

Listening to the Children

Madeleine Trichel listens to children and teachers. And her approach is highly successful in promoting nonviolence and peace education. "When we began, we could not use the word "peace" or "peacemaking" in a public school," she recalls. "We've come a long way since then."

Her work began modestly at a summer Peace School in 1982. After the volunteer teachers took the concepts back to their classrooms in the fall, other teachers began to ask her for training. "We had to learn fast so we could teach anybody else anything!" she recalls. Since then she has conducted pilots for the Ohio governor's office and other agencies and has taught and consulted for schools and school districts. Her work contributed to establishing a legislative commission that carries out school programs statewide. She has written manuals and curricula, designed model programs, and trained teachers and students to become trainers. On behalf of a conflict resolution education organization she is drafting national standards that will include systemic issues, social and emotional learning, and cultural dimensions.

Madeleine directs the Interfaith Center for Peace in Columbus, Ohio. Her work involves conflict management, mediation, classroom management and peace education in various forms, depending on the needs of a school. For more than ten years, she has been funded by the state commission to consult statewide on whole-school programs, an approach that involves infusing nonviolence concepts into all aspects of school life.

"We do a careful needs assessment before we negotiate a contract, and we've become quite practical along with our visionary proclivities!" she insists. "We've found the best approach is helping teachers and staff learn to model what they want from students. We help them incorporate peacemaking and justice concepts into what they are already doing----from the school codes of conduct and mission to classroom management, school-to-work programs, and academics related to the state test competencies. We, ourselves, work with students from K-12, always in the context of what else is going on in the school. That is, we don't lay out another whole curriculum. We may develop lesson plans or activity packets for teachers, but we do that in collaboration with a planning committee from the school."

Madeleine wants schools to become independent of outside consultation. "Lots of them have had initial training from our Center have begun to maintain their own programs. We hear from them as colleagues and not as clients. In other words, we have met some of our goals!" She advises others who want to work in school systems, "It's a long haul, discouraging, time-consuming, and if you do it right, you'll never get rich. Here are my words of encouragement: Every drop of water on the rock makes a difference. (I've been dripping for almost 20 years, and it's still interesting and lively and fun.)"

Bottom-line advice to people who want to work with schools:

1. Approach with humility.
2. Do your homework. If you haven't been a classroom teacher, go and volunteer in a school for a year before you try to persuade a teacher to try things your way. And don't go to your own child's room.
3. Listen.
4. Read.
5. Join organizations of peace and conflict resolution educators.
6. Begin where the teachers and schools can begin; if that's one classroom, then start there.
7. Be ready to individualize your work/ program.

We can listen to the sufferings and dreams of the world's children in this song. Len Schreiner, a Seattle teacher, commends it to us for the international Decade of Nonviolence, and he has been performing it widely. Look for it in your local music store.

I Want to Live

words and music by John Denver

I WANT TO LIVE, I WANT TO GROW, I WANT TO SEE, I WANT TO KNOW.
I WANT TO SHARE WHAT I CAN GIVE, I WANT TO BE, I WANT TO LIVE.

- vs.1 There are children raised in sorrow, on the scorched and barren plain;
 There are children raised beneath the golden sun.
 There are children of the water, children of the sand,
 And they cry out through the universe, their voices raised as one. (chorus)
- vs.3 We are standing all together, face to face and arm in arm,
 We are standing on the threshold of a dream.
 No more hunger, no more killing, no more wasting life away,
 It is simply an idea, and I know its time has come. (chorus)

The U.N. Resolution for a Culture of Nonviolence calls for making nonviolence training widely available. Madeleine Trichel and Len Schreiner are meeting the Challenge of the Decade by listening to the children --- and by providing them with the skills, knowledge, confidence and inspiration they will need. Send us information about Decade activities and nonviolence training in your area so we can share it with others.