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Finding Solutions Newsletter

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DISCOVERING HOPE IN A WORLD OF POVERTY...

By Martin C. Fergus

For a number of years I have taught a course on poverty that focuses both on the United States and on the developing world. Many students find taking this course an eye opening experience because it exposes them to a reality they previously knew little about. They are surprised by poverty's scope, its intensity and its tragic human costs. At times they are overwhelmed by the fact that, while some progress against poverty has been made, the most compelling verity is poverty's persistence. The first few times I taught the course, students sometimes told me that they ended the semester with a feeling of hopelessness and even despair.

This was the exact opposite of what I had intended. The course was originally part of Fordham University's Values Program, which encouraged students to examine issues not only empirically but also normatively, and to discover ways to put their values into practice. While I did not want to convey to students a rose-colored-glasses image of the poverty problem – the first step to addressing any problem is always a realistic understanding of it – neither did I wish to leave them without hope and with a feeling of powerlessness.

There was also another reason for not wishing to leave my students with the impression that nothing could be done. Simply put, this did not correspond to the reality I had experienced outside the university in my own efforts to address the issues of hunger and poverty. I had been involved for many years with Bread for the World, an organization that lobbies in Washington, D.C. on hunger issues. I had seen enough legislative successes over the years to know that the lives of poor and hungry people, both in this country and abroad, not only can be improved but have been improved. In addition, I was familiar with the work of Lutheran World Relief, which provides direct development assistance to many projects throughout the developing world. In 1994 I had the opportunity to visit some of these projects in southern India and had seen for myself the effectiveness of these efforts. And I was aware of many other nongovernmental organizations that were doing similar work.

About this issue...

The tsunami is the focus of this issue. KIDS is concerned not only with the immediate aftereffects of this tragic event, but with its long-term implications.

Rabbi Michael Lerner (pg.1) on a recent call-in radio show, was asked "Where was God during the tsunami?" Rabbi Lerner asks instead "Where was humanity?"

Oxfam America (pg.4) expresses concern not only about those who were directly affected by the tsunami, but about funding for other emergencies that exist around the world. Will all the money pledged actually be given? Will governments divert money away from needed projects into areas devastated by the tsunami?

Linda Starr (pg.5) describes what schools around the country did to help the victims of the tsunami. Her article also raises questions about the other disasters that occur every day but don't get media attention.

Noreen Springstead of WHY (pg.6) shows how we move beyond emergency feeding. WHY is involved in working with thousands of small grassroots organizations that are changing people's lives while at the same time meeting their immediate food needs.

Enjoy!

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The question became, how can this *reality* of hope and empowerment best be conveyed to students? I try to do this in two fundamental ways. First, while looking at poverty analytically and in terms of its human impact, I also emphasize from the beginning of the course that, while the poverty problem as a whole is far from being solved, there have been many successful efforts to address parts of the problem. Examples are given both for the United States and for the developing world.

Second, I give my students the opportunity to discover these efforts for themselves, and that they can also take part in them. Each student is asked to select an organization that is already addressing the problem of poverty or hunger, either in the United States or in developing countries (or both). They are asked to describe the history and activities of their organization and then to evaluate its work in light of what the students have learned in the course about the poverty problem.

Every semester I am gratified with student responses to this project. Most students are surprised to discover how many different organizations there are from which to choose and encouraged by this multiplicity and diversity. They are also surprised to learn that these organizations are addressing many of the same concerns and issues we have considered in the course, that there really can be a

connection between the ivory tower and the real world.

In most instances students are greatly impressed by the accomplishments of the organizations they have selected. They see positive impacts on the lives of the poor. Furthermore, they become aware of the many opportunities they have for personal involvement. Some join or volunteer for the groups they have researched and this commitment often continues long after the course has been completed. A few even have a life changing experience. More than one student has ended up pursuing a career that they had never known about or considered before taking this course and doing this project.

The bottom line of all of this, of course, is that by emphasizing what is already being done to address the poverty problem, and by providing students the opportunity to discover this for themselves, the potential that studying poverty has to produce discouragement or despair is turned instead into empowerment and hope – and maybe even a job after graduation!

Dr. Martin C. Fergus is Associate Professor and Associate Chair of the Political Science Department at Fordham University, Bronx, NY. He may be reached at FERGUS@FORDHAM.EDU

KIDS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE[®] FINDING SOLUTIONS NEWSLETTER
A PROGRAM OF WORLD HUNGER YEAR (WHY)

Published by:

Jane Finn Levine, Ed.D. and Larry Levine
1 Borodell Avenue, Mystic, CT 06355

(860) 245-3620, FAX (860)-245-3651, email: kids@kidscanmakeadifference.org,
<http://www.kidscanmakeadifference.org>

WHY TEACH ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES: ANSWERING AN ESSENTIAL QUESTION...

By Carol Devine

I am perplexed and sometimes left speechless by some of the things people say to me. I find it difficult to answer questions whose answers seem so obvious. The title of this article is such a question.

Throughout my thirty-five years in education, it always seemed apparent to me that the primary reason for all that I did was so that the children I was teaching and the adults I was influencing in myriad ways would eventually go away with the idea that they were responsible for more than themselves. Samuel Johnson once said that knowledge without goodness is dangerous. Thus, it would seem implicit that all of the information and skills that we convey to our children is without merit, if we do not simultaneously give them a purpose for having that knowledge.

Currently in the field of education, the approach to curriculum planning involves answering essential questions about what to teach, how to teach it, but most importantly why are we teaching it. There are, of course, specific short term goals for every skill or concept introduced, but in what way do we keep an eye on the longer term outcome of all that we are doing? The first step is to define a clear, unambiguous mission for the school and then to compare what is developed in the curriculum to that essential mission. In part, Caedmon's mission states: "We foster in them (the children) the empathy and compassion to see the world from perspectives other than their own. We nurture in them the self-assurance and courage to one day address the social concerns of their age... By committing to this mission, we believe that our children will grow to take command of their natural gifts with a greater understanding of our complex world and their eventual role within it- a role that will increasingly demand empathy and responsiveness, as well as knowledge, ambition, and skill. It is for this that we teach."

Considering that Caedmon only goes through the 5th grade, people have asked how we can commit to this lofty mission with children who only get to be eleven before they leave us. I ask, "How can we not?" It is a commonly accepted idea that children are dramatically influenced in these early years and much of what they end up believing may be traced back to what they were exposed to during this formative period. If we don't begin at the

beginning, how can we ever hope to establish in an adult a sense that he/she has an important role to play in creating a world that is more equitable and just? A cousin of mine recently sent me this quote from the writer George Scialabba, renowned reviewer of books related to politics, policy, and the culture of our time. Scialabba wrote: "Progress depends on extending our imaginative range, identifying with those who are unnecessarily suffering." This resonated with me as I contemplated writing this article, because it so eloquently articulated why it is necessary to instill a long term view in our children...helping others is as self-serving as it is altruistic, for without it we will not advance our culture and our lives. Without ever having read Scialabba, a child in one of our Middle Level classes (third/fourth grade) wrote the following in answer to "Why should we care about people we don't know?"

"We should care about people we don't know because someday they might help UNICEF, or help the world be a better place to live for us. But also because every living thing on the planet helps the world in one way or another. If we ever stopped caring about a poor person we might not see what they could do with just a little support and a caring person. So if you help them, it's not only going to help them by caring, it might help you."

This is quite an insight for an eight year old. However, it is the kind of thing we have come to expect as a result of our efforts to educate the children about the social concerns of our time. Will this carry over when they are grown and making decisions about what they will do with their lives? That certainly remains to be seen, but there is no question that attitudes are formed early, and we have an obligation to give them experiences that will help them develop a sense of their community and global responsibility.

Another quote from the peace journal of one of our fourth graders gives an indication that even nine year olds are capable of thinking about how they might act for the benefit of others, actions which might ultimately benefit themselves:

"My responsibilities as a global citizen are to feel empathy for others who are in bad situations. Another of my

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thy for others who are in bad situations. Another of my responsibilities is to care for others going through hard times. One more of my global responsibilities is to respect differences. After all, if you try to surround yourself with people just like you, you'll be missing out on a lot of friendships."

I find it extremely satisfying that given even a little bit of education about global responsibility young children can have insights such as these. It gives me hope when I see, on the other hand, the ideas that a number of adults have. The epitome of this kind of disengagement was articulated in a letter to the editor of The New York Times. In the beginning of the discussion about privatizing social security, Bob Herbert wrote an op-ed piece about the legacy of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his intention to provide old age security for those less well off. Mr. Herbert referred to the "litany of rights", which Roosevelt felt every citizen had. In response to that op-ed piece Jerry Tempelman of Florida wrote:

"F.D.R.'s litany of rights is nonsense. The problem with calling for a universal right to food, or housing, or employment, or health care, is that such a right for person A is meaningless unless person B simultaneously incurs an obligation.

Person A may argue that he has a right to food or to a job (a right presumably based on his need), but it does not follow that person B therefore has an obligation to feed or employ him. B may wish to help A (by means of private charity, for example), but B's moral intuition does not transform into A's legal right."

When I emailed Larry Levine of "Kids Can Make a Difference" about this, and other letters to the editor that were equally disturbing, I said, "Clearly, Mr. Tempelman didn't go to Caedmon!" It is alarming to think that children would grow and mature without the sense that all human beings had certain basic rights and that as members of this world we were all obliged to see that everyone had them in whatever way we could. If this is what we believe to be right, then this is what we need to tell them day in and day out from the time they are very young. It is also what we need to show them in very real ways through first hand experience.

Last year a group of parents here at Caedmon met to discuss becoming more involved in community service ini-

tiatives with the children. They were all taken with the notion that my daughter was then in Uganda, spending the semester studying development issues related to AIDS orphans, refugees, hunger, and myriad other problems in a third world country. The parents all wanted to know how she got to this point in her life, at twenty years of age, that she would hope to make this her life's work. The answer was simple: partially she was in Africa, because she spent her early years in a shelter for homeless women. From the time she and her brother were two or three, my husband and I took them to a shelter on a regular basis when we went to set up each week for our guests. Her knowledge of poverty was first hand and very personal. I can still see her sitting up on a desk in the shelter, her short legs swinging as she talked with Mary, one of the homeless women who had befriended her. For my husband and me it is very clear: how we got from there to here was to start when they were very young.

The same principle applies in school: teach them at an early age and they will never forget. If you decide, as we did at Caedmon, that our responsibility as educators extended beyond the three R's, then it is essential to define the long term vision you have for your children in a clear mission statement. It is essential that you provide them with the knowledge and experience that will lead to greater understanding, and it is essential that this experience foster the compassion that will encourage their commitment to social justice. This is, after all, the reason that we teach.

KIDS CAN HELP TOO...

By Linda Starr

Children in the United States and around the world have responded to reports of the recent tsunami in Asia by contributing to the relief efforts in record numbers-- and in unique ways.

UNICEF reports that one third to one half of the victims killed in the tsunami were children. Many more were orphaned by the disaster. Early estimates indicate that up to 1.5 million children were affected. Children in the United States and around the world have responded to those reports by helping the tsunami youngest victims in record numbers -- and in unique ways.

In Havertown, Pennsylvania, for example, 7-year-old Jesse Taconelli decided to raise money for tsunami victims by asking contributors to count their blessings and calculate their donations based on the results. Jesse developed a questionnaire containing such questions as "How many pillows are on your bed?" and "How many people say 'I love you' to you every day?," suggesting a donation of \$1 for every blessing on the list. He raised more than \$1,000 the first week. Jesse, who plans to donate the funds to *Save the Children*, also convinced local stores to donate \$5,000 worth of teddy bears for youngsters affected by the tsunami.

Also in Pennsylvania, at Philadelphia's Edwin Forrest Elementary School, K-5 students held a School Spirit Day to raise money for tsunami victims. According to vice principal Dennis Gold, the effort was part of a school-wide effective behavior plan (SWEBS), in which students receive a PEACEFUL dollar (a copy of a real dollar with the word PEACEFUL and the school mascot's picture in the center) for anything they do that is "positive, nice, or unusual." On January 14, students, who wore the colors or logo of a Philadelphia sports team instead of their usual school uniforms, received a PEACEFUL dollar for every real dollar they donated to the tsunami relief effort. The Philadelphia Flyers hockey team donated a hockey puck and team picture to be raffled off at the event; the names of the winners were picked from a jar of PEACEFUL dollars of those who contributed. The kindergarten classroom that collected the most money will be rewarded for their accomplishment with a special event and refreshments. Altogether, Forrest students, faculty, and families collected a total of \$2,579,000, which will be given to the *American Red Cross*.

In Connecticut, the Canton High School National

Honor Society sponsored a "dress down" day as part of their tsunami relief efforts. On a recent Friday, students paid a dollar to wear pajama bottoms to school; teachers paid \$5 to wear jeans. The more than \$3000 raised by the event will be donated to *AmeriCares*.

Students at Providence Elementary School in Winchester, Kentucky, dressed *up* for their fundraising event. They held a "Crazy Dress Up Day" when, for a donation of a dollar or more, kids could wear to school any wacky outfit they wanted. The proceeds of that event also will go to *Save the Children*.

Other schools are participating in fundraising efforts developed by national relief organizations. Students at The Henry Street School for International Studies in New York City, for example, are attempting to raise \$4000 through *Quarters from Kids*, a Web site that provides the opportunity for America's young people and the adults who work with them to contribute to victims of the tsunami disaster. More than 100 organizations dedicated to children have combined their resources to collect quarters, dimes, and dollars from America's youth.

In a similar fundraising effort, the *American Red Cross's Donate Spare Change* campaign encourages donors to bring their spare change to Coinstar machines located in the nation's grocery stores. The site notes that "if only half of the American living within 2 miles of a Coinstar machine donated \$1 in spare change, more than \$65 million would be raised" for Red Cross relief efforts. In Naperville, Illinois, students are collecting their loose change for the *Do Something Kids Tsunami Relief Fund*.

Do Something, an organization that encourages young people to contribute to their communities, notes that, in India, donors often give an extra \$1 for good luck. In the same spirit, the *Do Something: Kids Tsunami Relief Fund* plans to raise \$1,000,001 to help victims of the tsunami. More than \$100,000 has been raised so far.

At *Kids Can Make a Difference*, officials hope the generosity displayed by kids in the current crisis in Asia will carry over to areas of need in other parts of the world as well. *Kids Can Make a Difference* co-founder Jane Levine told Education World, "The tsunami was a natural disaster that drew the immediate attention of media around the world. In no time at all, images brought home the full magnitude of the disaster to billions of people. There was an outpouring of money from govern-

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ments and individuals to help those people directly affected.

“Students certainly need to learn about the effects of, and reactions to, the tsunami,” Levine said. “However, there are disasters occurring every day that are just as important, but do not generate media interest and excitement, and therefore go unnoticed.”

“Every day 34,000 children under five die of hunger or preventable diseases resulting from hunger,” Levine noted. “The United Nations (FAO) reports that one in 12 people worldwide is malnourished, including 160

million children under the age of five. They estimate that 3.1 million people die each year from diarrhea, and most of the victims are children. As educators, we should use the tsunami to start a discussion among students about the root causes of hunger and poverty and how they might help.”

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BUILDING THE BRIDGE: FROM FOOD CHARITY TO FOOD JUSTICE... **By Noreen Springstead**

Thirty-six million Americans are living in poverty and 842 million people in the world go hungry for days, weeks, and much longer. Because of hunger, kids never have a chance to develop, learn and thrive, economies are crippled, and human potential is greatly hindered. Solutions to hunger and poverty are wide-ranging and often quite practical. World Hunger Year (WHY) has a 30 year track record of connecting people to food, government programs, and services that build self-reliance; motivating organizations to adopt effective models that move people out of poverty; advocating for sustainable development policies; inspiring kids to make a difference; and engaging artists to bring attention and much needed funds to address the problems.

One of our most important activities is to bring our work into the classroom as part of our KIDS Can Make A Difference program. We are working in 3,000 classrooms to inspire more than 100,000 kids to learn about hunger and engage in service that helps their hungry neighbors and changes their communities. The KIDS program challenges the typical response to hunger which is to feed people. The KIDS program reveals the root causes of hunger. We are living in a time when more people are going hungry, many of whom are part of working families, and are relying on emergency food from food banks, pantries, and kitchens to meet their every day needs. By feeding vast numbers of hungry people our massive and efficient charitable food distribution system masks the great injustice of poverty and diverts our attention from building a more just society and

sustainable food system that provides access to healthy food for all.

Emergency situations demand emergency responses. Time and again we experience how crises are met with an outpouring of compassion that leads to heroic efforts of volunteerism and fundraising. We weep at the horrific images of people suffering from the recent tsunami, hurricanes in Florida, landslides in California, and genocide in the Sudan. Empathy is transferred to full blown action. However, a crisis that lingers becomes a constant like homelessness, hunger, and disease. Over the course of two decades, the emergency response to hunger has slowly converted into an entrenched system of charitable feeding that serves millions of Americans. By becoming so invested in our heroic efforts to solve the hunger crisis, we are unable to see that feeding ever-increasing numbers of people without helping them afford their own food through living wage jobs is not only completely unsustainable but also thoroughly unjust.

How do we move beyond emergency feeding? WHY attacks the root causes of hunger and poverty by promoting effective and innovative community based solutions that create self-reliance, economic justice, and food security. We work with thousands of grassroots organizations that are changing people's lives while at the same time meeting their immediate food needs. We believe that community food security can work within the traditional anti-hunger framework of emergency feeding, support of federal nutrition programs, and advo-

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cacy, while simultaneously strengthening everyone's access to affordable healthy food in their neighborhoods that is grown by farmers who are caring for the earth and in turn earning a living wage for themselves and their families.

Community Food Security (CFS) embraces the full range of food chain activities – natural resources and agriculture, processing and distribution, nutrition and health, public policy. While the goal of CFS is the same as other approaches – to end hunger and food insecurity – its method is different. CFS, in its fullest expression, draws on a range of community food system resources, invites the participation of many individuals and sectors, and promotes solutions that reduce food insecurity and build the health and well being of the wider community.

Community food security is a dynamic approach to ending hunger that some food banks and numerous community organizations have implemented. The value of incorporating any of the community food security measures like community gardens, farm to school programs, farmers' markets, community supported agriculture, nutrition education, culinary arts training, and food policy councils into the work of food banks is that it can increase their capacity to address multiple needs and problems, and provide a valuable tool for community building that fosters self-reliance. There are many food banks and emergency food providers that incorporate community food security into their work, and are finding that by growing food or by linking directly with a local farmer they can provide a transformative experience for clients, volunteers, and the community at large. It also creates opportunities to implement innovative solutions that address the root causes of hunger and move people out of poverty. Because food is grown sustainably, organically, locally, and humanely, the positive health benefits are enormous. A food bank, pantry, or kitchen that embodies these practices establishes a more dynamic system that fosters social change, directly challenges dependence, and promotes healthier eating.

Food banks, with their access to food and multiple community relationships, have a special role in building

the bridge between anti-hunger work and community food security. Many anti-hunger networks and groups have long supported policies that address the root causes of hunger -- poverty, joblessness, homelessness, and lack of health care. Increasingly, groups such as food banks, shelters, and churches, while continuing to feed the hungry and house the homeless, are sponsoring food security related programs that include food sector job training, nutrition education, healthier food choices, community gardens, links to local farms, and economic development. The forthcoming *Building the Bridge* will focus on food banks that – from an anti-hunger base – are implementing key aspects of community food security.

Food Banks are uniquely positioned to shift the prevailing model of food charity to one that promotes food justice. Actions to move toward food justice would include exposing the growing inequality in income and in access to food. Many of the food banks profiled in *Building the Bridge* are already making a shift in empowering those involved in emergency food programs to be active participants in their local food systems as opposed to passive recipients of aid. This is significant in that it promotes self reliance and brings people together to solve problems in their own communities. They can inspire the vast network of food banks to transform their operations and awaken our greater societal responsibility to address the root causes of poverty. Building community food security is a practical alternative vision to food charity and provides us with an opportunity to care for our farmland, provide an abundance of healthier food, and stimulate local economic development.

Noreen Springstead is Program Director at WHY.

*The basis of this article comes from the forthcoming *Building the Bridge*, a joint collaboration between WHY and the Community Food Security Coalition.*

*Please email your request for a copy of *Building the Bridge* to Noreen@worldhungeryear.org. You can find ways to incorporate nutritious food into your school lunch program, support family farmers, ensure healthy food for you and your family, and more by accessing WHY's online Food Security Learning Center at www.worldhungeryear.org*

This is your newsletter...

If you are reading *Finding Solutions* and have responded to our annual fund-raising appeal, we thank you. If by chance you have not contributed, we hope that this is just an oversight and will be rectified. Keep in mind that a contribution of only \$9 brings you three issues of the newsletter a year. This contribution covers the actual cost of producing and mailing the publication. If you are able to make a larger contribution, it is greatly appreciated. Nearly 100% of all contributions go directly to the program as KIDS has no paid staff, and does not pay rent.

2001 TEACHER GUIDE AVAILABLE

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“If I were a teacher struggling to help students remain human in a sea of cynicism and self-absorption, I would grab onto this book as if it were a life raft and use it to bring my class to shore.”

*Joan Dye Gussow, Professor Emeritus,
Teachers College, Columbia University*



**1 Borodell Avenue
Mystic, CT 06355**

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.