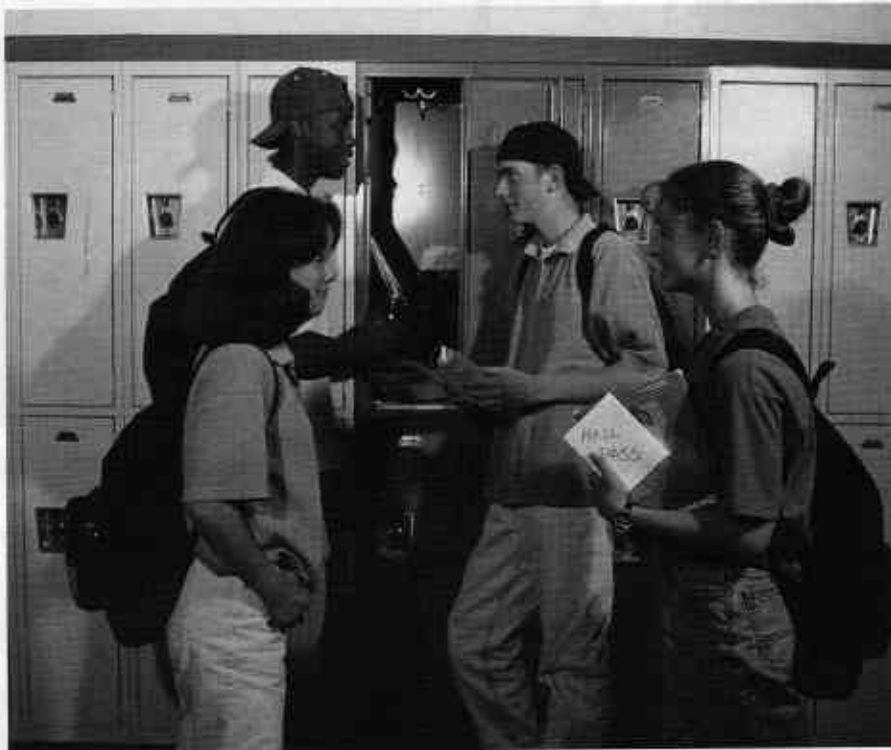


Classroom Connections

How a Toronto mother hopes to bring peace to school

By Sylvia MacIver



Teachers across the country know the best place to teach non-violence is in the classroom.

The tragic events of September 2001 and the escalation of conflicts and renewed threats around the world have brought home more than ever, the urgent issues of world peace and human security.

We are surrounded by violence in our society and our global community, and too often we see this in the actions and behaviours of the youth in our schools.

Teachers across the country know the best place to discuss peace and violence is in the classroom. Throughout history we have witnessed examples of education being used to inculcate hatred and violence and we all know the power of education to influence and shape society. Teachers know they can change lives and that education is at the core of social change in our world.

What we need to recognize is the potential for our education system to be a powerful force in shaping a society that values social justice, respect for others and a belief in the dignity and

rights of every human life - in short, a culture of peace. And that's where Classroom Connections, the brainchild of a 40-year-old Toronto mother comes in to play.

Five years ago, Heather McTaggart was Mom to three children in elementary school and a stepdaughter in high school. She was deeply involved in the schools her children attended but with a business background realized early on there were several corporations and organizations that wanted to become more involved in the education of this country's future work force. Thus her non-profit organization, dedicated to supporting publicly funded education by providing free learning resources to schools in Canada, was born.

Since its inception in 1997, Classroom Connections has become the leading provider of community supported educational resources in Canada. It offers a way, through sponsorship, for organizations to be more involved in schools and to demonstrate

corporate social responsibility.

On her cell phone from Toronto, McTaggart tells me that 75 per cent of all publicly funded schools across Canada have climbed aboard Classroom Connections including the Calgary Board of Education. The Calgary and Edmonton separate systems are also part of the program. (The Edmonton public school board has yet to officially confirm.)

McTaggart says that students need learning materials that engage, inspire and empower them. Parents need insight into the classroom and into how best to support their children and their school, she says, and teachers need a wide range of exceptional resources from many sources to help them deliver the best quality of learning to their students.

Each year, Classroom Connections delivers, free of charge, a selection of learning resources, developed by Canadian educators, to schools across the country and currently there are more than 10,000 elementary and secondary schools registered. But the current curriculum, entitled Cultivating Peace, a project sown out of the Sept. 11 attacks, is the one that most excites McTaggart. She says key education organizations across the country helped develop the curriculum, intended to teach students the rights of others, acceptance of diversity and empathy for others.

Cultivating Peace in the 21st Century, is the first module in the peace series. It is designed to actively engage Grade 10, 11 and 12 students in the search for a deeper understanding of the forces that can bring about tragedies such as the attack on the World Trade Center, and the means by which they can personally contribute to the ongoing search for peaceful co-existence. It provides teachers and administrators with concrete mechanisms for integrating peace education into the curriculum and the school environment.

Module two (available in September, 2003) lays the groundwork for understanding the issues involved in peace, conflict and justice. It will personalize these concepts and focus on individual responsibility. It will encourage

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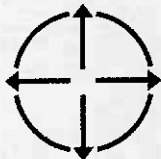


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A culture of peace will be achieved when citizens of the world understand global problems, have the skills to resolve conflicts and struggle for justice non-violently, live by international standards of human rights and equity, appreciate cultural diversity, and respect the Earth and each other. Such learning can only be achieved with systemic education for peace.

Hague Agenda for Peace & Justice for the 21st Century

youth to internalize the belief that each of us has the power to create societal change through our own attitudes, behaviours and actions.

As part of the curriculum, Classroom Connections offers three animated short films (without words) produced by the National Film Board.

The first one deals with neighbours whose friendly relationship turns to hatred and violence in their fight over a single flower located on the border between properties. It is intended to

introduce students to the causes of violence, presenting the fight for resources as an instigating factor in aggressive, confrontation and war.

The second film reduces conflict to its most elemental form. Cubes oppose spheres and violence transcends reason and understanding. No dialogue or commentary is necessary as the characters' sounds and actions tell the story of socio-cultural differences forming a basis for violence.

The third film is designed to provide tools for conflict resolution. Here, two neighbouring gophers demonstrate escalating retaliation as a cause for destruction and illustrates how much can be lost and how little is won, by seeking revenge.

The following are curriculums offered by Classroom Connections in the past:

Strangers Becoming Us

A curriculum-based program for Grades 4-8, designed to guide students to a greater understanding of multiculturalism, citizenship, and what it



Students are taught to appreciate diversity and respect for each other.

means to be a new Canadian.

Activities include drawing family trees, examining discriminatory immigration policies of the past, and writing essays that express thoughts on Canada's principle accomplishments.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada financed this project.

Gift of Life

This program for Grades 5-8 focuses on increasing student awareness of the nature and purpose of organ and tissue donation and transplantation. Through discussion and sets of activities, students develop an understanding of how the transplantation of donated tissue and organs can save lives and ease suffering.

Literacy Connections

A workshop for Kindergarten to Grade 3, that schools run for parents and caregivers. It teaches skills that help parents and others understand how to read with their children, so their children learn to read and love it.

Pets

This program for Grades 4- 6 promotes responsible pet ownership and pet care with the focus on North America's most popular companions - cats and dogs. Students learn that pets need a lot of care to live a healthy and happy life through three engaging activities that cover science, math, language, and visual arts curriculum areas.

Money and Banking

This program for Grades 4- 6 encourages students to study and learn about the world of money and banking and how both fit in people's lives. It consists of detective activities based on Agents P and J, the Agents in Black. The program integrates curriculum in math, language arts and social studies.

If you would like more information on Classroom Connections, check out their website at:

www.classroomconnections.ca

Cultivating Peace also has its own

website at: www.cultivatingpeace.ca

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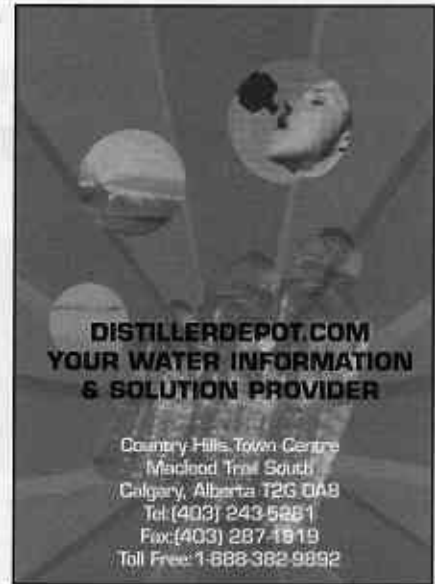
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