

Solutions to Violence: DJPC's New Education Initiative

by Nancy Babbs

Faith in the future and confidence in the efficacy of human strength are the necessary antecedents for all energetic actions and all productive plans.

José Enrique Rodó, Ariel

When two young women who had spent extended time in Central America got together last fall, they discovered they shared not only a passion for the people of Latin America, but also the burning need to educate our own young people about the philosophy of nonviolence as a solution to personal as well as global conflict. Kareen Erbe was a CAMINOS Accompanier in Guatemala, and Catherine Raveczky was with Witness for Peace in Mexico and Guatemala, where they both worked with indigenous groups to help them in their struggle with the intractable problems of poverty, injustice, and violence. Now they are here in Denver – Kareen is DJPC's Program Coordinator and Catherine works with migrant families in the Jefferson County Schools – and through discussions with Richard Kruch and others, have energetically and productively developed DJPC's new Solutions to Violence Education Program.

DJPC has formed a committee to work with them to develop a curriculum that they can take into area schools and churches. Its focus will be to define violence, conflict, and nonviolence; to highlight historical figures such as Dorothy Day, Mahatma Ghandi, and Martin Luther King, Jr.; and to develop an understanding of global links between economic and military violence.

The Solutions to Violence Program will offer 50-minute workshops specifically on nonviolence, globalization issues, and current economic/military policy in Latin America. A week-long unit will also be offered. It will incorporate the above workshops to illustrate the structures of violence and alternative approaches. For example, while doing a workshop on free trade to understand policy issues, students will be able to analyze information and problem solve from both corporate and grassroots perspectives. Interactive activities, a speaker, and follow-up activities—writing assignments, art projects—will conclude the week-long unit. A semester-long curriculum is also being planned that will incorporate materials from the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and Colman McCarthy's Center for Teaching Peace. DJPC is currently doing pilot teaching at the Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning and JeffCo Open School.

DJPC has long had a commitment to education. In this time of international crises, the new Solutions to Violence Program will be an effective way to inform our community, especially our young people, about alternatives to violence and the consequences of global conflict, particularly in Latin America. Fundraising will be key to the program's success, though the costs are minimal considering the importance of getting out our message in this time of war and increasing corporate globalization.

The committee needs volunteers to help with this project. It is looking for people who are willing to help with curricular development and to take our curriculum into the public forum,

especially schools; for contacts within schools and churches to further its outreach; and for help with fundraising to support this critical venture.

Colman McCarthy asked himself 20 years ago “Can peace be taught? Can peace be learned?” He went into the schools as a volunteer teacher of peace and discovered “students are hungry to learn nonviolence. They understand it is much more than a noble ideal, it is also a basic survival skill.” He exhorts us: “Let’s not give peace a chance, let’s give it a place in the curriculum.” DJPC now has the program to do just that.