. As part of its mission abroad, C/A supports the following project in Mexico:

MEXICO: Concern America's "Integrated Community Development Project to Accompany Indigenous/Autonomous Municipalities in Chiapas, Mexico" works in more than 500 indigenous communities with a population of more than 100,000 people to build sustainable, community-centered development through programs in health, education, economic development, and appropriate technology. Chiapas is a region of ongoing civil conflict in Mexico in which the government and its various forces have isolated, harassed, attacked, and displaced the predominantly indigenous communities for many years. *See below how the indigenous peoples of Chiapas are building society despite this ongoing struggle.*

"Peace is the respect for the rights of others."
Benito Juarez, (first Indigenous President of Mexico)

"As love is a union, it knows no extremes of distance."
Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz (17th century nun, poet and first feminist in Western Hemisphere)

6-12

What Would Your People Do?

Have the students assume for a moment that they all represent a unique group of people who live in another country. As a people, they existed long before the current boundaries of the country where they live were drawn, and their language and culture are different from that of the dominant members of society (business people, government). Though they enjoy certain rights to live their lives as they have done for centuries, their country's schools do not teach their children in their native language; their community is poorer and has fewer services than other communities; their land is under attack for the natural resources it contains, and corporations want them to work in low-paying factories that are slated to be built near by.

Ask the students, as a group, to decide what they should do. They can ask specific questions about their situation, but it is up to them to think about what they want to do about things like education, protecting their language and customs, defending their land, etc.

As a teacher, you know ahead of time that your students are the indigenous Tzeltal, Tzotzil, and Tojolabal people of Chiapas, Mexico. With a bit of background on your part, you will know how to guide the students in this task (visit www.sipaz.org, and click on "the conflict" link for good information on the current situation in Chiapas).

Once the group has developed its plan, talk about their choices: Are they nonviolent? Do they attempt to preserve their culture, etc., or to adapt to the dominant culture? Then, share with the students the summary of the conflict in Chiapas (listed above), which includes information about the indigenous communities in Chiapas and how they have responded to a multitude of outside pressures. How does the students' plan compare to what is actually taking place in Chiapas? If the students feel ownership for their plan, this comparison and the ensuing discussion could be very productive.

Tips for Teaching about Native Peoples

Students in this country learn about native peoples in a variety of classes and grade levels. How are they taught? As a single group of people? When they come in contact with Europeans? As they are today? A great list of "dos and don'ts" to help guide educators when teaching about native peoples can be found at www.ableza.org/dodont.html. Ableza is a Native American Arts and Media Institute located in San Jose, California.

K-12

What Did You Do Today?

6-12

This exercise lets male and female students compare/contrast the activities they do on a daily basis, and then do the same with girls from three other countries. This was developed by a Peace Corps volunteer, and the supporting material* can be found at www.peacecorps.gov/wws/lessons/women/index.html.

Ask each student to fill out her/his own daily activity schedule,* focusing on things like chores, school, play, family interaction, and work outside the home. This completed, form same gender groups of 3-4 to talk about the similarities and differences of the schedules and quantify the information (e.g. 2 of 4 care for youger siblings). Have the class come back together and share what they found in their small groups. How do the activities of girls and boys compare?

Another level of this activity is to compare the lives of the students to those of teenagers from other countries. Hand out the activity schedules of girls from Paraguay, Poland, and Cape Verde, and compare/contrast them with those of the students themselves. Key areas to consider are leisure time, time spent in school, work responsibilities, and others, and be attentive throughout this activity to both the similarities and differences.

(adapted from an exercise of the Peace Corps' World Wise Schools' program, found at the internet address listed above. Other similar exercises can be found at the site as well.)

Dialogue Poetry Across Borders

2-12

Another way to compare the lives of youth is to create dialogue poems. These poems are often written with two parallel columns side by side, each one representing a participant in the dialogue. A sample poem might start like this:

I am a 12 year old boy in the U.S.
I take a bus to school each day
After school I play with my friends
Every evening I eat with my family

I am a 12 year old boy in China
I ride a bike to school each day
After school I work in our store
Every evening I eat with my family

This type of poem works well for highlighting what was learned after studying another culture or group and as a way to connect the information to the lives of the students. As discussed on page one, however, don't focus only upon what separates the students from others, but also the things they have in common. One way to do this is to have the students write two dialogue poems, one pointing out the differences, and one the similarities. Another technique is to have the students write one poem, and then ask them to count the lines that show differences, and those that show similarities. Discuss the results and explore why the students' poems turned out as they did.

(For another example of a dialogue poem and a longer description of this exercise, visit www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/19_01/dial191.shtml)

What Do You Really Think?

8-12

Most students are consciously committed to equality across gender, ethnicities, disabilities, etc., and this is a testament to the ongoing education they receive at home, in schools, at church, etc. Do we also have hidden biases, however, that may affect how we see others? Try taking a few of the "Implicit Association Tests," found through www.tolerance.org/hidden_bias/index.html. Tests cover age, race, gender, and even the candidates in the 2004 presidential race. The intent of using these tests should not be to "prove" if we have prejudices or not, but rather to explore our own stereotypes and biases and how they affect the way we look at and treat others.

"Giving kids clothes and food is one thing but it's much more important to teach them that other people besides themselves are important, and that the best thing they can do with their lives is to use them in the service of other people." Dolores Huerta (activist and labor leader)

RECOMMENDED

"Wisdom lies neither in fixity nor in change, but in the dialectic between the two."
Octavio Paz
(Mexican Author)

"We appeal, as human beings to human beings: Remember your humanity, and forget the rest."
(in a statement signed by Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein, and others)

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

The following is a list of children's books that explore the theme of what makes us similar while affirming our differences. Though these books are geared towards younger children, they can be used at all grade levels.

1. **The Colors of Us** by Karen Katz was written by the author when she adopted a girl of an ethnicity other than her own.
2. **Whoever You Are** by Mem Fox and Leslie Straub uses striking illustrations and simple text to remind us that despite differences among people around the world, we have many similarities that connect us.
3. **Carrying** by Gwenyth Swain is part of a series of books in the "Small World" series which include *Smiling*, *Eating*, and *Celebrating*. This book depicts different people carrying things, this simple human experience that is shared by all cultures.
4. **Shoes, Shoes, Shoes** by Ann Morris is much like *Carrying* in that we are treated to images from around the world depicting a common element in many of our lives: shoes.
5. **The Name Jar** by Yangsook Choi depicts a young girl named Unhei who has just moved to the U.S from Korea. Unhei and her classmates learn about the importance of names and identity across cultures.

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, Colombia, Guinea, and Mozambique.

In support of these projects, Concern America offers educational services in California 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.

2005-2015 is the International Decade on Water for Life. Water is a scarce resource for a great number of people in this world. How much water do each of us use in a day? How much water does it take to make a newspaper? What happens to the water sprayed on agricultural fields? These and other questions are answered in a short quiz on water found at www.un.org/cyberschoolbus, and the quiz can be used to learn about geography, math, and natural resources/conservation. Once at the quiz page, there is a link to the United Nation's site dedicated to water issues, including information on the International Decade on Water for Life, 2005-2015.

The U.N.'s Cyber Schoolbus site has many great resources for teachers, in addition to the water quiz. The InfoNation link allows you to compare statistics of countries very quickly; there are many ideas for use in the classroom, including a human rights curriculum; students can learn about the U.N. and Model United Nations; and much more.