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NEWSLETTER

Spring/Summer 2004 VOLUME 9 Number 2



TEACHING WATER, QUENCHING THIRST: A FIVE STEP PROGRAM... By Peter Mann

“**H**urry Up! 2.4 Billion People Are Waiting to Use This Toilet!” read the poster on the men’s and women’s bathroom doors at the World Social Forum that I attended in Mumbai (Bombay), India in January 2004. That is a vivid way to focus your mind on the global sanitation crisis. It is true – 2.4 billion people in the world have no sanitation.

An even more drastic handout informed us: “Your urine is cleaner than the water most poor people have to drink.” This is also true. More than one billion people lack clean water for drinking, cooking and bathing. Imagine the costs of this water and sanitation crisis in disease, malnutrition and death. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) claims that more than half of the hospital beds in the world are filled with people suffering from water-borne diseases, and thousands of children die each day from water-borne infection.

What follows are some suggestions on ways to *teach* the water crisis as a kind of five step program on water awareness.

Step One: Become Aware of Water

The first step is to become aware of water as a precious resource. We are made of water, we use it to drink, to bathe, to grow the foods we eat, to move from place to place. Nevertheless, for the most part we take water for granted. It is at the end of a tap, part of our bathroom routines. We have fallen into a cultural trance, and there are specific reasons for this. One is the myth of abundance, that we have a never-ending supply of water, the other is our faith that technology will solve all our problems.

Thus, *Step One* is to confront the myth of abundance and question the technological fix. Water is a precious resource and the world’s water supply is running out. Nearly 450 million people in 29 countries currently face severe water shortages. As much as two-thirds of the world’s population could be water-stressed by 2025. All of these are signs that we must change our way

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About this issue...

This is our first issue that deals with international topics, but as you will see, these topics affect all of us.

Peter Mann (page 1) grabs our attention by writing “2.4 billion people are waiting to use this toilet!” The issue of water is of great importance to all on the planet.

Illene Pevec (page 3) demonstrates how one person can make a difference in the lives of children in Brazil. Along the way, we see how she learned from those she was teaching.

From Brazil, we travel to Lima, Peru and meet Maria Cullen (page 5). She shows us how a teacher in a relatively affluent school in Lima helps students understand they are part of a larger community and realize they have responsibilities to that community.

Back in the United States, Ed Gragert has helped build the largest network of elementary and secondary schools involved in project work online. (page 6).

Our final stop is Rome, Italy where we meet Frank Martinez Nocito (page 7). He introduces us to the concept of social community. As you will note, this is about community—as is this entire issue.

We hope you are enjoying your summer. We timed this newsletter, so that the teachers in our audience would receive it at the start of the school year.

(Continued from page 1)
of thinking. (1)

Step Two: Conserve Water, Protect Water

As we shift our thinking about water, we can begin to transform our relationship with water. One path to change is water conservation in the home. In her WHY “Water Crisis” article, “*It begins with you: transforming your relationship with water*,” Meagan Greenberg provides useful water conservation tips, from “low-flow” showerheads and “low-flush” toilets to watering plants in the morning and landscaping with native plants.

Children and adults will find fascinating ways to explore their own family home and find new ways to conserve water through a cybertour around the *Water Saver House* at www.h2ouse.org/index.cfm.

Moving out of the house into nature, we can find many ways to protect the world’s water and become involved in preserving local wetlands, rivers, lakes, bays and coasts. Groups such as the Waterkeeper Alliance at www.waterkeeper.org/mainaboutus.aspx can provide help to organize community action.

Step Three: Learn How the Other Half Lives – With and Without Water

It is hard both for children and adults in water-rich countries to visualize the situation of poor people in water-stressed communities of the developing world, especially women and girls. Another article by Meagan Greenberg in WHY’s Water Crisis series, “*When water is scarce, women and girls pay dearly*,” describes the burdens on women and girls due to lack of access to safe drinking water and inadequate sanitation.

Traditional gender roles in many places in rural Africa and Asia, she explains, place on women the task of gathering water for the family. Women also are keepers of family health and hygiene. With growing water scarcity, women and girls must travel longer distances to obtain water, which makes access to income-generating activities harder and blocks girls’ education, thereby worsening the cycle of women’s poverty. (2) There are many resources to help us get involved, including the U.N.’s Cyber School Bus that offers an online slideshow for children to learn about water in the lives of women and girls: see www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/freshwater2003/slide1_a.asp.

The *Third Step*, therefore, is to develop solidarity with the water-stressed poor of the world, especially women and girls, and to take action on their behalf.

Step Four: Change How We Grow Food

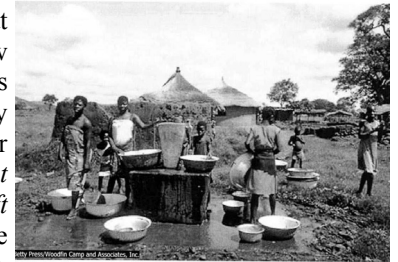
To put it briefly: industrial agriculture with its monocultures,

flood irrigation, and factory farms uses vast quantities of water (70 percent of the world’s freshwater is used in agriculture), wastes huge amounts of water, and pollutes our groundwater. To learn more about the amounts of water that go into the food we eat, visit the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) Water Portal’s *food supply* page at www.unesco.org/water/wwap/facts_figures/food_supply.shtml.

We can encourage sustainable use of water in agriculture by growing some of our own food, supporting local farmers who respect the environment and use alternative irrigation techniques, buying food locally and seasonally, shopping at farmers’ markets, and learning about organizations that work for sustainable food systems such as the Community Food Security Coalition at www.foodsecurity.org or Friends of the Earth at www.foe.org.

Step Five: Fight the Power

It is true that we face great obstacles in creating a new water ethic in which, as Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke make clear in their book *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World’s Water* (The New Press, New York, 2002), water is understood as a common good and a human right, not a private commodity, in which people around the world see themselves as “water stewards”, where equity is established between water-rich and water-poor areas of the world, and water peace replaces water conflict.



Nevertheless, there are many forces working to resolve our problems of water access and sanitation. At the 2004 World Social Forum in Bombay I met representatives of water advocacy networks from around the world. They are fighting powerful forces that seek to privatize water and gain control of the world’s water. I reported on these meetings in the WHY Speaks article, “*Water Wars: A Report from the 2004 World Social Forum*.” I returned home from India, aware of the dangers we all face if we are to save the world’s water, but strengthened by activists around the world who are fighting the power.

- (1) Robert Svadlenka, “*The Emerging Water Crisis and Its Implications for Global Food Security*,” On low-tech solutions to the water/sanitation crisis, see Svadlenka’s articles, “*Improving Local Water Supply in Rural Communities: Challenges, Techniques, and Opportunities*,” and “*Sustainable Sanitation Approaches for the Urban Poor*” (WHY Speaks Archive, Water Series.)
- (2) For more information, visit the WASH website at www.wsscc.org/load.cfm?edit_id=57. To find out more about water and disease, see UNICEF’s statistic site on water at www.childinfo.org/eddb/water/index.htm.

Peter Mann is international coordinator for WHY (World Hunger Year) and editor of WHY Speaks at www.worldhungeryear.org. He can be contacted at peter@worldhungeryear.org

A CHILD'S GARDEN OF PEACE: SOWING THE SEEDS OF THE FUTURE...

By Illene Pevec

Six-year-old Carla spent a hot summer day picking up trash from the river bank and streets in her neighborhood. Ten-year-old Vagner rode the trash truck to catch the bags thrown to him by others during the community clean up. Eight-year-old Iago took a hoe to the weeds to clear a garden plot. Twelve-year-old Gelson carefully pulled out the weed roots and made his garden rows.



work gave them something to do together in a safe place and a way to grow food for their families.

I was born in Brazil, and brought up in North America. Since returning to Brazil as a fifteen-year-old and seeing children begging in the streets I had wanted to do something that could change the difficult living conditions for children. With a small grant from the Canadian International Development Agency, in January of 2001 I began the Child's Garden of Peace project. I read in the Susila Dharma International newsletter about a group of Brazilian educators in a small town in southern Brazil who were providing free educational programs to children who lived in a poor community located at the side of their private school for middle-class paying students. I proposed that I come and facilitate the development of school and community gardens with the children in the "favela". The educators and the community welcomed me and two of my own children warmly.

Eight-year-old Thais found some old corn lying on the ground, and carefully pulled off the kernels to plant anew. Eleven-year-old Jaqueline cleaned the table and cut up the fruit for the morning snack after washing the garden dirt from her hands. These children from a slum in Brazil worked without anyone asking them. They worked because they enjoy each other's company. The

We found a community covered in trash strewn on empty lots although roads through people's homes were spotlessly clean. I went door to door with a mother from the community to every house in a 380-family neighborhood to invite participation in the community garden. For the most part it was children and the voluntary community president along with some single mothers who showed up to plan and work. Children and a few adults identified what they liked and what they wanted to change. All pointed to the lack of sewers as their most serious environmental problem, along with trash, pollution in the river, the need for trees and the need for a park where children could play and adults could relax. I didn't have the expertise or funding to deal with the sewage problem but we made it part of our newspaper and radio campaign aimed at raising awareness of the local officials. We launched the project with a community clean up day. When the town refused to provide us with a truck to haul away the trash the soft drink distributor who supports recycling loaned us their truck. Over 100 children and 20 adults spent a day in 90-degree heat cleaning. An elderly grandmother donated a 10-pound sack of flour to make bread for the celebratory meal at the end.

We learned from the children that many children came to our project and school with no breakfast. We provided nutritious, substantial snacks. The children helped prepare, serve and clean up these mini-meals, and we used them as an opportunity to provide nutrition education. In intense summer heat the children cleared the weeds from the community center grounds and school yard. It was the children who planted most of the garden plots including vegetables, herbs, traditional medicinal plants, flowers and fruit trees and vines. The teachers



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KIDS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE[®] NEWSLETTER

A PROGRAM OF WORLD HUNGER YEAR (WHY)

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at the grade school welcomed the chance to provide fresh food in the children's meals at school from their new school garden. Extra produce went home with the children.

We received additional funding in January 2002, allowing us to expand the project to include a summer pre-school program for very young children and their care-takers and a summer camp for children 6 to 14. We worked with twelve 15 to 18 year olds to form a "Green Team" of counselors to lead and assist the younger children with their work in the garden and their recreational and educational activities at the camp. Nature studies, art, traditional Brazilian games, swimming, and a carnival party at the end gave the children diverse experiences. An American volunteer taught art and English.

The Brazilian educators continue the work with the children year round now using their school facilities to provide a play site, sports, English, Computer education, sewing, and wood working. The Green Team of counselors help supervise younger children in gardening, educational and play activities and receive training in recreational supervision, nutrition and psychology from local university students doing internships.

Celuan, the local education association, now teaches parent educational programs using the methods of the International

Child Development Project and trains the youth Green Team in this approach of mediated learning and respectful treatment of children. Parents in the community have begun an additional community garden, as has one of the child care centers. The seeds are spreading for organically grown food for families and respectful working relationships between children, youth and adults. The children have made a significant contribution to the natural environment of their community and their homes with their on-going work in tree planting, gardening, and recycling.

Our focus throughout has been community involvement in planning, multi-generational work teams, nutrition education and the providing of nutritious snacks for all children involved. We offer programs in skills and leadership development, healthy recreation and a safe place for children to have fun. Our long term goal is to provide opportunities for the youth that will help them identify their personal talents and gain skills for their work lives. In the future, we would like to provide business training so they can start their own businesses as the community offers few work opportunities to people of any age. These young people work with extraordinary enthusiasm as they sow the seeds of the future.

Illène Pevec is an educational and community development consultant. She can be contacted at ipevec@ca.inter.net.



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Next Issue Celebrates KIDS 10th Anniversary

KIDS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE – LIMA STYLE...

By Maria Cullen

It could be anywhere in Latin America. The bell rings, the students enter class, some have their homework, and some haven't. One is sick, one is hungry, one needs the bathroom. It's English in a relatively affluent high school, but the class will finish with the students realizing that they are a part of a community which has an infant mortality rate of 40 and will go on to discover they live amongst one of the worst examples of income distribution in the world. This is Lima, Peru. Today, nearly half the population of Peru lives on less than \$2 dollars a day, despite living in a country rich in natural resources.

My husband and I came to Peru three years ago with the intention of living and working within a local community and 'helping' in whatever way seemed appropriate. Since then, we have had many of our ideals changed, challenged, established and more than a few thrown out the window.

My school serves the upper echelon of Peruvian society, the families of those who 'have' rather than those who 'have not'. I always try to create units of study that are relevant to students' lives. So, my class of 13 year olds spent ten weeks investigating issues about cycles of poverty on both a global and a local scale, and thus, our study into poverty and hunger was uncomfortably close to home.. For most students, this was the first time they had been aware of such issues and they were quite disturbed by them. Their curiosity more than a little aroused, they threw themselves into the study... they researched, presented, wrote essays, interviewed and created written responses to a variety of topics.

During the last five weeks, we began to focus on local issues. I'll never forget the day they discovered the Child Mortality and Income Distribution stats for Peru. Most students thought I wasn't telling them the truth. Their homework that night was to search the UNICEF website to see if the facts were true or not.

The final phase of our study involved a group exercise where the students had to 'make a difference' in their local neighborhood creating a Plan of Attack on the poverty and hunger in their immediate circle of influence. They then had to report back to the class what they had done.

One group chose to invade one floor of the massive Maternidad De Lima (Young Mothers' Hospital). Over the course of two weeks, they collected clothing, nappies, bottles, blankets, creams and many other necessities and created over 60 'packs' to give away. A huge wooden cot was donated for a raffle. The classroom literally could not cope with the amount of donated items and we ended up moving all the offerings to

the basement of a student's house. Early one Saturday morning the students, their parents and I went to the ward and experienced the joy of giving without receiving. In their own words,

"During this visit we met lots of girls but there were two that really made an impression on us. One was Janeth a 13 year old who had just given birth. She is the same age as US! The other was Juliana who was 14 and had just given birth to twin boys. She has no father or family of her own.

Choosing to help these young mums has not just been a school project for us. We experienced something different. We have seen that many girls in our country don't have the same quality of life that we have and they suffer a lot. We have learnt what the real meaning of sharing and helping is. It's not just to give, but to demonstrate that you CARE. People don't know how much others suffer until they really see it and know how good helping feels."

Needless to say they received 20/20 for their assignment!

What made our study unique was looking at these issues from our position of within a country in need, yet still somehow strangely removed from the reality of the situation for most people here. This is common in many underdeveloped places. It is easy to close our eyes to the injustice in our immediate surrounding.

The outcomes of our study were heartening. Once aware of the facts (and after careful discussions about the impact of this on their lives) the students learned above all that they could 'make a difference'. Some are still involved in such initiatives within their local community. They continue to grow in their appreciation of the privileged life they lead and the opportunities they have. The Kids Can Make A Difference course has found an excellent balance between presenting the facts (which are disturbing) and focusing on the positive - how little by little, things can be changed for good.

Seeing how people respond when they take ownership of social issues and are active in their beliefs is the greatest reward- both professionally and personally.

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CREATING HOPE: STUDENTS CREATE A GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION NETWORK USING TECHNOLOGY...

By Ed Gragert

I am standing at the side, watching as 800 young people gather at New York City's American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) to share the environmental projects on which they have been working for the past 12 months. There is an electric anticipation running through the teens, who are meeting physically for the first time and rehearsing in their minds what they will say and do in their workshops later in the day. They are part of the opening session of YouthCaN (Youth Communicating and Networking), a global effort sponsored by iEARN and the AMNH to build a

iEARN (International Education and Resource Network) has been connecting schools internationally since 1988 to enable students to engage in collaborative online project work. iEARN currently has programs in 109 countries and is the world's largest network of elementary and secondary schools engaged in project work online. For more information on iEARN, see: <http://www.iearn.org>

community of concerned and committed young people who are using technology to link and work together. Sitting under the huge whale suspended from the ceiling of the Hall of Ocean Life, one of the students points to a quotation that someone has posted on a nearby wall: "No one

knows so much that s/he cannot learn from another; no one knows so little that s/he has nothing to teach."

It's a simple, yet powerful concept, and one difficult to realize in daily life. As I watch these YouthCaN students, I am moved by the effortless way in which they embody this concept in the work they plan to share today. They have come to share and listen—empowered with the notion that as global citizens they have something to say and that someone is ready to learn from their work. At the same time they are prepared to attend others' workshops so that they too can return to their home communities with more than they came, learning from the other.

This is refreshing in today's world in which so many of our leaders are convinced that they are in the right and have no need to listen to any other. How does one build respect for diverse values and perspectives? How does one develop a value for citizen engagement when the most prominent civic leaders seemingly flaunt respect for the very laws that they are mandated to carry out?

The word that comes to mind is "community." The development of communities takes committed persons out of isolation and powerlessness and unites them with others who share the same values, amplifying voices and actions. Today, Internet-based tools can build and amplify voices and actions beyond the wildest imaginations of organizers of the past. As I look out across the room of 800, I am reminded that their coming together from 10 states and 11 countries over issues facing the

environment could not have happened even a few years ago. And the parallel YouthCaN events happening simultaneously around the world would have taken place in a vacuum, rather than be linked via video-conferencing and Internet-based forums. Literally thousands of young people were being brought together virtually and physically in a desire to build a global community and amplify voices and actions.

And importantly, they were not coming to solely press their individual agendas, but to listen and learn from and with each other—recognizing that the environmental issues that they were addressing separately were inescapably intertwined and had common roots. What the community taught them was that only by international collective and interactive learning would solutions be found that were powerful enough to truly deal with the issues. In forming their community, these students have come to realize that their numbers are large and their potential for effective change is great.

Later, as the 800 students file out of the huge room at the end of the day, each one will carry a piece of paper with the e-mail address of one other student in the room. This will be a buddy, someone to update on environmental issues and actions during the year and someone who will share the responsibility of identifying another person to bring into the online community of committed young persons. So, every pair of buddies will become four students in dialogue and interaction; potentially swelling the ranks to 1,200 students at the 2005 YouthCaN event.

I was impressed by the YouthCan conference because so many people care and are doing their part to make the world better. So many people worked hard to present their work and ideas. Presenting was fun I thought we did a good job when we were presenting....

Nina

Delaware USA EWMS

Fourth grader Nina did not use words like community, awareness-building and action in stating what she gained from participating in YouthCaN, but in reality she articulated all these concepts. And she recognized that others, both in NYC and around the world, had worked hard to share ideas as well. She is proud about presenting her class's work, but she also recognizes that many people care and are doing their part. She is listening to the other. Imagine...what if the technology was to build a similar global community to combat hunger, poverty and conflict. It's possible and it's happening.

This gives me hope.

Ed Gragert is Executive Director of iEARN-USA in New York City. He may be contacted at ed1@us.iearn.org



INVESTING IN YOUR COMMUNITY: THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL...

How many of you know your neighbors? Have you ever heard the saying that there is “safety in numbers”? Or how about, “It’s not what you know, but who you know?”

In some way, all of these questions touch upon an extremely important subject—something called *social capital*. The term *social capital* describes a system of intricate networks that balances trust, support, standards and norms in defining and shaping relationships within a community and its collective value. Quite simply, it is what connects people to people. Among other things, this network creates a form of *social safety net* within a community as it aids in elevating the individual beyond what they could accomplish alone, though ultimately the resulting outcome benefits the entire group. These interactions foster increased growth, mental and physical health, and enhanced coping mechanisms in time of crisis. It is a term that attempts to conceptualize a system that has been in existence for as long as there have been organized societies. It has been grappled with and defined by anthropologists, economists and sociologists alike but with no one common definition.

Within the context of social capital one must consider the concepts of *charity* and *gift* giving as well. Presently, charity is defined in too narrow a context. Charity is not just the process of “feeling sorry for someone” or empathizing for a person’s difficult situation (i.e. the homeless, the hungry, the impoverished, etc.), for it remains incomplete if some type of positive action related to those thoughts is not *enacted*. While the act of charitable giving is important and necessary, all too often it only serves to appease our guilt and a sense of duty while ultimately we remain unattached to the individual and situation, thereby making the action empty.

The anthropologist Marcel Mauss describes a fresh perspective on an ancient system of exchange and relationships in his book *The Gift*. The acts of giving and of equal exchange or *reciprocity* date back to the earliest organized societies, where people were reliant on communal activities and total cooperation for their survival. In this context, a gift is received with a certain burden or obligation attached. To refuse to give, just as to refuse to accept, is to reject the bond of alliance and potential for a deepening relationship between individuals, groups and communities. Within the realm of reciprocity, the gifts that are exchanged are thought to exert a mythical, magical or religious hold over the person who receives it! This gift is invested with life and energy—the very spirit of the person from which it came and seeks to produce an equivalent to

replace it, so as to complete the circle of giving. Mauss argued that the negative connotations of charity, fueled by its inconsistent rate of giving should be replaced by a constant system of reciprocity. In other words: there are no free gifts.

Now we must rethink the concept of charity and look at it through the lens of reciprocity and social capital. For with every act of giving there is an opportunity for reciprocity. Traditionally, the exchange of a gift bound two people together with an obligation on the recipient’s end to give in return, thereby avoiding the shame to oneself or to one’s community. A connection exists from the moment of exchange between the two individuals and remains throughout their lifetimes. As additional acts of reciprocity take place the relationship grows and the bond is strengthened. This idea can be broadened to be included in the term of social capital, as the importance of existing and consistent relationships cannot be underemphasized or undervalued.

The US and many industrialized or modern cultures stress the importance of the individual. Phenomena such as capitalism and isolationism are modern barriers that prevent such exchanges and relationships from taking place. As I am sure you have already discovered, relationships take time and energy to develop. They must be nurtured and cared for as you would a garden in the springtime. The idea that “it isn’t what you know, but who you know” is a very distorted way of viewing *networking* as you might know it today, because it attempts to translate something on a personal level into economic terms, basically that it all comes down to money. Can you put a monetary value on friendship; or on loyalty; on compassion; or on love? The answer, of course, is no. So while remote connections can be made between translating social capital into economic terms, the truth of the matter is that these intricate networks and relationships transcend monetary concepts— they are invaluable.

Everything in today’s world seems to be defined in economic terms. Though if *time is money*, then invest your *money* in something stable and worthwhile...in people...in relationships. It is here that you will find the greatest return on your investment. If we begin to change our mindset, then perhaps our actions may follow.

Frank Martinez Nocito is a Nutritional Anthropologist. He has worked with OXFAM America and is currently a consultant at the

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The purpose of **Kids Can Make A Difference®** is to inspire young people to realize that it is within their power to help eliminate hunger and poverty in their communities, their country, and their world.