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NEWSLETTER

Spring/Summer 2001 VOLUME 6 NUMBER 2

Food in Africa—Finding New Solutions to Old Problems...

by Kristof Nordin

Many people form their opinions about Africa based on what they see in the media. These stories are often negative. We see reports about war, disasters, or disease and assume that this is what all of Africa is like. These things do occur, but I would like to share with you a different picture—a place where people are working together to find sustainable solutions to their own problems.

In 1997, my wife, Stacia, and I came as Peace Corps Volunteers to work in the small African country of Malawi. (*Ed. Note: Stacia's article about AIDS will appear in the next issue of the newsletter*). The Peace Corps is an organization that allows American volunteers to live and work in a different country for two years. This can be difficult because you often have to learn a new language, get used to new foods, and adapt to different ways of doing things. We have enjoyed working in Malawi so much that we have stayed for four years.

At first, we spent a lot of time visiting villages trying to find out what problems the villagers face. People told us that they didn't have food to eat. When asked why, their response was there was no rain during the dry season to grow food, and that they didn't have enough money to buy seeds and fertilizer. This didn't sound right since we knew that seeds often are saved from plants without having to buy them, and that people have farmed for thousands of years without buying chemical fertilizers. We also noticed that there was a lot of wasted water during the dry season that could be used to help grow food. For example, the water people used for bathing or washing clothes was thrown on the ground where nothing was growing.

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About this issue...

In our last issue (Winter 2001), Joan Dye Gussow wrote about ways that students "can begin tracking down where and how their own food is grown, and then work to make their own diets sustainable." Carmela Frederico (page 3) shares her thoughts about Joan's statement and tells how we can start to learn about food systems. Kristof Nordin (page 1) writes about his experiences as a Peace Corps volunteer in the African country of Malawi, the negative effect the introduction of corn had on the local economy and how he and his wife re-introduced foods that were grown and eaten in Malawi before the introduction of corn.

Lisa Enzer of the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts (page 6) introduces us to YAH! and its connection with The Empty Bowls Project (TEBP). John Hartom, Co-founder, of TEBP (page 7), explains how the program started and where it is headed.

The story of the RESULTS Educators Network (REN) continues as Keith Wilhelmi (page 9) tells us about REN's progress and what you can do to participate.

Linda Glen Dembo (page 10) describes the Hunger Banquet held at her school and shares with us the reactions of students, teachers and administrators.

Enjoy your summer.

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A major problem was that people tried to meet all their food needs for the year by growing only one crop during the rainy season—corn. Corn has been grown in Malawi for a short period of time, and it is not suitable to the local growing conditions. It was introduced when foreigners began to colonize many of the countries of Africa. In Malawi, corn was brought in by the Portuguese about 250 years ago, but not widely grown. About 50 years ago, the Malawi government switched from the foods that traditionally had been grown to corn. Corn was seen as a high yielding crop and there is an export market for the crop—a way to bring "hard" currency into Malawi. This change had several negative effects on Malawi. First, many people try to meet all their food needs for the year by growing only corn—an approach that is unhealthy for people's bodies as it limits a diversified diet necessary for good health. Secondly, a one-crop approach is unhealthy for the soil as one type of crop planted in the same soil year after year takes away the nutrients that plants need. Thirdly, because corn is a fairly new crop to Malawi, it is not used to the local growing conditions—too much rain and the corn might rot; not enough the corn might not grow well.

Stacia and I started to look at the food grown and eaten before corn was introduced. What we found was unbelievable! Through research (and the knowledge of older Malawians), we have identified over five hundred foods that grow in Malawi and were eaten in the past—but are now forgotten because of the emphasis placed on growing only corn. Many of these local foods are also disappearing because of land being cleared to grow greater amounts of corn.

We decided to try growing some of these local foods around our house. Today we have almost 150 different foods that we eat throughout the year. We keep our soil healthy with the use of compost, which is a method of returning organic matter and nutrients to the soil, so we don't have to buy fertilizer. Seed is saved from these plants each season so that we don't have to buy new seeds. We also try to reuse water from our house. The results are that we are eating better and are healthier.

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Through our example, we show people that they can have healthy and nutritious foods throughout the year—without the need for money. Many Malawians are beginning to realize that the solutions to their problems can be achieved by working with nature, rather than against it.

Any country can adopt this approach to growing food. Find out what people used to eat in your country. Are there food plants in your area that aren't being eaten any more? If so, why? Do your grandparents remember eating any of these foods? Do they remember using different ways of growing foods that didn't require money for fertilizer or seeds? If you find out some of the answers to these questions, are there ways that you can use this knowledge around your homes or communities to improve your own nutrition and help to teach others about these plants? Give it a try—what you find might amaze you as much as it has amazed us here in Africa!

Kristof Nordin was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Jamaica from 1992-94 working with youth and the environment, where he met his wife, Stacia, a fellow peace corps member working as a nutritionist. They married in 1995 and rejoined the Peace Corps as a married couple. They have been living in Malawi since 1997 working with HIV/AIDS, nutrition,and sustainable agriculture. Feel free to contact Kristof and Stacia Nordin at nordin@eomw.net

Learning about Food Systems...

by Carmela Federico

Schoolchildren eat every day and never give it a second thought. That lunchtime food, however, has a secret life, complex and multidimensional. Each mouthful is a product of a food system, an increasingly intricate collection of human and natural actors, relationships and events that nourish people's bodies—and, sometimes, their souls. Food nourishes student's bodies; revealing and examining the economic, social, and scientific richness of food also can nourish students' minds.

Why should children learn about food systems? The list of pedagogical and educational benefits, to both young and old learners, is long and diverse:

- It's experiential and hands-on. Everyone eats! Food systems are as tangible and immediate as the food on our plates, the cultures in our classroom and in our world, and the living things around us.
- It supports multiple intelligences. Kids can explore food systems in so many different ways: through experiments, nurturing life, studying the food myths and practices of other cultures, exploring food in history, art, literature, and music.
- It's inherently interdisciplinary. Food systems are biological, in that they are composed of living soils, plants, and natural systems; they are cultural, in that societies enact different and special relationships to the land and its bounty; they are economic, in that most food systems involve markets and/or the exchange of goods and services.
- It's topical and relevant. Each day many ideas and discoveries about how to feed the world arise from laboratories, are proposed by politicians and are discussed in the media. Decisions that societies are making right now about food systems will affect global climate and population as well as the contents of students' pantry shelves.
- It's a pathway to even richer issues. Diverse ideas and assumptions central to different worldviews are embedded in the various food systems kids can study: ideas about resources, progress, rights and responsibilities, and the meaning of life. Food systems provide a simple, comprehensible way to see and learn about these complex ideas. Moreover, as food systems are complex and multi-dimensional, learning about them can foster "systems thinking"—an ability to understand the complex ways that elements in real-life systems interact—which many educators strive to foster in the students they teach.
- It provides service learning opportunities. Through connecting with food systems, learners can positively contribute to a larger community, through growing food, feeding the hungry, and working for more just and sustainable food systems.
- It's fun! Most of us really enjoy making things grow, eating yummy food, helping a neighbor eat better, and learning about the secret life of the foods we eat.

How to begin? There are as many worthwhile ways to educate about food systems as there are delicious foods to eat! *(Ed. Note: Starting in this issue, we will illustrate diverse examples of programs that provide children with rich, meaningful and enjoyable encounters with food systems).*

Seeds of Change in Southern Florida

In 1992, after Hurricane Andrew had devastated Florida, Rowena Gerber, an elementary school teacher at Miami Country Day School, sought to involve her children in helping repair the storm's destruction. She and her students decided to grow trees to re-leaf decimated southern Florida communities. At year's end, 2000 trees, each gift-wrapped and bedecked with a booklet of student poems, were donated to hurricane victims—garnering her students first place in Scholastic's KidsCare competition. This project began the school's long-standing relationship with ECHO (Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization), which supports small farmers and urban gardeners in the Third World with seeds, farm supplies, and training. Students began experimenting with growing different seeds that

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poor Third World farmers need. Miami Country Day School, blessed with a warm, wet climate and long growing season, will soon be providing ECHO with substantial amounts of seeds for tropical farmers, among them, the native Florida seminole pumpkin and the amazing moringa tree—fast-growing and a rich source of food, vitamins and medicine.

The student's enthusiasm has enabled the program to grow like a weed. Beginning with one garden, Miami Country Day now has an Abess Center for Environmental Studies Lab and a garden for each pre-K to 5th grade class, along with shared arbor and greenhouse projects (designed by the students, of course!) The cafeteria manager is happy to receive and use the garden's produce—but students gleefully consume most of the fruits and vegetables during class. The kids grow herbs, and have formed their own non-profit corporation, Project Hope, which sells plants and herb-infused vinegars to benefit Haitian schools.

Rowena's church, meanwhile, was getting involved with solar cooking projects in Haiti. Haiti is seriously deforested, and for many of its impoverished citizens finding cooking fuel is a daily challenge. However, the country's sunny climate provides ideal conditions for the use of solar cookers. Rowena explains that each grade at Miami Country Day School designs and builds solar cookers, "from primitive crayon 'melters' for the 4 year olds to the sophisticated inventions the fifth graders come up with." Learning leads naturally to action: students now contribute to two solar-cooking initiatives in Haiti. Their donations fund a revolving loan that allows Haitian villagers in a rural community to be able to afford solar cookers and to share solar-cooking expertise; donated funds also support a solar cooker store and information center in Port-Au-Prince, the capital city. These personal ties to Haitian communities, enriched through visits, frequent letters, picture exchanges and email, enhance the Miami students' cultural and multicultural understanding.

Rowena has provided quality instruction in science and social studies to her students through working with them on food systems for an hour a week. The Florida Solar Energy Center curricula on solar energy and alternative fuels ensures that solar cooking work is also an in-depth science exploration. Nutrition, biology, Florida history, Haitian culture—many other subjects come alive as students work with food systems at Miami Country Day School. "It has been so rewarding to watch the children learn and to listen to their insights and discoveries—their hands-on, nose-on, mouth-on, and both-feet-in approach to this thing we call science," Rowena notes. Community building and leadership also have grown: "I have never seen the children happier than they were the day they carried the wood planks to the garden to build their raised beds. I saw timid children become leaders, angry children become enthusiastic helpers, and everyone happily pitching in to pull the garden together." Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the program is that her students learn the feasibility and value of making a positive difference in the world. "When they sell their vinegar," Rowena notes, "it's something that they've done from scratch: they grew the plants, they've made the labels, they've made the whole thing. It's not like selling chocolates for a good cause—they can see how their own efforts and ideas can benefit other people."

Tips for success

Involve your school. If the teachers and maintenance staff of your school don't support your garden, or understand its role in your kid's lives and education, the garden's long-term health and security are in danger.

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KIDS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE® NEWSLETTER
A PROGRAM OF WORLD HUNGER YEAR (WHY)
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Likewise, school food service personnel are an immense resource; meaningfully involving them in your plans can help your food-systems education program immensely. Administrative support can ensure that a successful program can become a core component of a school's mission and strategy, instead of the special interest of particular impermanent faculty members.

You can start small. You don't have to wait for total buy-in, say many successful food systems educators. If you have a committed core, you can begin and demonstrate the merits of your program to the rest of your staff. Some schools have a smaller, more flexible cafeteria that feeds teachers, which can more easily be involved in your food systems education program—eating your garden produce, or purchasing local or organic food, for example.

Involve your community. You will find a good deal of support and expertise among your school families, neighbors, stores, agricultural professionals, local businesses, and non-profits.

Be safe. Get guidance from horticulture professionals about suitable plants for a school garden, and follow food safety procedures when preparing and cooking food.

Reach out for garden space. Rooftops, sunny windowsills, neighborhood parks, nearby farms, community gardens, family backyards can all be sites for school gardening activities.

Make arrangements for summer care. Your custodial staff or a network of volunteers may have to care for your garden over summer. Living systems don't shut down because students aren't around!

Think systemically. Explore the many aspects of food systems with your kids: farms, farming practices, nutrition, distribution of food, food systems in literature, the food systems of other cultures, the biological and physical bases of life, waste and compost, the connection between hunger, poverty and justice, etc. Encourage your students to explore the complex interaction of ecological, economic and social systems that occur in food systems.

Make sure your program helps teachers. Make clear connections to the mission of your school and the responsibilities of your teachers. Document the knowledge and skills that students acquire through participating in your program.

Carmela Federico currently works as Program Coordinator at the Sustainability Education Center in New York City. She may be contacted at carmela@bookbuzz.com

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YAH!—Youth Against Hunger...

by Lisa Enzer, M.Ed

One of the most satisfying aspects of my work as the Community Service Coordinator at the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts is bringing area educators together for our annual Teacher's Tea. Our Food Bank is a non-profit organization, serving the four counties of western Massachusetts by providing food to over 120,000 people in need through a network consisting of over 400 member programs. The Teacher's Tea is an informal gathering that recognizes teachers who have participated in our Youth Against Hunger (YAH!) program, and gives them an opportunity to share their experiences.

YAH! is an extensive hunger awareness program dedicated to supporting teachers with a variety of resources, materials, and professional development to implement social justice and community service projects at their schools. A primary resource designed by The Food Bank is an interdisciplinary curriculum, *Hunger Awareness and Community Service Learning*. The curriculum contains lesson plans as diverse as how to conduct a community needs assessments, to using the arts to help stop hunger. Since the fall of 1998, 1200 students and teachers have been involved with YAH! through a variety of contact points including: community service learning (CSL), workshops, guest speakers and tours of the Food Bank's warehouse and farm. Collaborating schools represent a range of educational programs from private academies, inner city high schools for youth offenders, and suburban middle schools, to rural alternative high schools, and small charter schools. Using hunger awareness as a theme for learning, YAH! is incorporated into a range of academic subjects, at most grade levels, while still meeting the requirements of state education frameworks. Teachers are the catalysts by which YAH! enters the school culture. The following snapshots demonstrate how faculty members at three distinct academic sites use YAH! to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

- Under the supervision of teacher, Mr. Momodou Sarr, a special needs class at Amherst High School uses a portable greenhouse to grow herbs and houseplants to study botany. Discussions of hunger and nutrition are provided through YAH! The class volunteers each month at a nearby Brown Bag site, a Food Bank program that helps low-income elders access healthy food. Lessons in advertising, event planning, finance, and the development of social skills are an integral part of their annual plant sale fundraiser for the Food Bank.
- A group of parents of elementary students at Montessori-Northampton want their children to understand the reasons for holding a food drive. Teachers respond by developing a partnership with YAH! In addition to touring the warehouse and discussing hunger with a Food Bank staff member, the students make posters reflecting the statistical breakdown and distribution of salvaged foods from the Food Bank. The finished graphics are used to inform volunteers about the purpose and usage of the food they are handling. A discussion on Who is Hungry and Why is accompanied by a sale of student-made Empty Bowls. (*Ed. Note: see page 7 for article explaining the Empty Bowls program).* The sale benefits the Food Bank while raising public awareness of hunger for the larger school community.
- Nancy Dunn's health class at Easthampton High School uses *Hunger Awareness and Community Service Learning* as a guide in analyzing poverty issues. Ms. Dunn's enthusiasm and belief in the project has supported her impulse to make it happen, although she notes, "I am only one step ahead of the kids in preparation." Numerous service projects are being proposed, including a food drive at area businesses that highlights local hunger statistics on the donation boxes. Both a local public radio feature and newspaper article publicize the students' endeavors.

The teachers mentioned are only a few of the attendees at this year's Teacher's Tea. They represent a wide spectrum of educators who have become instrumental in shaping a comprehensive view of hunger. The Tea dispels the isolation that can occur for teachers working across wide geographic and social boundaries. By partnering with community agencies, these teachers have enriched their schools and empowered their students to make a difference.

Lisa Enzer, M.Ed. is Community Service Coordinator of the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts , and may be reached at lisae@foodbankwm.org

The Empty Bowls Project...

by John Hartom

The Bloomfield Hills Schools annual Food Drive was underway and falling short of expectations, leaving the district Community Service Coordinator looking for ways to make up the shortfall. I told her my Ceramics students could help. I had absolutely no idea how but it seemed like a good idea. My wife, Lisa Blackburn and I decided to challenge my students to make enough ceramic bowls to host a meal for the staff at the local High School. They enthusiastically agreed to help and by collaborating threw 120 bowls, decorated the bowls and assisted with the firings. On the day of the luncheon, the students washed the bowls and set up a beautiful display in the media center. They put all of the bowls on one table so each staff member could select one for the simple meal of soup and bread. Students collected the donations, served the soup and helped straighten up the room. At the conclusion of the meal, Lisa and I shared with the participants information about hunger in our community, thanked each person for their cash donation and asked each of them to keep the empty bowl they had selected as a reminder of all the empty bowls in the world.

Silence fell over the room as everyone immediately felt the power of their bowl as a metaphor for hunger in the world. Tears were evident on many faces. Bowls were clutched to chests. The arts had, as is often the case, served in a powerful way to transform. It was magic—absolute magic! We knew something amazing happened. It was apparent that we had been presented with an amazing gift and a great responsibility. What we thought would be a one-time event would not end there. We pledged to share this incredible tool with others.

Over the next few months we developed an information packet about our creation, *The Empty Bowls Project*. Lisa developed the design for the materials and we began to distribute the packet to potters, educators, community centers and to every other person and place we could think of. Still not aware of how successful the project would be, we designed it to last several months and to end on World Food Day, October 16, 1991. Our goal was to raise $1,000,000 nationwide. As reports began to come in, several things started to be very clear: The project worked. People in many states were holding Empty Bowls meals and were raising money; we designed the project so that money would be used to fight hunger in the community where it was raised—nothing came to us! People reported that they intended to hold events every year. Most importantly, people loved the spirit that the project helped create. The metaphor of an empty bowl was immediately clear to everyone attending an event—and taking home a tangible reminder of the energy and purpose of the event in the form of a beautiful ceramic bowl was thrill for everyone involved.

Once we accepted that the project had clearly developed a life of its own, we also accepted the responsibility of nurturing it. We spoke about Empty Bowls at art conferences, teachers meetings, pottery workshops, and service learning gatherings. We sent publicity materials to newspapers, radio and television stations, and magazines. We sent out literally thousands of information packets in response to requests from every state in the country. We sought and received 800 student-made bowls and, working with Oxfam America presented a bowl and an information packet to every member of Congress. We used Empty Bowls at the Oxfam Mickey Leland Memorial Hunger Banquet in Washington, DC. The following year, Oxfam allowed us to participate again at their Hunger Banquet, this time at the United Nations. We served soup to over 1000 participants at the National Youth Leadership Council National Service Learning Conference in Detroit. The Unitarian Universalist Church has held Empty Bowls events at two General Assembly national conferences. At each event they raised nearly $20,000 that was donated to food providers in the city where the conference was held. At least seven state art education associations have held events at their annual conferences.

Literally hundreds of thousands of students have participated in Empty Bowls events making this project perhaps the largest service learning activity in the country. Kids happily give away their own artwork because they want to help make a difference. Helping a student identify, strengthen and utilize his or her own voice—what more could an educator do for a child? Presenting a child with the feeling of empowerment should be at the heart of every lesson in every school every day.

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We had one focus when we started *The Empty Bowls Project.* Raise all the money we could. Our understanding of the issues surrounding hunger and food security was very limited. We were ceramic educators and artists. We were not hunger advocates. It was our remarkable naiveté that allowed us to believe we could start a national hunger project. As *The Empty Bowls Project* has spread across the United States and beyond, our understanding has grown considerably. We now know that money alone will never end hunger. There will never be enough Empty Bowls meals to feed everyone. The Boy Scouts will never hold enough canned food drives, restaurants will never donate enough excess food, and food banks cannot possibly receive enough food from producers to feed all the people needing assistance. But we must never stop doing these vital things. We must do them and we must do more.

Our role has changed. We continue to be advocates for *The Empty Bowls Project* but that work is now shared by literally thousands of people who are helping the project grow in a wonderful grassroots manner. They are collectively doing far more than we could have ever imagined possible and the project continues to grow in amazing ways. We like to think of ourselves now as community activists utilizing the arts for positive and lasting social change. We have taken a leadership role in creating an annual statewide anti-hunger campaign here in Michigan called *A Place at the Table World Food Day Campaign*. We have joined the *Building Bridges Network*, a group of representatives from some forty or fifty hunger-fighting organizations, to work on this campaign. We have relied heavily upon the United States National Committee for the World Food Day to develop our goals. We share their belief that we must mobilize the whole of society in the work to end hunger. We are striving to increase awareness, understanding, information, services, support, advocacy, networking and impact. We have created five major components of the campaign this year: A Press Conference on the steps of the State Capital Building, A Restaurant Partnership Program, A Richie Havens Concert, A lobbying campaign aimed at state legislators, and an on-going Hunger Educators Project

The Hunger Educators Project has the potential of creating a huge positive impact. We are expecting 100 K-12 and college educators from all areas of the curriculum to participate. They will be invited to attend the annual State Hunger Conference and presented with a resource kit includes *Finding Hunger Solutions: Kids Can Make a Difference*; a subscription to the KIDS Newsletter; an information packet about *The Empty Bowls Project*; an issue of Hope magazine featuring a special section on food; an issue of In Context magazine with a special feature on Good Harvest; a bibliography of appropriate books on hunger, food security, service learning; a list of websites; a list of music focusing on hunger and other social justice issues; and anything else we can think of that will be of interest to the educators and their students. There will be no official lesson plan. Educators will be asked to develop and utilize a lesson or project about hunger in their classroom. We will attempt to gather information about these lessons and projects to compile archive materials we can share with additional educators as the project continue in the future.

The name of the campaign has a double meaning. As we hope to provide a place at the table for everyone to have adequate food, we also are inviting everyone to their place in helping end hunger. Hunger need not exist. More than enough food is produced to feed every person on the planet. It is poverty that causes hunger and poverty that we must end. Thirty four thousand children will die today from hunger and hunger-related diseases. Another 34,000 will die tomorrow and every day until we demand that it end. Public will must be changed. Our collective story must become one in which every person has access to food and other basic human rights. We must together dream a new story that provides for all.

A word of caution might well be in order here. As you continue your important work with children, be alerted that at any moment the overwhelming forces of good working all about you could capture you. What you think will be a little service project with a few kids could change your life. We know. It happened to us.

John Hartom and Lisa Blackburn are the co-founders of The Empty Bowl Project and The Imagine/Render Group. Blackburn is the manager of The Education Studio at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Hartom is a recently retired art educator currently serving as director of Imagine/Render Group. They may be reached at ImagineRen@aol.com.

Creating REN (the RESULTS Educators' Network)—An Update...

by Keith Wilhelmi

Since its 1980 founding by a high school music teacher, the anti-hunger lobby RESULTS has attracted many educators. In the Fall of 1999, at the request of RESULTS' Director, a half dozen such volunteers began discussing ways to enhance the relationship between education and anti-hunger lobbying. The discussion group doubled in size after a presentation at the June 2000 RESULTS International Conference—and soon named itself REN, the RESULTS Educators' Network.

During months of biweekly conference calls we brainstormed ideas and strategies, broke into task forces, merged our task forces, and eventually established a working draft of the purpose and objectives of REN: REN exists to support educators in incorporating the teaching of hunger into their curriculum. Toward this end, REN's founding members will: compile a binder of the best anti-hunger lesson plans, design an educators' training workshop, assist in the production of a web site.

By mid Fall we felt ourselves ready for a working retreat, which we set for mid January. There, things really got "fun"!

In our early discussions, the retreat group determined to deal first with the educators' training workshop. With considerable input from our two education professors (long time practitioners of service learning), and our elementary school principal (a leader in character education) we soon agreed that REN's original focus was too narrow!

> "IT WAS DECIDED THAT REN SHOULD COMPILE AND DISSEMINATE STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT EDUCATORS IN INFUSING THE FOLLOWING FOUR COMPONENTS INTO THEIR CONTENT: CRITICAL THINKING, CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT, SERVICE LEARNING, AND (PERHAPS MOST UNIQUELY) PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY."

REN, we eventually decided, should do for educators what RESULTS does for its volunteers—enhance democratic citizenship! (RESULTS' founder, Sam Harris clarified this objective in his 1993 book about RESULTS—Reclaiming Our Democracy). REN should help generate awareness that the current system of education has, in essence, "broken the covenant" with society to educate our children to eventually take their place as productive members of a democracy. Educators deserve support in their efforts to return to this original covenant—to reclaim the joy of teaching not only academic issues, but issues of morality and social responsibility. Specifically, it was decided that REN should compile and disseminate strategies to support educators in infusing the following four components into their content: critical thinking, character development, service learning, and (perhaps most uniquely) participatory democracy.

A few members of the retreat team agreed to produce a draft of an article to publicize our reformulated "mission statement," then we returned to establishing the framework of a two hour educators' training workshop.

In conference calls since the retreat, REN members have completed two versions of the mission statement article, have refined the educators' training workshop, and have decided to seek RESULTS staff support in establishing a clearinghouse of the best lesson plans (or the sources of such lessons). We have also decided that the creation and management of an effective web site is critical to attaining our goals.

As we move into the next phase in the creation of REN we encourage educators to submit their best REN type lessons—particularly those that encourage students to use the democratic process to effect change!

Keith Wilhelmi is a middle school science teacher, a long time member of RESULTS, and a founding member of REN. He may be reached at KWilhelmi@aol.com.

Hunger Banquet: Not Quite An Oxymoron...

by Linda Glen Dembo

"The world's poor may now line up single-file for today's meal." Approximately fifty-five middle school students in well made uniforms rose from the hardwood floor of the general assembly room and hurried into line to receive their day's meal: a cup of rice and water for each. At the same time, about twenty similarly affluent-looking children were served a home-cooked three-course meal at a cloth-covered table.

The event, a *Hunger Banquet*, was part of the annual *Eat Well Service Learning Project* at St. Matthew's Episcopal Day School, a pre-K through Grade Eight independent school in San Mateo, California. The 86 students involved in the *Hunger Banquet* came from predominately economically fortunate families. Three groups were set up based on global economic statistics—rich, middle class and poor. Ten students represented the "rich", twenty were "middle class" and the remainder were "poor." The "rich" dined at cloth covered tables, the "middle-class" at bare tables, and the "poor" sat on the floor. The group were presented with statistics on world hunger and read the following from the Sierra Club Bulletin:

> *"If you have never experienced the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 500 million people around the world…If you have food in your refrigerator, you are richer than 75% of people in the world…If you have money in the bank, cash in your wallet and some spare change, you are among the 8% of the world's wealthy."*

Upon entering the room, students were given a thumbnail description of the person they represented. Several students gave thumbnail sketches of their new identities—poverty-stricken peasants, struggling factory workers, and successful entrepreneurs. Using an Oxfam developed model as a starting point, some students faced wrenching economic changes. For example, some members of the middle-class lost their jobs and were forced into the ranks of the poor.

When time came to eat, the poor huddled on the floor to eat their meager rations of plain rice with their fingers—picking up grains that fell and checking the trash bins in hope of finding more food. Two of the poor were pressed into service waiting on the rich. The middle-class had a cup of rice and beans for their meal. Students and teachers observed that those representing the world's middle-class had a much less comfortable lifestyle than their counterparts in the United States. Four students playing the part of thugs barged into the ranks of the poor to take food from this impoverished group. They blatantly gave the food they stole to the rich who had hired them. It was discovered that two young women forced to take the stolen food to the rich were devouring some of that food. They were roughly arrested and taken away. When the arresting officers were asked why they had been so hard on the women, one said "I support the government", another uttered more chilling words, "I was just following orders."

After the meal, student's reflected on their experiences. When asked if they had trouble eating a full meal in front of the poor, one of the rich said, "It made me uncomfortable, but not so uncomfortable that I didn't eat." An impoverished student described how she felt when begging. Still another chose not to eat rather than beg.

The *Hunger Banquet* intensified the impact of the *Eat Well Project.* "We want students to recognize their responsibilities as members of local and global communities and to build a foundation for life long learning. This is part of the mission of our school," points out Mark Hale, Head of the School. "It is our hope that the *Eat Well Project* helps our students develop habits of service that they will carry with them as they grow into adulthood."

Every student in the school from pre-school through eighth grade participates in the *Eat Well Project*. Different grade levels learn about hunger and what they can do as individuals to help make a difference. The Project is a

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mixture of ideas from several sources and our own brainstorming. Materials are drawn from Kids Can Make A Difference, Oxfam America, Doctors Without Borders, local programs and various texts.

“Faculty, family and parishioners provide powerful role modeling for our students,” says Sara Suchman, Assistant Head of School. “It is important for students to see that service learning isn’t something you have to do in school, but an ongoing commitment to others woven into the very fabric of the life of people of all ages.”

Linda Glen Dembo is the Service Learning Coordinator at St. Matthew’s Episcopal Day School. She may be reached at dembol@stmatthewsonline.org

The Giraffe Heroes Program...

The Giraffe Heroes Program is a service-learning and character education program instilling courage, caring, and a sense of personal responsibility in kids in grades K-12, and helping them build lifelong commitments to active citizenship and service. The Program begins by telling students the exciting stories of "Giraffes," drawn from the Giraffe Project's library of nearly 900 stories. Giraffes are women, men and kids of every color and creed, sticking their necks out for the common good on issues from hunger to environmental pollution to violence in schools. Students then look in their families, neighborhoods and communities to find more real heroes. In the final phase of the program, students go into action themselves, creating and carrying out a service project to address a problem that concerns them. The Program is used in classrooms, afterschool, and in special programs and summer camps. It can be integrated into traditional curricula, such as social studies and language arts. Education Week called the Giraffe approach "the ultimate character education."

The K-2, 3-5 and 6-9 teaching guides contain lesson plans, activity sheets, enrichment activities and a reference section. The 10-12 edition includes a Resource Guide for the facilitator, but the core is a one-per-student paperback book entitled It's Up to Us. Trainings are available at all grade levels.

For more information on the Giraffe Heroes Program, see www.giraffe.org or contact the Giraffe Project at P.O. Box 759, Langley WA 98260. For ordering information, contact AGC/United Learning at 800 323 9084.

The New World Hunger Year Web Site (www.worldhungeryear.org)...

The site welcomes viewers with the **WHY** questions:

- ***WHY*** *hunger and poverty in a world of abundance?*
- ***WHY*** *do the poor get poorer, the middle class lose ground, and the rich get richer?*
- ***WHY*** *are people jobless when there is so much work to do?*
- ***WHY*** *are people who work unable to put food on the table?*

The questions are “clickable” but the click leads back to the questions as we do not yet know the answers; however, we are resolved to solve them.

Please join the 6,000 monthly visitors and learn how you can help and **WHY** your help is needed.

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