

Friends Council
Education

Chronicles

OF QUAKER EDUCATION

FALL '99

Teaching Peace and Justice

"If we are to teach real peace in the world, we shall have to begin with children; and if they will grow up in their natural innocence, we won't have to pass fruitless ideal resolutions, but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace, until at last all the corners of the world are covered with that peace and love for which consciously or unconsciously the whole world is hungering."

Many Friends schools integrate peace and justice issues into their social studies curriculum, but what if a school developed a whole course around these concepts? That is what Westtown School decided to do five years ago.

"We wanted it to be a high-energy, multi-dimensional, interdisciplinary full-year course for 9th graders that would give them solid skills in research," explained Joe Marchese, upper school principal and one of the developers of the course. "We use a variety of approaches to learning -- small group discussions, speakers, simulation, and student research presentations."

"It is actually a perfect course for 9th graders," remarked Eric Mayer, chair of Religious Studies. 'Peace & Justice' really captures their interest in social justice. This age group holds a strong belief in right and wrong and what is fair." The course covers issues of intolerance both internationally and domestically, including anti-immigrant hostility, anti-Semitism, the Civil Rights Movement, hate groups, and censorship.

After taking the course and looking at many examples of intolerance in the world, the students began to ask for some messages of hope. "That is when we realized that we needed to add a component to the course on how to create social change. Each person, including students, can make a difference," said Joe.

The final project became a student research project in an area of intense interest to the student. Topics varied widely: Aids Awareness, the Arab/Israeli conflict, China's oppression of Tibet, infant mortality, and land mines. The project included writing a research paper and answering the question "How can I make a difference regarding this problem?" Some students produced slide shows or Websites on their topic. On Parents Day, the students asked their parents what issues of intolerance were important to them.

Some students do not stop working on their issue when the course ends. The student who had picked AIDS Awareness as his topic continued to work to bring the AIDS quilt to Westtown. "Most classes work in isolation," said Joe, "but this class is always making announcements to the whole school about their issue. They know that one way to create social change is to provide information to others. 'Peace & Justice' has tapped into the students' incredible energy to work on something meaningful to them, and to incorporate a model working for social justice into their lives."

Jim Ballangee, director of Service Learning at William Penn Charter School, uses the core concept of nonviolence to study different movements that have brought about social change in his 'Peace, Justice, and Social Change' class. The students study proponents of nonviolence like John Woolman, Henry David Thoreau, and Philip Berrigan, and then use the models of social action to examine such topics as welfare reform, trade unionism, and conscientious objectors during war. "I try to connect each topic with the Quaker testimonies and visits to service learning sites in the Philadelphia area," said Jim. "For example, when we look at welfare reform, we work with the Kensington Welfare

Rights Union that is using many of the same tactics that were used during the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s." An exciting development in this year's course is a partnership with University High School in Philadelphia to study Civil Rights. "We often partner with Philadelphia public schools to do service together, but this is the first time we will actually be studying a topic with another school. We hope to create a Website and a curriculum on Civil Rights for use by other schools."

Jim has also created curricula on Civil Rights to be incorporated in the 5th, 8th, and 11th grade social studies courses at Penn Charter. "The impetus for this project came from a Civil Rights tour my wife and I took this summer. We developed a slide show and compiled a huge number of resources, including books, videos, and Websites that could be used at each of the grade levels. It is very important for students to study something as important and powerful as the Civil Rights Movement and relate the issues and the social change tactics to today. I think it helps them to view our current social problems in a different light, and hopefully, take more individual responsibility for getting involved and making a change."

"Faith & Justice," a senior elective at Westtown, considers the human struggle from the perspective of faith. The course first examines the question of what is faith, and then asks each student to write their own spiritual autobiography. The second part of the course explores particular issues of justice and injustice including classical nonviolence, war and pacifism, civil rights, and the penal system. Students read the spiritual autobiographies of such religious leaders as Billy Graham and the Dalai Lama.

"Many kids believe that to be religious is to be disinterested, or even opposed to justice issues. It can be overwhelming to really feel the suffering of the world, if you are not connected to the transcendent. It is also difficult to continue the work with joy and vigor if you feel you are not making progress. If we believe that God is working through us, it can make all the difference," explained Eric. "When the students tell their own stories, it authenticates the experience for them."

"Faith & Justice" tries to teach that although some people are religious, all people have spiritual lives. "Transcendent moments are those where people experience depth and connection in the world. In the course, we try to validate spiritual voice and look at the joy of service because of that spiritual base," remarked Eric. As the final research project, the students choose to study an individual who is working on a justice issue from a religious witness. "The students begin to talk about their spiritual lives and, though they may never have been to a church, many of them are able to discover spiritual richness within themselves."

Problems Are Opportunitites in Disguised

An Interview with Rick Grier-Reynolds

How did the course "Peace, Justice, and Social Change" begin at Wilmington Friends School?

The trustees here were looking for a way in the early 80s that would clearly put forward the Quaker testimonies. Many courses at a Quaker school should and do have an ethical dimension. However, the administration wanted a stand-alone peace studies course that would be a requirement. It is a tenth grade course and lasts a full semester. One of the key principles of the course is that the social scientist has a moral responsibility to the world. Once you have done the diagnostic work on, for example, "Why is there hunger?," then you have to take the next step and do some prescriptive work. I really try to use the course to empower students because really that is what we should all be doing. We are living in an age when there are dramatic challenges to our quality of life. As we look around, we see, for the most part, a lot of people feeling alienated, disenfranchised, and powerless.

Another key assumption of the course is that problems are opportunities in disguise. If you look at history, change has occurred because inevitably some person or group of persons have become angry or had enough of a certain situation, and they get active. When I write a unit, I include the realities or the facts of the situation. "What is going on in Bosnia?" "What is really occurring in global warming?" Then, we spend a greater part of the time talking about, "What are we going to do about it?", including remedies to the situation.

How do you pick the units? Do you change them from year to year?

I always have a unit on sources of aggression and nonviolence. One of the notions of the course is that we also have to look at the violence in ourselves, our families, our school, and our own communities before we can begin talking about a nonviolent world. This gives us a micro and a macro analysis in each unit. I try to anticipate what are going to be the important issues for next year. I am working on building a larger conflict resolution unit. My job as a teacher is to try to demystify these issues and I am always looking for articles that will say in a very clear five-page way what the issue is about. The great thing about this course is that it is continually evolving. I am always making the kids bring in articles to critique so I have boxes of articles. I spread out all the articles prior to writing a particular unit for the next year, and I decide what to keep and what needs revision. I sometimes will eliminate a whole unit because something more important has come up.

Could you talk a little about the final exam for the course?

I took the final exam from Elise Boulding's "Imaging a Positive Future" material. The final exam is the culmination of all the different work that we have done in nonviolence and environmental sustainability. The kids have to go into the future to the year 2030. It is a functioning society that is based on sustainability and the fact that all conflicts are resolved by nonviolence. When the kids originally read that, they say, "No way! You are crazy. That is totally impossible."

So, in preparation, I have them pick out one fact from the Civil Rights Movement between 1948 and 1994. The next day, we create a timeline. It usually includes, for example, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, the peace marches, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, it never includes the fact of Colin Powell's potential nomination as the Republican candidate for the presidency. I ask the class, "If I was standing in this room with all of you in 1960, and I said that thirty years from now a Negro would be the Republican candidate for President, what would you all say?" Of course, they say the same thing as when they read the exam -- absolutely no way, it can't happen.

History is the coming together of expected and unexpected events, peoples, movements, some of it predictable and some of it serendipitous. For the exam, they have to create a history from the year 2030 back to the present that records legislation, people, events, catastrophes that moved the world to sustainability and nonviolence. In the last part of the exam, each student has to create an action plan about what he or she can do in the next five years to move the world towards these goals.

I try to impress upon the students that the heroes of the environmental and peace movements are just normal people like us. These are people that may be doing things like cleaning the stream in their town, or coming up with a whole new design for an automobile. For example, I do an assignment in the environmental unit that states "You are an environmental hero. What are you doing as a hero for the environment ten years from now?"

How did you become involved personally in the peace movement?

I came down to Wilmington after a WFS graduate and friend bribed me with a free lunch and a beer to meet a WFS faculty member who was recruiting teachers; I didn't even know what Quakers were! I planned to be an investment banker in New York City. Well, here I am, 30 years later. When I first came to Wilmington Friends, I was a supporter of the Vietnam War. I began to change when I saw the psychological damage to friends and friends dying. I began to ask many questions. Having contact with Quakers who were doing incredible things also changed me. Now I not only teach nonviolence, I try to live it.

In the middle 70s, I went to Cyprus with an international group to try to use Gandhi's ideas to see if they could be applied to the inter-communal violence that was occurring there. It was a life-changing experience. We had negotiated a great program in which the government had agreed to rebuild all the houses of the people who had been displaced. We were in a big public meeting to sign the agreement and suddenly someone said, "How can we trust you people?" Suddenly, there was an escalation of tension. I began to think, "The agreement will fail. All this work was for nothing." Then the leader of the Gandhian movement in India got up and began to talk about love and truth and brotherhood. To deny his words would have been to deny your own humanity. Everyone got up and shook hands and signed the treaty. I was the "doubting Thomas" and I realized that nonviolence can work.

I have continued on with that work. In the early 90s, I received a full-year fellowship under the National Endowment for the Humanities. I went down to Central America. I also went with Witness for Peace several times. I traveled with Borderlinks where we followed the route of a refugee from Guatemala City through Mexico to Tucson. I went to Cuba with my wife and did a workcamp and I also have visited Bosnia, working with grassroots reconciliation groups.

How do you fit these personal experiences in to the course?

I really tell stories; I don't lecture. The kids do a lot of simulations, listen to speakers, or debate their views from the readings. Every day the overhead is projecting the lyrics to some song that a student has brought in that is thematically linked with the lesson. So if it is human rights, it might be Bob Marley. They find the songs and I listen to them. They have to be able to explain to me how it is linked. It really engages them in the work.

There is a group of about ten kids who started a peace and ecology committee several years ago, after taking the course. Two years ago, they developed an all-day program for the upper school on the theme "Being an Agent of Change." We brought in people who were living their lives in some way as an agent of change. They shared with the students how it was that they came to be doing that work. It was extremely powerful because these people were really no different than you or me.

What advice would you give to a school that is thinking about beginning a course on Peace & Justice?

This course came from the top down -- the administration said we want a peace program and we want a service program. In both cases, these courses are requirements for graduation. Making it a requirement tells the students that the school thinks this is important.

Rick Grier-Reynolds is the creator and teacher of "Peace, Justice, and Social Change" at Wilmington Friends School in Wilmington, DE. For more information about the course, contact Rick at 302-576-2900 or e-mail: richgr@dol.net

Building a Bridge of Peace for Thirty Years

Like many of the life-changing experiences that occur for students in Friends schools, this one began with one person, well, really two -- a student and a head of school. A Mexican student who spoke no English entered pre-primary at Plymouth Meeting Friends School (PMFS), a pre-primary to sixth grade school, located in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania. The head of the school at the time, LaRue Taliaferro was intrigued by the way Luis learned to communicate through play and by just being one of the class. Luis quickly learned English and everyone in the school community benefited from learning about his culture. Luis's parents urged PMFS to consider an exchange with Mexico. That was thirty years ago!

The year 2000 will mark the 30th anniversary of the Mexican - U. S. student exchange at PMFS. For the past fifteen years, the school's Mexican exchange partner has been the Discovery School, a small private school in Cuernavaca, a city about 40 minutes from Mexico City. The entire fifth grade class spends two weeks in Mexico, lives with Mexican families, and studies the Mexican culture. Later in the school year, Mexican students came to Plymouth Meeting. Said assistant principal Marilupe Perez-Salazar, "We jumped at the chance to build a relationship with PMFS because it gave our students a chance to see the U. S. and practice their English. Half of our school day is taught in Spanish and the other half is taught in English."

The teachers at PMFS work very closely with the teachers and the principal, Diane Ramos, at the Discovery School. "Even though the school curriculum is regulated by the government in Mexico, we have seen changes in their teaching methods as result of our influence," said Anne Javicas, head of school. "Teachers there have asked for help in using holistic approaches to teaching reading and writing. The Discovery School began an art program when the teachers saw how important art was at Plymouth Meeting."

How can children who are only ten to eleven years of age leave home for two weeks and live in another culture? Don't they all get homesick? "Actually," said Rob Staples, school psychologist, "Traveling with this age group is just about perfect. They are ready to branch out from home, but still expect and want supervision." Anne added, "In every grade at PMFS, beginning with first grade, the students take longer and longer trips to give them practice at being away from home."

Dottie Leonard, the fifth grade teacher, who has been involved in the Mexican Exchange Program from the beginning, agreed. "We begin preparing for the trip in fifth grade as soon as the school year begins. The kids exchange pictures and letters with their host families. The curriculum in the fifth grade is geared to our exchange by studying the origins of culture and civilization in the New World. We study pre-history, archaeology, and pre-Columbian cultures. In January, we study modern Mexico, and by March, we are ready to move on to the Incas. In the spring, we focus on the Amazon rainforest." In addition, the curriculum in the special classes for the fifth grade are geared to their upcoming Mexico trip--- they study fossils in science, Mexican art in art, and, of course, conversational Spanish for travelers in Spanish class!

What do the PMFS students do on school days in Cuernavaca? Dottie explained, "Our experiences in Mexico are group-oriented. Our students have assignments and write in their journals every day." Daily field trips include Teotihuacan, the archaeological site at Xochiacalco, Mexico City, the Palace of Cortez, the cave at Las Grutas, and the Floating Gardens at Xochimilco. Said Anne, "It is so amazing to see these students visit the archaeological ruins, enter an ancient cathedral and study the frescoes, sketch a courtyard in Mexico City, talk about Olmec art, walk through a small village market and see day-old chicks for sale, and barter with Mexican money to buy presents for their families!"

How does the experience impact the students? "Our fifth-graders learn how to get along with new people. They also learn about cultural differences and similarities, how to adjust to living in a new household, and how to become part of another family," reported Dottie. Anne added, "They seem more mature and more confident when they return. It may sound surprising, but the 5th grade exchange has really impacted the career interests of many of our students. They return wanting to learn more about other cultures and they begin to look at issues globally. The students understand that though our cultures may be different, there are many similarities between us as people. One student I know pursued a career as an anthropologist, specializing in Latin America. Another alumna returned to tell me that she had chosen to become a Spanish teacher because of her trip to Mexico at PMFS. We worked with her college and she will be pioneering the first U.S. teaching internship at the Discovery School in Cuernavaca. These stories confirm for me something I have believed all along. Even in the lower school, this kind of cultural exchange promotes personal growth, increases international understanding, and can really change lives."

Editor's Note: In February 2000, this writer's son will be participating in the Mexican Exchange as part of the fifth grade at Plymouth Meeting Friends School. Report from a parent's view in a later issue!

For more information regarding exchange programs in the lower school, contact Anne Javsicas, Plymouth Meeting Friends School, Plymouth Meeting, PA at 610-828-2288 or e-mail: PMFS@Earthlink.net

Call for "Best Practices" and Favorite Lesson Plans in Teaching Quakerism

Chip Poston, director of Religious Studies at George School in Newtown, PA, has been awarded a Lang Fellowship for the 1999-2000 school year. The Lang Fellowship, in its first year at George School, enables two faculty members per year to have a reduced teaching load in order to work on a special project. Chip will use his fellowship to work on collecting materials for teaching Quakerism to high school students. After collecting and editing the materials, he hopes to publish a workbook to be used in teaching Quakerism at Friends high schools.

Please consider contributing a lesson to the project. Lesson topics may include the following:

- Quaker history and dynamic personalities;
- Meeting for Worship--what it is and how to use it productively;
- The Light Within;
- Quaker belief about Jesus;
- Quakers and the Bible, prayer, sacraments;
- What is a concern? What is a leading?
- Quaker testimonies, including--peace, simplicity, integrity, equality, service/community;
- Quaker women as pioneers of feminism;
- People of color in Quaker history;
- "Cutting edge issues"--Friends testimonies for the 21st Century related to economics, sexuality, violence/nonviolence or other Friends' testimonies.

Class plans should be approximately one hour in length and should include preparation or homework of some kind. Interactive, "hands-on" exercises would be especially helpful. Chip is counting on your help in this exciting and vital project.

Submission: To submit a favorite practice or lesson to be included in this project, you may send it via e-mail to:

chip_poston@georgeschool.org or mail to: Chip Poston, PO Box 4636, Newtown, PA 18940. In order to avoid duplication, contact Chip before submitting a contribution. All submissions are due no later than Thanksgiving, 1999.

Reflections *Letter from the Executive Director*

Dear Friends,

"You are all starting the year with a clean slate!"

As students, we heard that declaration each September, as we sat in front of our new teacher in our new clothes with our new binder and pencils atop our desk. And as educators, we have no doubt said it---and meant it, as we face those eager young learners still fresh, pressed, and in class with pencils!

This sense of starting anew is enhanced by the summer away from the school routine that allows both true closure, and a time for reflection on the experiences of the year just past. It is at the opening of school that we all have a sense of the opportunity before us to realize our inward potential. It is a time of hope for our futures. And in that time, whether published in a newsletter, privately written in a journal, or quietly stated to oneself, we set our goals for the new year.

While we do not have new clothes, binders, or pencils, the Friends Council board and staff, like you, have had a part of the summer to reflect and renew. We have hopes for this new year and have set goals that will advance our mission "to exercise leadership in drawing Friends schools together in unity of aim and spirit...." I would like to share some of these goals with you. Two of them build directly on the successes of the moral growth report and the Council's first national gathering of Quaker educators, held at Haverford College.

One goal is to find ways to share with other public and private schools what we learned in our moral growth study about creating a workable school culture. With the unfortunate incidents of highly publicized and tragic acts of violence in schools over this past year, it seems imperative that the Council share its findings about how the handling of conflict contributes to a sense of community.

Another goal is to build on the dialogue about diversity which was the focus of the national gathering at Haverford in April. At the initiative of Pat Macpherson at Westtown School, the Council is supporting a study of Friends schools'

experiences of moving toward greater diversity. These stories are being collected and will be shared in the spring. Our sense is that we must know something of where schools have been before considering future paths to be followed.

The Council will continue to strengthen the network of Friends schools by offering workshops in Philadelphia, organizing regional gatherings and visiting schools. Plans are being made for three spring gatherings---one for Friends educators on the west coast, another for admissions directors and staff in Philadelphia, and the third for pre-school educators, hosted by Abington Friends School. The board is continuing with its commitment to visit all Friends schools across the country.

Finally, we are in the process of building a resource library of "best practices" in Friends schools. As we visit schools, we will be collecting information on topics such as peace and justice curricula, queries for teacher evaluations, board training and practices, and service learning. Watch future Chronicles for information on this new resource library.

As a personal goal, I would like to see every teacher, administrator, and staff person in Friends schools read Paul Lacey's new book *Growing Into Goodness: Essays in Quaker Education*. In his search for the answer to whether or not there is a philosophy of Friends education, Paul has gone back to some of the basic definitions of those things we hold dear. With clarity and good humor, Paul leads us through our significant educational past, articulates our present understandings of what it is to be a Quaker school, and concludes each essay with thoughts about where we might be led in the future. For anyone who has asked, "What does it mean to be a Quaker school?," this is must reading!

Quaker education is a process which involves many people willing to share their gifts of knowledge, time and energy. The Council is blessed to have the assistance of many volunteers. Some create and lead our workshops, some write the books and pamphlets, and others share their curricula. We could not function without them. Your Council is run by a volunteer board of directors which sets all policies and directions. We list them below to thank them for the wonderful service they provide Friends education.

So, while we work to implement our dreams and goals as a Council, I encourage you, also, to start the year with a clean slate on which you can write your own hopes and dreams.

Kay Edstene, Executive Director

