



Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated.

To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty.

October 17, 1987, Joseph Wresinski (1917-1988), Founder, International Movement ATD Fourth World

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Seeking Common Ground on Education

By Carl Egner

Education is often in the news these days. There are articles about successes—usually about a spectacularly innovative teacher or school—but it seems that more often articles point out the failures of our public schools. A recent example of the latter was an opinion piece in the *New York Times* entitled “Failing Teachers.”¹ The article describes all-too-familiar situations of teachers who don’t care about their students, students who don’t care about learning, and a system that seemingly allows all that to happen.

One teacher from Brooklyn, New York, is quoted about his fellow teachers: “You have teachers who have categorized all of the students as a problem. So they walk into the room afraid of the students without even knowing them. To them, the students are one-dimensional. Everybody’s a thug. Everybody’s a problem. So they don’t require anything of them.”

The author, Bob Herbert, concludes by writing, “The worst of the problems—the true extent of school violence, the utter chaos in some of the classrooms, and the fraudulent grading and promotion practices, the widespread contempt heaped upon the students, and the scandalous lack of parental involvement—have not yet been fully and honestly revealed. Real progress and real reform won’t happen without an understanding of the real truth.”

We agree with Mr. Herbert that our education system is failing many students. And we applaud his continuing efforts to show how poor and minority students have been consistently shortchanged.

We take issue, however, with the placing of blame for these problems. This article is particularly hard on teachers. Many other articles also seem to be looking for someone blame, whether it is parents, students, administrators, or the system as a whole.

We believe that everyone involved in our public schools—teachers, parents, administrators, communities, and decision-makers—does bear a measure of responsibility for the current state of our schools. And we recognize that fundamental reforms are needed in many areas. Yet we also believe that true and lasting reform needs to start from the premise that everyone involved holds part of the solution. Real progress won’t happen without real cooperation.

Education seems a political issue where common ground should be possible to find. How can anyone not believe that all our children deserve a high quality education? Yet even debates about education too often seem more about attributing blame rather than looking for ways to work together.

The Fourth World Movement’s “Unleashing Hidden Potential” project is all about finding common ground, and about adding a new voice to our national debates about education: the voice of parents and families who have been the least well served by our schools. Please read the articles in this issue to learn more. Please help us to make this project better known.

¹ Bob Herbert, “Failing Teachers,” *The New York Times*, October 24, 2003.

Training Future Teachers

The *Unleashing Hidden Potential* CD-Rom Gets Field-Tested

By Maria Sandvik
In Consultation with Lenore Cola

The *Unleashing Hidden Potential* CD-ROM was given its first trial as a training tool last May at Kingsborough Community College in New York City. Invited by Barbara Ingram (professor of early childhood education and UHP Seminar participant), the outcome was a great success. Lenore Cola, Denis Cretinon (also UHP Seminar participants) and I used the CD-ROM to facilitate a workshop for a diverse class of students studying to become teachers and teacher’s aids.

To prepare for the workshop, Lenore, Denis and I met with several other UHP Seminar participants to review the units in the *UHP CD-ROM* and decide which was most appropriate to use in the class presentation. We decided that a unit about communication between parents and teachers would be best to discuss with the students, most studying to teach in early childhood education where communication with parents is vitally important. After this unit was chosen, we designed a role-play that would allow the students to examine the issue from both the point of view of a mother and a principal.

After a brief introduction to give some background information, Lenore read the unit’s main story about a mother whose advice for the appropriate school setting for her son was ignored by the school principal. The students were then asked to take on the very challenging task of putting themselves in the mindset of the parent, and in the mindset of the principal. The students separated into two groups, one that formed an argument supporting the principal and the other supporting the mother. After debating the points formed in each group, they changed roles to form arguments for the other side.

Reactions from the students after the role-play were mixed, and came slowly at first. When students began to relate the situation to people they knew and to speak of personal experiences, the class debate intensified and strengthened. “The active participation by the students was the strength of the class. The atmosphere and interest shown by the

students is hard to get in a large group, but all had something to say, even the quietest were involved,” explained Barbara.

A student who was a former principal argued from her years of experience, speaking about many assumptions she held about parents and home situations. Parents in the classroom,

both presenters and students, disputed the assumptions and explained how they are not always true and are hurtful to the communication between parents and teachers. Another story of the *UHP CD-ROM* unit that students read and discussed was Lenore’s story about difficulties that she had



Maria Sandvik at a Street Library in Brooklyn.

communicating with the principal at her son’s school. Discussing this story in person, Lenore emphasized the importance for parents to also walk through the school door with a respectful attitude towards the principal and teachers. The point that open communication and respect are necessary from all parties involved with a child’s education was discussed through the students and presenters sharing first hand experiences.

Open communication between parents and school principals and teachers is an important aspect of school being a successful experience for a child. It is also something that many education students do not have much experience with when they enter a classroom for the first time. Lenore explained how the *UHP CD-ROM* addresses this issue: “The CD-ROM is important because people just starting out as teachers can listen to the stories of parents who have had different experiences with their kids and teachers. The outcomes aren’t always going to be exactly the same, but students can have an awareness of how they can deal with some situations and keep that communication open.” In this first of what we hope will be many *UHP CD-ROM* workshops, current and future teachers were able to listen to and discuss the stories of experienced parents and teachers. Through this they learned to be more open to different points of view. They recognized the importance of creating a dialogue in which everyone can be respected and listened to, and practiced this vital element of effective teaching.

See more about **Unleashing Hidden Potential** inside.

Unleashing Hidden Potential CD-Rom Brings a Learning Community to Life



As mentioned in the previous article, the Unleashing Hidden Potential CD-Rom is now being field-tested. This CD-Rom brings together, in a dynamic and interactive format, the experiences and learning moments of the Unleashing Hidden Potential

process (see Fourth World Journals - Vol. 33 No. 2, Vol. 34 No. 1-3). In the coming issues, we will continue to bring you news of its field tests as well as content highlights. Below are excerpts of the unit that was presented at Kingsborough Community College.

When her son started kindergarten, Gina Russell told the principal that Corey needed to be in a special class, but her advice was ignored.

The “Do Not Send” Slips

Our son Corey really has school spirit in him, but we knew he also had problems. He used to roll on the floor; he hummed and rocked. Corey’s doctor wondered if he was autistic. We went to see the principal and told him that Corey did not belong in a regular kindergarten class; we brought a doctor’s paper stating what Corey’s problem was. The principal answered, “Leave Corey alone, he is all right.”

Corey was so bad off that his teachers didn’t know how to deal with him. They were sending me “do not send” slips, hoping I would keep my son home. It was like sweeping the problem underneath the rug. I got tired of it. I asked the school to stop sending me “do not send” slips. “Corey does belong in school, that’s his right,” I told the principal.

Corey would still not be in school if it wasn’t for Ms. Becknell—she was a second-grade teacher who had taught my older children. Every day she observed Corey in the schoolyard and she noticed his behavior. She saw that Corey had no business being in a regular class and she decided to help us.

Ms. Becknell arranged for me to meet with the school board; she got them to listen. She told the board that Corey needed to be sent to a particular school with the right setting. As a result Corey was tested and finally admitted to a special ed class in the school recommended by Ms. Becknell. The process took fifty-seven days, but Ms. Becknell stayed involved until the end. Corey finished kindergarten and the rest of the grades were smooth sailing.



Lenore Cola’s son was getting into trouble at school. She looks at why it was so difficult to communicate with the school staff.

I Almost Got Arrested

My son’s teacher had me come to the school every day of the week to tell me all the problems my son was having. I got frustrated. I told the teacher to take my son out of the classroom since he had already had the last test, but they didn’t want to hear me.

One day I ended up getting into an argument with the principal. I was getting heated, so I said, “Please let me leave.” The principal said, “No, I just want to tell you this,” and then he wanted me to leave. But I said, “No, I’m not ready to leave, now you need to hear what I have to say!” When I was ready to talk they all went off around the corner. They told me to leave the school before I got arrested. The school did not call me back.

I realized that it was also my mistake. I should have walked out that door, calmed down, and came back. I wanted respect, but I did not get it because I did not give it to them. It is all about how you say what you have to say. We have to realize how we walk through the school door to address people, because they are human. Just because they have that title of principal doesn’t mean they don’t have a life besides that. They have just as many problems as we have. We have to let our children know it. These teachers are somebody’s mother, father and grandmother. Give them the respect that you want.

A teacher explains why it can be difficult to seek the parents’ and students’ input.

Teachers Are Anxious Too

It’s important to know that the anxiety the parents have when entering the school—that a lot of teachers have it too when facing the parents. A teacher is often in a situation of success and of failure. Like all the parents, a teacher would like, as if by magic, all the kids to succeed at school. But it doesn’t work like that. So, because the teacher is in this uneasy situation, when he or she sees the parents coming to say, “Something is wrong,” he or she is embarrassed and reacts aggressively.

A Memorable Summer: A Fourth World Volunteer's Experience in France

— By Jordan Thompson —

During the summer, I participated in the Summer Street Festival in Noisy-le-Grand, France, the birthplace of the Fourth World Movement. Throughout the year, the team there runs a family promotion project with activities and services for families and children of all ages. The summer event is meant to be an opportunity for people with diverse experiences to come together and share their knowledge and time with children living in poverty. Activities lasted for six weeks. People came from all over the world to help out and have a good time with the families in Noisy, and both the families and the volunteers gained a summer full of good memories.

While some activities were for children or entire families, I facilitated a discussion café for adults. Everyday I set up a small coffee table for conversation as well as a larger table with space to paint, draw, or look at art books. One of the objectives of the festival was to involve more adults in the summer activities, and we hoped

that the café would give parents the space to talk and be together while their children were involved in other activities. We put our tables in the open garden of a Fourth World Volunteer who lives in the neighborhood. Neighbors who often did not have the time or the space to get to know one another would stop by to drink a coffee and spend a moment together.

A few people came regularly from the beginning, but there were many more people who would pass by and not stop. My role at the café was to be the hostess. I would offer coffee or put out art supplies and when people walked by I would say hello and offer them a coffee. As the summer progressed, more and more would come by, and some of the parents who came regularly started to take responsibility for the café. They would invite people to stop and pour them a cup of coffee. They were able to reach people who were less active and more isolated in the community. One man often made the coffee for us, using his own coffee; another would pick up all of the trash



Participants in the Café Discute work on a painting together.

before we arrived so that the garden would look more inviting; one mother brought different activities to share with the others, such as pottery or materials to make bracelets, and she made sure that everybody was included in the activity or conversation.

I was very much struck by how welcoming and accepting people were and how willing they were to

share what they had, when they themselves had so little. People came to the café to spend time together, talking about their children or politics or the challenges they were all facing in their lives. They really made an effort to be open and kind to everybody, and I definitely benefitted and grew from being included in their summer.

Become Part of the Learning Community



Unleashing Hidden Potential How You Can Be Involved

There are many ways you can be involved in the Unleashing Hidden Potential project:

- Arrange for the CD-ROM to be shown and discussed, for example in:
 - ◆ Schools
 - ◆ Parent-Teacher Association meetings
 - ◆ Community groups
 - ◆ Local or national education associations
 - ◆ Teacher training classes
- Send us articles or other information about education issues.
- Participate in an e-mail discussion group about education issues.

If you would like further information about any aspect of Unleashing Hidden Potential please contact us at (202)393-2822 or at uhp@4thworldmovement.org.

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October 17, 2003: Hope is Part of Being Human

Many events marked this year's observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Around the world, people came together to honor the victims of hunger, ignorance and violence and to reaffirm their commitment to ending persistent poverty. In the United States, the Fourth World Movement organized or co-organized several commemorations. In New Orleans, citizens from diverse backgrounds came together at the Masjid-ur-raheem (mosque) around the theme "To imagine a world without poverty is to imagine a world at peace." In Washington, DC an open house marked the debut of the new Fourth World Movement office there. In Appalachia, community members gathered at the Clincho Senior Citizens Center to listen to "Voices of Justice and Peace." And in New York, Fourth World Movement members welcomed two delegates from Guatemala: Maria Clara Chet de Rivera and Marta Zoila Caballeros Ruiz. Commemorations took place at both the United Nations in Manhattan and at the Biko Community Center in Brooklyn. Following are excerpts of Maria and Marta's testimony:

"We want to speak for those who suffer from not having a roof to protect them from the rain. Not being able to count on a place to go, to meet in dignity with one's family. This means being used to being uprooted from one place to another, always waiting for a day when one can finally put down roots. It means

dreaming of having your own land, dreaming of safe land that is free of floods and of landslides that bury those who are alive.

To be poor in Guatemala means not being able to read a book or write a letter. It means being left out of school and having no access to written communication, to computers or to libraries. And, sooner or later, it means that you suffer the pain of not having enough food for the children, of barely making do with a pile of tortillas with salt and chile. It means sickness that cannot be cured for lack of money for medicine. It means enduring the cold of scorn. It means that three out of every five people in Guatemala suffer from inequality, violence, insecurity. They are marked from birth and largely excluded from life, generation after generation. But despite this horizon devoid of opportunities, we also have cherished hopes and dreams.

[...]The lives of the poorest speak to us, in each word, of a path of hope. Doña Dorothea and her daughter live below the Belice bridge, very far below it. In the past, Doña Dorothea was a carrier in the Central Market. She carried packages for people shopping in the marketplace and took them on her back to the vehicles of the shoppers. Over time, she grew old and began going blind. Her only daughter has a mental impairment. Every day, mother and daughter go out to earn their living. They leave the shack at the bottom of the cliff. To avoid falling in the river, they clutch the girders

of the iron bridge over which the train used to pass. They cross the river of black water, which rises every winter, threatening to wash away their shack. Somehow they climb a makeshift rope ladder to get up the cliff, holding on so they do not slip and fall into the abyss. [...]Doña Dorotea's vision and her strength have faded with age, but she has not lost her hope. Doña Dorotea climbs up and down the cliff every day; her path is the path of hope.

[...]Sometimes poverty seems hopeless. However, hope is part of being human. That is why we can transform poverty. Despite everything, the very poorest continue to hope. Poverty does not erase the dream of solidarity with others. Doña Dorotea's daily efforts tell us that the hope for a better future is something very concrete. If she can keep hoping, we all can.

If we unite the hopes of the men and women who believe in the equality of people, if we unite the hopes of those who believe they can free themselves from the chains of misery, if we can make a commitment of brotherhood with the poorest people around the world, then we can leave our children a world with no more indifference, a world where no one is forgotten. [...]The poorest invite us to build hope with them, beginning with respect, dignity and brotherhood. The poorest invite us, on this day, which is their day, and every day hereafter, to build a world for our children in which no one is left out."

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FOURTH WORLD JOURNAL

The Fourth World Journal is a regular publication of the Fourth World Movement/USA, the US branch of an international association working with and on behalf of those around the world who live in extreme poverty.

The International Movement ATD Fourth World is an NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC, UNESCO, UNICEF, ILO and the Council of Europe.

The Fourth World Journal aims to bring together different points of view, especially those of the very poor themselves, on topics related to extreme poverty. We encourage our readers to share with us their reactions and comments.

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