

# Connections

Volume 29

Number 1

Fall 2006

Ahimsa and  
Teaching

Being Socially  
Responsible in Your  
Financial Choices

Life in China:  
A Pictorial Special  
on Bicycles

Rural Roots:  
A Youth Action  
Project



The newsletter of the Global,  
Environmental & Outdoor  
Education Council

To promote involvement in  
quality environmental and  
outdoor education



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*Connections* is published for the Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council (GEOEC) by the ATA. Editor: Sara Coumantarakis, 8808 100 Avenue NW, Edmonton, AB T5H 4M9; phone (780) 462-5041; e-mail [scoumant@shaw.ca](mailto:scoumant@shaw.ca). Editorial and production services: Document Production staff, ATA. Address all correspondence regarding this publication to the editor. Opinions expressed by writers are not necessarily those of the GEOEC or the ATA. ISSN 0701-0400

Membership in the GEOEC includes a subscription to *Connections* and a reduced fee at the annual conference. Please address your inquiries to the memberships office of the ATA at 1-800-232-7208 (within Alberta) or (780) 447-9400.

Printed on unbleached 100 per cent postconsumer recycled paper to decrease our impact on the earth.

Individual copies of this journal can be ordered at the following prices: 1 to 4 copies, \$7.50 each; 5 to 10 copies, \$5.00 each; over 10 copies, \$3.50 each. Please add 5 per cent shipping and handling and 6 per cent GST. Please contact Distribution at Barnett House to place your order. In Edmonton, dial (780) 447-9400, ext 321; toll free in Alberta, dial 1-800-232-7208, ext 321.

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**Cover photo by Sara Coumantarakis**

# Editorial

## From the Editor

Edmonton's river valley is a wonderful place to walk in the fall, with the brilliant contrast of red and gold against the constant evergreens, the birdlife using the North Saskatchewan River as a flocking ground before their long flight south, and the carpet of leaves underfoot, readying the soil for next year's growth. When I'm surrounded by such beauty, I find it harder to remember that all is not well with the world—that the environment is under threat as never before, that wars continue to rage, that disease claims numbers too large to comprehend—the litany goes on.

Recently, three news stories hit the media in the same week, each in its own discrete box:

- Canada's commissioner of the environment and sustainable development released a report saying that Canadians haven't moved any closer to the Kyoto Protocol targets we agreed to as a nation, in spite of the expenditure of billions of dollars. In fact, emissions rose 24 per cent between 1997 and 2004 (Simpson 2006).
- Scientists have found warmer Atlantic Ocean water in the Arctic Ocean.
- Environment minister Rona Ambrose warned that if Kyoto targets were to be met, consumers' utility bills would skyrocket.

Last weekend, I visited Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre, to check in with visiting exchange teachers in Alberta. What case studies in issues of sustainability!

In 1903, one face of Turtle Mountain came crashing down to cover much of the southern Alberta town of Frank in 100 seconds. Subsequent study by geologists revealed that the instability of the geological layers, combined with unusual weather conditions and massive coal mining, laid the foundation for the disaster. A significant lack of knowledge about the place where they lived, combined with massive resource exploitation, resulted in the deaths of 70 people as they lay fast asleep.

At Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, a UNESCO World Heritage site, I was reminded that for thousands of years a way of life was pursued on the prairies that was in sync with the ecosystem; human needs were met without endangering other species with which the prairie was shared. Similarly, the Inuit in the Arctic followed a sustainable way of life in one of the harshest environments I have ever visited.

As we travelled by bus past the giant arms of the windmills perched along the horizon in the Pincher Creek area, I thought about the huge distance we have come in the blink of a geological eye. At a recent teachers' convention, then ATA president Larry Booi suggested that what teachers really need is more courage. I would suggest that our current political leaders also need more courage. Ms Ambrose could have called upon our deep longing for well-being, our creativity in the face of challenge and our determination to protect our grandchildren, instead of appealing to our fears about rising utility costs. Global leaders could call upon our compassion for our fellow humans and our desire to live in a just world, instead of fear-mongering about perceived terrorist threats. I fear that we are running out of time to move on these huge challenges and that courageous leadership is lacking.

In order to persevere in this complicated and difficult job of education, we need community as much as we need knowledge and skills, not to mention a good sense of humour! That sense of community awaits us all at the conference in Kananaskis in May, where we can recharge our batteries, take time to remember why we're in this business and celebrate the paths we have trod. See you there!

## Reference

Simpson, J. 2006. "Still Looking for Bold (or Anything) on Climate Change." *Globe and Mail*, September 29, A17.

—Sara Coumantarakis

# GEOEC Business

## Imagine Yourself Here: A Conference 2005 Photo Essay

*Elise Maltin*

*If this photo essay piques your interest in the GEOEC annual conference, be sure to read about Conference 2007 in this issue of Connections and consider attending!*

Sunshine, blue skies and warm temperatures in a spectacular mountain setting was the formula for a successful GEOEC conference in Banff in April 2005. For this participant from Yellowknife, just seeing *green* grass was a joy!

Sue Arlidge of the Kananaskis Field Stations led us through hands-on activities in her workshop Schoolyard Ecosystems and Interactions. On the grounds of the Banff Centre, Sue demonstrated and let us try out easy-to-use equipment to investigate the life around us as part of the Grade 7 Science unit “Interactions and Ecosystems.”



*Sue Arlidge's workshop Schoolyard Ecosystems and Interactions*



*Sue's group*

Heather Dempsey of Parks Canada (Banff) provided us with an insightful perspective on the complexities of managing a national park. We spent the afternoon working our way up the Minnewanka Loop while discussing issues of park management. The workshop culminated in a wonderful walk along the shores of Johnson Lake, with the added delight of loons and prairie crocuses!

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*Elise Maltin is an education specialist with Parks Canada in Yellowknife.*



*Heather Dempsey and her map*



*Heather and her group*

*Heather Dempsey's session on park management*



# Conference 2007

## “Trails to Sustainability”

May 24–27

## Delta Lodge, Kananaskis

Mark May 24–27 on your calendar as the time to be in Kananaskis at GEOEC’s 2007 annual conference, “Trails to Sustainability.” This year’s conference is being sponsored in partnership with the Canadian Network for Environmental Education and Communication (EECOM) and the Alberta Council for Environmental Education (ACEE).

Stephen Lewis, the UN secretary-general’s special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, and David Schindler, an international expert on water issues, headline a long list of speakers who will inform, challenge and motivate you. Wildlife biologist and park warden Karsten Heuer will speak about our connections to wildlife and wilderness, and Hunter Lovins will show how schools, business and people profit and thrive when we “green” our practice.

A full program of workshops is currently being finalized to meet the needs of environmental, global and outdoor educators.

GEOEC conferences are known for music, warmth and great food. Most important, they give educators



an opportunity to experience a beautiful setting in an ecologically responsible way while being immersed in timely and provocative topics that face us as educators.

Visit [www.trailstosustainability.ca](http://www.trailstosustainability.ca) for more information and to register. The first 150 registrants will pay just \$99 plus a mandatory fee of \$35, which will give you membership in all three host organizations.

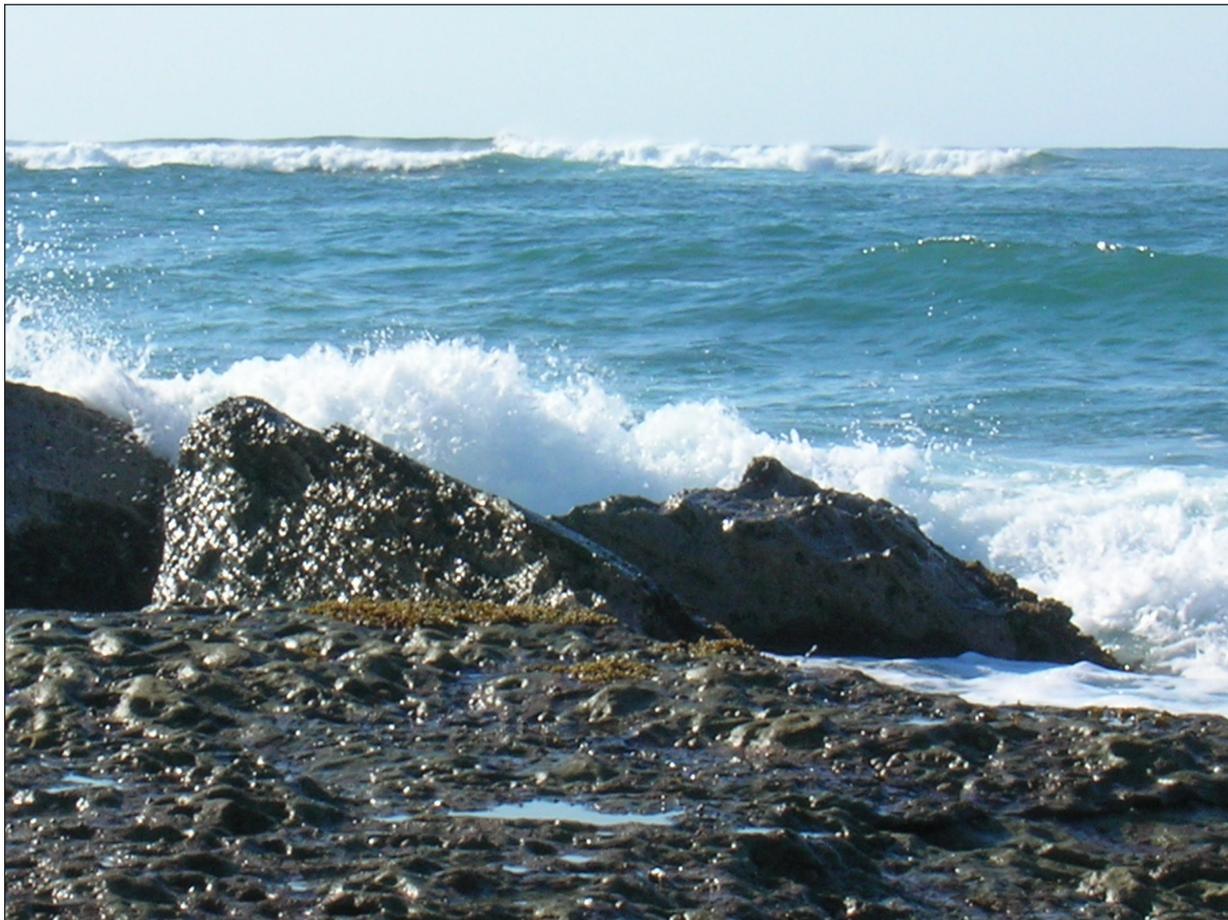
# GEOEC Website

## [www.geoec.org](http://www.geoec.org)

The GEOEC website is filled with useful information and resources, including the following:

- Lesson plans
- Articles
- Links to other organizations that provide teaching resources
- The latest news on the upcoming conference
- Information on how to stay connected
- The World of 100 global simulation activity

Be sure to bookmark the website!



*Photo by Sara Coumantarakis*

# Articles

## Ahimsa and Teaching

Reva Joshee

As the title indicates, this article is a discussion of teaching and *ahimsa*, a term commonly translated into English as “nonviolence”; thus, it is part of a larger discussion on education for peace. I would therefore like to begin with a consideration of what I mean by *peace*. Generally, people think of peace as the absence of war or the absence of direct violence. This is what is sometimes called “negative peace” (Smith and Carson 1998). It is a good place to begin, but many peace educators will tell you that negative peace is not enough. The next step is to develop an understanding of positive peace.

In thinking about positive peace, we examine the underlying causes of war or direct violence—such as poverty and racism—and work on ways to address them. Noted Norwegian peace researcher and activist Johan Galtung coined the terms *structural violence* and *cultural violence* to talk about those underlying causes. He explains these forms of violence as follows:

Some cultures are very dangerous because they consider

themselves select or chosen above all others. . . . Some structures are either highly repressive or exploitative—or both. Structures of this kind readily elicit revolutionary violence from below or counter-revolutionary violence from above. The combination of so-called chosen cultures and repressive social structures almost invariably and fairly speedily results in direct violence; from below in order to liberate, and from above in order to prevent liberation. (Galtung and Ikeda 1995, 69)

So, working for peace means addressing structural and cultural violence; it means working for what former prime minister Pierre Trudeau called “the just society.” Unlike many approaches to addressing oppression, which ask who benefits and then seek to wrest power away from the oppressors in a society, an approach that addresses structural and cultural violence proceeds by asking what such violence looks like and how it continues to occur. Though this

approach acknowledges that some people are hurt more than others by various forms of violence, the underlying assumption is that no one truly benefits from violence in society.

Working with this understanding of positive peace, peace educators such as Marvin Berlowitz (1994) and Ian Harris (2004) have talked about three approaches to working for peace: peacekeeping, peacemaking and peace building. Schools have traditionally focused on peacekeeping, using punishment to convince students not to act in overtly violent ways. With interest in programs such as Safe and Caring Schools in Alberta, we have seen more educational efforts directed at peacemaking in the form of programs that teach skills in conflict resolution and mediation. Following Boulding (2001), Harris (2004) and Ikeda (2001), I believe that we need to increase our attention to peace building through education. This would require us to approach our work as educators in ways that contribute to transforming how we live in the world. Buddhist thinker

and teacher Thich Nhat Hanh (2003, 55–56) echoes this idea:

The war stops with you and me.  
Every morning when you open  
your eyes, the potential for  
violence and war begins. So every  
morning, when you open your  
eyes, please water the seeds of  
compassion and nonviolence.  
Try selecting a mindful practice  
that helps you transform your  
own internal conflicts. Let peace  
begin with you.

I would suggest that we need to find our own transformational practices while working together to create ways of living peacefully. My approach begins with the ideas of Gandhi and an exploration of how those ideas might apply to my teaching.

## Gandhiji and Ahimsa

At the centre of Gandhiji's<sup>1</sup> understanding of peace was the concept of ahimsa. Gandhiji did not invent the idea of ahimsa. It has existed since at least the sixth century BCE as part of the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist philosophical traditions. Though Gandhiji and others have translated *ahimsa* into English as “nonviolence,” I find that translation inadequate because, as Christopher Chapple (1993, xiii) notes,

In western cultures, nonviolence usually denotes passive, nonresistant civil disobedience, pacifism, and conscientious objection to war. It is particularly associated with the Christian teachings of the Religious Society

of Friends (Quakers) and other radical reform movements that rely on Biblical injunctions to “love your neighbor as yourself” and to “turn the other cheek.” In India, nonviolence . . . is a personal commitment to respect life in its myriad forms.

A commitment to ahimsa thus requires an appreciation of our common humanity and the connection between all living things. At the same time, we must recognize that the common life force is expressed in the world in myriad ways and that our task as people (and especially as teachers) is to understand, accept and support the diversity around us. This insistence on both one and many rejects the either-or way in which we usually frame the world in favour of an approach that considers each-and.

I believe, as Gandhiji did, that a commitment to ahimsa must be at once personal and political. It requires paying attention to one's own spiritual development and everyday actions while striving to address issues at a larger level. For example, one practice I have followed is to spend some time each week (ideally every day) listing the ways in which my actions may have harmed another being. Then I make a list of things I have done that may have helped another being. The goal of the exercise is to bring to my attention my own actions and to get me thinking about their consequences. I also think about how I am addressing issues of structural violence in my larger sphere of influence. What have I done in my teaching or scholarship? How have I brought structural

violence to the attention of the broader community? How have I supported the work of others who are trying to address structural and cultural violence?

For Gandhiji, the notion of ahimsa was connected to three other important ideas: *sarvodaya* (the uplift of all), *satyagraha* (the power that comes from acting in ways consistent with the principles of ahimsa) and trusteeship (the notion that we should think of all that we possess as things we hold in trust and that we should use what we have for the benefit of others). For me, these ideas are key to developing a sense of what I, as a teacher, ought to be doing in my classroom.

First, if I think about *sarvodaya* in relation to my students, it means thinking about working with all of my students. Sometimes it is easier to work only with students who are particularly interested in the subject matter or with those who are high achievers. The principle of the uplift of all means measuring my teaching practice against the learning of the students who are the least engaged.

*Satyagraha* tells me that I need to think about the ways I teach. Do I treat all my students with dignity and respect? Do I show concern for all my students? Or do I, for example, use sarcasm to put them in their place?

Finally, the principle of trusteeship asks me to reflect on what I have and how I use what I have for the benefit of my students. This has led me to rethink my teaching practice and work toward what I call a pedagogy of ahimsa. I am nowhere near perfecting this

pedagogy, but what follows is an explanation of how I currently understand this approach to teaching for peace.

## Toward a Pedagogy of Ahimsa

I see three key aspects to the development of a pedagogy of ahimsa: a re-evaluation of our understanding of power in all relationships, a conscious move from debate to dialogue as the dominant form of public discussion, and an emphasis on creativity and imagination.

### Power Relations

The world is indeed one family.  
Therefore the law of the family  
should be the law of the world.

—Gandhi

Virginia Held (1990) has made the case that in the public realm of Western societies, relationships are based on the model of a contract between two equals. Because these relationships are based on the assumption of equality, they ignore issues of power. She advocates accepting that a power differential inevitably exists between two people and finding models that allow us to use that power in positive ways. Using the example of a classroom, she encourages a relationship based on a mothering model, arguing that the essence of a mothering relationship is to bring the less powerful person to a place where she or he becomes at least equal to—and ideally surpasses—the more powerful person.

Mindful of the essentialist undertones in talking about a

mothering model, I would still argue that what I like to think of as a parenting model is a more productive approach to addressing power imbalance than trying to eradicate power differentials between me and my students in the classroom. My students have pointed out that even if we all address each other by first names, co-construct curriculum and assume the position of teacher-learner, the fact remains that I, as the designated instructor, am the one who has the power to give grades and who is considered more knowledgeable about the subject at hand. By accepting this and attempting to use this power in ways that benefit my students, I have become a more effective mentor for them as they negotiate the university system.

A second aspect of understanding my own power position in the classroom is the incorporation of Gandhiji's idea that the leader is the most devoted seeker (Iyer 1990, 257–58). In other words, I must be clear about my own principles and commitments and model the practice I am talking about. My students need to see that I am trying to come to terms with the difficult issues we have been discussing in class. And they need to see evidence of ahimsa in my actions.

A third aspect of rethinking power in the context of the teacher–student relationship relates directly to trusteeship. The idea of trusteeship comes from Gandhiji's approach to addressing the economic aspects of inequity. He believed that, rather than condemning capitalists, we should

acknowledge that some people's genius lies in the ability to make money and that we all require money both to survive and to create the changes we would like to see. At the same time, he advocated a system in which all economic resources are considered resources we hold in trust for the betterment of the entire community (Iyer 1990). I believe that we can apply this notion more broadly and think of knowledge and social position as resources. As individuals, we should use the resources we have not to give charity but, rather, to create structural changes that lead to a more peaceful society.

As a faculty member at a major Canadian university, I have access to monetary resources but, more important, I have the privileges that attach to my position. I can channel my research in whatever way I see fit. I have the luxury of being in a position where my main task is to learn and grow as a researcher and a teacher. I have the power that goes with being a teacher of teachers, administrators and future professors. I have the good fortune of having worked in three universities and being able to connect students and faculty from those three institutions. I must be diligent about the ways in which I use all of these resources.

### Dialogue

The golden rule of conduct is mutual toleration, seeing that we will never all think alike and we shall always see Truth in fragments and from different angles of vision.

—Gandhi

The idea of moving from debate to dialogue comes to my teaching practice largely from my research on policy. I have been attracted to the work of those who are trying to find ways to involve as many people as possible in conversations about matters that are important to society as a whole, such as Peter deLeon (1997), Jane Mansbridge (1997) and Emery Roe (1994). A key insight from this work on policy is the need to think of public conversation as a place where people and ideas meet rather than compete. In other words, we should work to replace the current emphasis on debate with an approach based on dialogue.

Whereas debate is constructed as a contest between two opposing ideas, dialogue suggests the possibility of many approaches and ideas being brought together. Taking a side in a debate tends to increase our attachment to our original position; participating in a dialogue ideally allows us to be open to new and different ideas. I believe that, in terms of addressing violence, a key skill we must teach our students is how to enter into dialogue. As Chapple (1993, 96) asserts, "The most violent acts arise from the nonacceptance of another's viewpoint. The inability to expand or alter one's own opinions often brings about the objectification of those who do not cleave to that particular vision." His solution is "intellectual nonviolence," which "requires a commitment to one's own belief system accompanied with an ability to tolerate and perhaps celebrate the positions of others" (p 97). Thus, dialogue is neither the

kind of discussion that requires us to adopt an opinion and defend it at all costs nor a freewheeling exchange in which every opinion is as valid as every other.

In my classroom, ideas, approaches or structures that perpetuate violence are not considered appropriate or acceptable. In practical terms, this means that racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist or classist language is not allowed. I also ask my students to think about the violent metaphors we use in our daily language. For example, in a class I taught on policy issues, we had a lengthy discussion about why I would not refer to groups designated under Canada's *Employment Equity Act* as "target groups." It also means that I ought to model respectful behaviour toward the students who are seen as outliers (that is, students whose opinions do not fall within what becomes understood as the classroom norm) and that I should try to encourage their participation in our dialogues. In a class I taught recently, one student was having a difficult time understanding how the act of not being able to distinguish between two members of a racialized group was an indication of structural violence in the form of systemic racism. She had already confessed to doing that on at least one occasion, and she thought that I was saying that meant she was racist. We talked together within the larger class discussion, and then she and I spoke alone during a break. I finally found language that allowed her to see what I was saying. She, in turn, was able to show me that in

teaching about structural violence I cannot take shortcuts; the connections between everyday actions and larger issues must be made clear.<sup>2</sup>

My own interpretation of dialogue also draws on insights from Iris Marion Young (1997) and Jane Mansbridge (1997), who both speak to the difficulties of involving members of dominant and oppressed groups in dialogue together. They draw our attention to the need to address power differentials and diversity in respectful ways that will enhance communication and understanding between members of historically dominant and minoritized groups. Young (1997) proposes an approach to dialogue based on what she calls "asymmetrical reciprocity," which she explains as follows:

This reciprocity of equal respect and acknowledgement of one another . . . entails an acknowledgement of *asymmetry* between subjects. While there may be many similarities and points of contact between them, each position and perspective transcends the others, goes beyond their possibility to share or imagine. Participants in communicative interaction are in a relation of approach. They meet across distance of time and space and can touch, share, overlap their interests. But each brings to the relationship a history and structured positioning that makes them different from one another, with their own shape, trajectory, and configuration of forces. (p 50)

The purpose of dialogue, then, is not necessarily to develop a common perspective. Rather, it is to do one's best to understand the differences between one's own position and that of others. At the same time, drawing from Mansbridge (1997), we must also acknowledge that certain positions and points of view have had more access to the public sphere. In acknowledging this reality, we must find ways to bring lesser-known perspectives to the fore.

## Imagination and Creativity

If you want something really important to be done, you must not merely satisfy reason, you must move the heart also.

—Gandhi

By now it should be clear that I see teaching as a moral, intellectual, political, social and emotional enterprise. I have long felt that all scholarly work requires intellectual rigour. Over the past few years I have begun to think more about the other types of rigour required—moral, political, social and emotional—and what these might mean in practice. This search has led me to experiment with nontraditional and creative ways of expressing knowledge and commitment.

In this area of my work I have been guided by a belief that we have traditionally privileged a very few forms of knowledge production and that these are not the only ways to either represent or access knowledge. I also believe that these forms have contributed to limiting

our understanding of what constitutes knowledge and to separating knowledge from commitment and art. For a number of years now I have asked my students to do at least one assignment that is not a traditional paper or presentation. I tell them that at the very least I hope it will give them an appreciation of the students they will encounter who do not express themselves most effectively through traditional academic forms. Additionally, I hope that they come to understand that tapping into their creativity allows them to connect with the issues we are studying on more than just an intellectual level.

I do not wish to imply that education should be less intellectually rigorous or that it should rest in the realm of make-believe; rather, I assert that we should encourage our students to find more creative ways to express and understand knowledge. Maxine Greene (1995), for example, has noted that imagination is necessary for building empathy and imagining new possibilities. Similarly, peace researchers such as Boulding (1999) and Smith and Carson (1998) have noted that encouraging creativity enhances the ability to think of different methods and approaches to addressing problems in general. "Seen in this light, all of the creative arts may have a special contribution to make in helping young people develop habits of creative thinking, particularly in seeking alternatives to violence in the solution of the problem" (Smith and Carson 1998, 165).

## Changing My Practice

It has been my experience that I am always true from my point of view and I am often wrong from the point of view of my honest critics. I know that we are both right from our respective points of view, and this knowledge saves me from attributing motives to my opponents as critics.

—Gandhi

By way of illustrating how these principles have come together to change my practice, I will discuss a lesson I have been teaching for several years and talk about how it has changed as I have moved toward a pedagogy of ahimsa.

For many years I have used a simulation activity from a Native Education Services Association handbook (Sawyer and Green 1989) to illustrate the process and results of colonialism. The participants in the simulation are assigned roles as colonial agents or members of a colonized group (adults and children). They are involved in a process that simulates to a small extent how colonialism operates. At the end of the process, those playing the children from the colonized group are asked to decide if they will remain part of their ancestral culture or adopt the colonial ways.

In the book in which the exercise appears, the authors suggest that students be given background on the impact of colonialism on Canada's First Nations peoples. The discussion after the activity is launched with the questions of who won the game, who won in reality and whether the real-life version of the game is ongoing. The first few

times I did this activity with my students, I facilitated the discussion much as the book recommends. The students had done readings in advance that focused on First Nations history and education. We discussed at length how colonialism was—and is—a reality in Canada. Though we always had a good discussion and most students went away feeling that they had learned a great deal from the activity, I was never quite satisfied with the process. The second year I used the activity, one of my most perceptive students wrote afterward in her journal that she had learned a lot but had left feeling horrible. She commented on the guilt she felt and asked if her only choices were to either accept or reject the guilt. And she wondered, as many other students have before and since, how she might move beyond the guilt to a place of action.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, I have used the same activity to illustrate structural violence. We talk about colonialism as one of the most virulent forms of structural violence, and we make links between this and other forms (specifically, homophobia and paternalism toward people with disabilities). The readings I ask my students to engage with before the class speak to the experiences of teachers and students who are particularly affected by colonialism, homophobia or ableism. In the discussion following the activity, we talk not about winners and losers but about how colonialism operated, how it continues to operate, how each of us is implicated in the process, how each of us is hurt by the process, what individuals did in

the past to disrupt colonialism and how we can work against it in each of our lives. We also talk about the connections between colonialism and other forms of structural violence. With this change of emphasis, I have received many fewer comments about guilt and more talk about the need for action.

## Ongoing Challenges

I would be the last to suggest that I have found the magic formula. If anything, I have more questions about the appropriateness of my pedagogy now than I did when I first began teaching more than 20 years ago.

In recent years I have been in unique teaching situations that have provided even more food for thought. Since the 2001/02 academic year, I have been part of a teaching team in the School, Community, and Global Connections program, a social-justice-focused cohort, in our secondary teacher education program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto. In 2003/04, most of our secondary program was organized into theme-based cohorts, and I have since also been part of the teaching team for a new cohort in Social Justice in Catholic Education. In addition, I have had the privilege of being part of the teaching team for the University of Alberta's summer institute, Building Peaceful Communities.

The students in the School, Community, and Global Connections cohort at OISE have generally had a background as community activists or have travelled and worked extensively

outside of Canada, often in developing countries. Typically, more than one-third of the students have a graduate degree, often with an emphasis on social justice. In short, they are politically committed individuals. My colleagues and I have often discussed that one of our biggest challenges in teaching this group is to shake them out of their own positions.<sup>4</sup> Many have a highly developed analysis of one aspect of social injustice (racism, for example) but have thought little about other aspects (ableism, for example). They know the language of social justice and are often impatient with those who do not.

They are certain of their convictions and make little room for others who do not agree with them. The comments I have received from some of them indicate that they are impatient with my emphasis on peace.<sup>5</sup> They do not agree with me when I say that anger is destructive: they want to embrace their anger and work from it. They want to continue to be social activists in the classroom. I have difficulty convincing them that classroom activism may require an approach different from that of community activism. Their existing analysis of injustice leads them to emphasize structures and systems to the point where they do not always see that they have agency and power.

The Social Justice in Catholic Education group has come together to work in the best of the existing Catholic social justice traditions. These students are generally younger than the School, Community, and Global Connections group, and they tend to have less life experience.

Most have not been community activists, but they have been involved with the Catholic Church and various Church-based social agencies. Rather than a political commitment, they come to social justice work out of a moral and spiritual commitment. In most respects they have been much more attracted by my peace education rhetoric and approach than the other group has been. They have a strong sense of their own agency and speak about the ways in which they hope to link their moral commitments to their work as teachers. Where I find my challenges with this group is in the need to insist on the importance of structures and systems in the perpetuation of structural violence. In more than one of our discussions on structural violence, for example, I have found myself having to respond to comments like "But all of the teachers I have seen are good people, so this sort of stuff just wouldn't happen."<sup>6</sup> My other major challenge with this group is to push them to think about the difference between social justice and charity. Some have commented that they see charity as a virtue and, therefore, are perplexed by my insistence that charity, in and of itself, is not sufficient.<sup>7</sup>

The students in the University of Alberta's summer institute were practising teachers and administrators, some of whom were also working on graduate degrees. They came in with a predisposition to learn about education for peace. One student told us that the concern peace educators have for spirituality meant nothing to him as an atheist. In fact, he was offended

by one of our guest speakers, who chose to include a group meditation as part of his presentation.<sup>8</sup> I was not able to have a direct conversation with the student about this issue. I did, however, work out what I would have said if the opportunity had arisen. Gandhiji used the terms *God*, *Truth* and *Love* interchangeably. We do not have to believe in God or any form of spirituality to engage in education for peace; however, we must be committed to working with and for love. I'm not sure that this answer would have been sufficient, and I wonder what I might have learned from the student if I had been able to talk to him.

My quest continues. I believe that the approach I have outlined and am trying to further develop holds promise as a means of teaching for peace and social justice. It is not the only way, nor is it inherently superior to other approaches to social justice. This is simply my way; it fits best for me. And I believe it might offer some ideas to teachers of children and youth, as well as adults. As I continue to teach committed educators, activists and community workers, I hope to refine this process even more.

Thich Nhat Hanh (2003, 57) has said, "The world is full of discrimination, violence, and hatred. If we allow ourselves to be caught by these negative energies, we cannot help each other or our planet. Instead we must cultivate freedom, solidity, and understanding." This is what I am trying to achieve through applying the principles of ahimsa to my teaching.

## Notes

1. The addition of the suffix *-ji* to a person's name is a sign of respect. Because my mother knew and learned from Gandhiji, it has been the practice in my family to refer to him in this way.
2. Note from personal teaching log, July 14, 2004.
3. Note from personal teaching log, December 5, 1996.
4. Note from personal teaching log, September 30, 2003.
5. Notes from personal teaching log, October 9, 2002, and September 23, 2003.
6. Note from personal teaching log, February 2, 2004.
7. Note from personal teaching log, April 19, 2004.
8. Note from personal teaching log, July 9, 2004.

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Photo by Sara Coumantarakis

# Being Socially Responsible in Your Financial Choices

*Michele Jolley*

When you buy things you need at the local discount store, do you consider how those products can be sold so cheaply? How and where were they made? Did the person who made them receive a decent wage?

When you invest your savings, do you consider what companies you are investing in to make your return? Are the companies you are supporting with your savings in line with your values?

We all reward with our purchases. The power we have in our spending and saving is immense. In fact, a revolution of sorts is being carried out by us—the consuming generation. We have the ability to effect change in the way a company acts just by making the decision to buy or not buy the company's product or company shares.

Stop to consider the impact of your financial choices.

## When Spending Money

What you buy, where you buy it, how you use it, how you dispose of it—these are all choices.

The items you buy have to be made or grown by someone. Some things are made with quality and

care, paid for with decent wages, and created using products and by-products that don't harm the environment. Other things are made using cheap labour, in poor working conditions and with little concern for the environmental impact.

Once you have bought the item, you use it and then discard it. How you dispose of the goods you buy depends on the choice you make: recycle or throw away. You can give to the poor your unwanted clothing, appliances and furniture; compost your organic waste; and recycle your plastics, paper and tins. Or you can just throw it all away.

The food you eat could have been grown on farms where no pesticides are used, or it could have been grown in a big field heavily treated with chemicals to make the product grow faster and bigger. The animals you eat could have been humanely treated before slaughter, or they could have lived a horrible life. People have begun to demand options. Not too long ago, you could not find organically grown food at the local supermarket. I was in Co-op recently and was really pleased to see the store advertising locally grown organic tomatoes. And they were very tasty, too.

## When Saving Money

What happens to your money when you place it in a savings account, an RRSP, an investment savings account or a stock portfolio, or even the money you save in your company pension plan or group RRSP? How is this money invested?

Banks generally lend out your savings to get a higher interest rate (for example, lending it back to you in the form of a mortgage or car loan), or they invest the money in other companies to get a higher return than they pay you. To whom does your bank lend your money, and in what companies does it invest? The same question can be asked for your longer-term savings. Where is your RRSP or your investment account invested? What companies are you supporting with your savings?

If you tend to buy organic produce, you might not want to own a pesticide company in your RRSP or investment mutual fund. Or if you are concerned about smoking as a health issue, you probably won't want to be a shareholder in a tobacco company. The same goes for investing in companies that produce weapons or have poor

environmental track records. Many times people are invested in these types of companies without knowing it; they are simply trying to save some money and don't necessarily consider how the returns are earned.

One way people can invoke change within companies is through ownership of company shares. If you have your savings in a mutual fund or if you are part of a pension plan (even CPP), then you own shares in companies. Every year shareholders vote on any changes put forward by other shareholders, and the company must abide by the shareholders' wishes. Shareholder voting on social and environmental issues is happening more and more. For example, both Pepsi and Coca-Cola have been responding to shareholder resolutions regarding their response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, because the workers in their plants in many developing

countries are seriously afflicted. Gary Hawton, chief executive officer of Meritas Mutual Funds (2004), said, "When company workers, customers, and market stability are all at risk—so is shareholder value. . . . We believe it's in both the company and shareholders' best interest to implement a proactive approach. It's also the moral thing to do." Visit the Social Investment Organization (SIO) website ([www.socialinvestment.ca](http://www.socialinvestment.ca)) for more information about this growing shareholder movement.

Another way to responsibly invest in a company is to research before you buy shares to determine if the company meets your social, ethical or environmental criteria. A handful of mutual funds in Canada will do the research for you and will screen out companies that have poor environmental track records, engage in poor labour relations and so on. The SIO

website also has information about these companies.

If you are concerned about how your money is being invested, talk to your financial advisor about the options you have for saving your money according to your beliefs.

It is through our individual voices, raised collectively, that we can make the world a better place for all living things.

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# Life in China: A Pictorial Special on Bicycles

*Gail Soliski*

During this year's spring break, students, staff and parents of Ottewell School ventured on a tour of four cities in China. As a teacher supervisor, I certainly enjoyed learning a thing or two! For example, it was the ancient Chinese who first envisioned yin and yang. In theory, they are opposites: yin is bright, and yang is dark; yin is substance, and yang is function. In reality, yin and yang are not opposites but, rather, two sides of the same thing, and each needs the other in order to exist.

Visitors to China initially notice the seemingly opposite trends that make up the country. There is the cosmopolitan, technological, high-fashion China we all know. But have you stopped to consider how people commute to their cosmopolitan, high-tech, fashionable jobs? They get there by riding their bicycles.

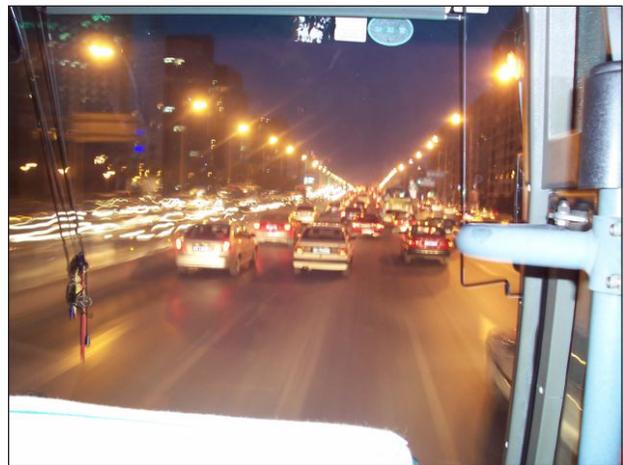
In Alberta, if you need to mend the eavestroughing on your garage, it can take months to find someone who will do such a little, insignificant job. What if you experienced that same scenario in a city of 15 million?



*A bike carrying eavestroughing*

How else would you get the materials to the job site? Remember the KISS theory—Keep It Simple, Sweetie?

More and more vehicles cram the streets of big cities in China.



*Beijing traffic at night*

But commuters can safely and calmly get to their destinations by bicycle.

Many bicycles have remained exactly as they were first used. However, in 2006, the Chinese government has encouraged commuters to upgrade their bikes with small electric motors, rather than drive cars, to prevent pollution.



*Everyone has a bike*

BMW's are becoming prevalent in China as the upper crust becomes thicker and people are anxious to show their wealth.

Resourceful people in China make money in a variety of ways. For example, how about selling yams, much like the British sell jacket potatoes?



*Yam vendor*

Don't underestimate the power of a bicycle. It can be used for more than triathlons!



*Don't underestimate your bike*



*The bike as a working tool*

While in Beijing, our school group took the Hutong Tour. Two by two, we sat in rickshaws while the drivers toured us through the narrow alleys of Beijing, taking us to dinner, showing us the waterfront and going slowly enough for us to wave at passersby, enjoying every minute. We couldn't help but squat on the floorboard and push with one foot when confronted with an incline, to help the drivers out. The bikes have no gears, and most of the drivers were quite small. It must have been exhausting work for them!



*Hutong Tour rickshaw drivers waiting for their turn*

Many Chinese are concerned with a healthy lifestyle, so they often walk or ride their bikes to the subway, then use the subway for the rest of their commute into the downtown core, where negotiating traffic becomes more difficult.



*Morning traffic, including bikes*



*Modes of bicycle transportation*



*These will keep riders dry*



*Morning commuters in Nanjing*

Looking at the bicycle parking lot from our tour bus, I envisioned who would ride what type of bike. How could people tell which bike was theirs in the crowded bicycle parking lot? What's the difference between an uppity upscale bike, a moderately upscale bike and an ordinary bike? We didn't have much time to really look, so I quickly snapped a few photos. What do you think?



*The variety of bikes in the parking lot*

Some lucky people get to ride directly to their place of employment or to the section of the city where they carry out their daily chores.



*The bicycle parking lot at the subway station*



*Bicycles, lanterns—it must be China!*



*Carrying groceries home*

Can we Canadians reorganize our workday to incorporate the bicycle more often as a working tool, rather than seeing the bike as merely a piece of exercise equipment or something to do with our young families? Perhaps we are underestimating the value of this amazing tool gathering dust in our garages. Yin is substance and yang is function. The bicycle is indeed both in China.

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*Gail Soliski teaches junior high at Ottewell School in Edmonton. She is an avid traveller and, in turn, extends hospitality to many exchange teachers who visit Alberta.*

# Rural Roots: A Youth Action Project

*Fiona Cavanagh and Matthew Gusul*

Change for Children's Rural Roots project is based on the idea that young people can act, to empower not only themselves but also each other in effecting positive, sustainable change in regard to global poverty and social injustice.

The project has involved the following activities:

- Tours of rural Alberta, where a core group of youth leaders perform popular theatre presentations
- The development of a youth action guidebook that discusses local and global issues and includes examples of young people involved in social justice around the province
- Assistance to young people in organizing educational events in their schools or communities
- The upcoming Rural Roots Youth Conference, to be held March 30–April 1, 2007, near Nordegg

Every fall, a tour of several rural communities is organized. Young people from both rural and urban areas of the province are trained to facilitate a popular theatre presentation that discusses the impact of globalization on the economy and culture of rural communities in Alberta and around the world. This style of popular theatre challenges students to

identify and understand the various points of view related to an issue. After the presentation, students are asked to come up with solutions to the problem, taking into consideration all the factors.

The tours have helped students to understand and identify with the situations presented and to come up with their own solutions. Tour participants are able to see the issues facing communities around the province and gain insight into how what is happening locally connects to global issues. The participants from urban areas are really happy to have the chance to visit rural areas, and they are amazed at the differences in the culture of the rural towns and the issues facing the communities in their areas.

The Rural Roots youth action guide provides young people with the skills to train their peers to be global citizens and to help them improve their ability to take informed action. We are searching the province for examples of young people who are effecting positive change in their communities and in the global community. We have found social justice groups in Alberta high schools, and we are getting the opinions of Alberta's youth on issues such as the water

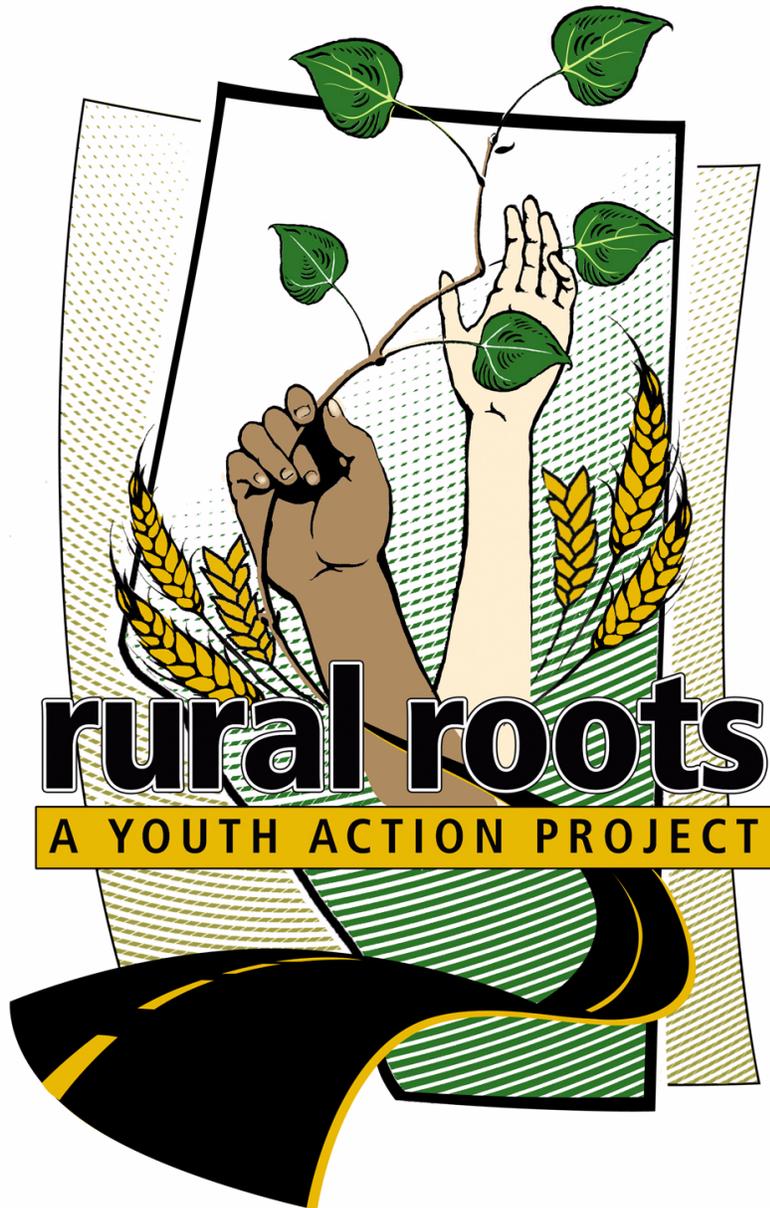
crisis, family farms versus factory farms, racism, poverty and more. The guide also helps young people in starting their own social justice group. The guide is available at [www.changeforchildren.org/pdfs/rractionguide.pdf](http://www.changeforchildren.org/pdfs/rractionguide.pdf).

Youth Action Days are educational initiatives organized by young people with the help of mentors (peers or rural community members) and Rural Roots staff. The youths choose a social issue of importance to them and organize a public-engagement initiative or event in their community or school. The objective of Youth Action Days is to provide a core group of rural youth volunteers with leadership training for social action. After the event, the young people involved showcase their Youth Action Day project at a Rural Roots Youth Conference.

March 30–April 1, 2007, marks the next Rural Roots Youth Conference, to be held at Nordegg's beautiful Goldeye Centre. The conference aims to explore global issues and local actions for change. Students will come together to learn, share, dream and take action on issues important to Alberta's youth in order to create strong, healthy communities at home and internationally.

The conference will foster and reinforce young people's interest in social issues and community leadership. They will leave with more knowledge of volunteerism, leadership experience and an increased capacity to play pivotal

roles in building stronger communities. As they bring their new knowledge and skills back to their schools and communities, these positive outcomes will ripple out to have a great impact on the future of Alberta.



## Benefits of Participation

Through participating in the Rural Roots project, young people will

- have the opportunity to share their experiences and develop new skills through work with peers;
- develop a deeper understanding of global issues;
- strengthen their ability to understand and contribute to topics on globalization, global and Canadian poverty, leadership, economic growth, human rights and volunteerism;
- gain insight into what it means to be an active, responsible citizen and the factors that affect and enhance youth volunteerism; and
- have the opportunity to use and improve their skills in leadership, critical thinking, interactive presentation and communication.

For more information, visit [www.changeforchildren.org](http://www.changeforchildren.org) or call (780) 448-1505.

The words of a 2004/05 Rural Roots youth tour participant best express the project's impact: "The Rural Roots project has profoundly influenced my life. It truly was an eye-opener for me" (Jason Long, Onoway).

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*Fiona Cavanagh is the education coordinator for the Change for Children Association, and Matthew Gusul is the Rural Roots coordinator.*

# Resources

## Green Street: Helping the Planet . . . One Classroom at a Time

The programs are very relevant. Students are learning about issues in the context of their own community, and they also get a sense of what other kids are thinking about in other communities. It's very meaningful.

—Grade 5 teacher

An energetic, highly educational, empowering, unbiased program. Exceptional!

—Grades 5/6 teacher

As a resource teacher in a small rural school, finding interesting and informative projects can be quite a challenge. Not anymore! Your website is an excellent resource for great ideas that encompass a wide range of learning styles and that actively involve all students. I have recommended your site to many of my colleagues. An excellent website. Keep up the great work.

—Grades 9–12 teacher

Discover opportunities to enhance your classroom by challenging your students to think critically about the environment, society and sustainability, and by supporting them in making the leap from ideas to action! All Green Street programs are curriculum-aligned and action-oriented, require minimal teacher preparation, and are free or low-cost.

Green Street delivers programs nationally and represents a standard of excellence in environmental learning and sustainability programs. It aims to deliver credible, accessible and affordable programs that are relevant to students' concerns, to encourage a sense of personal responsibility for the environment, to foster a commitment to sustainable living and to promote an enduring dedication to environmental stewardship.

Green Street links schools in Canada to reputable environmental

education organizations across the country. It offers opportunities for classes that range from discovering wetland ecology, to learning how to build a wind turbine, to writing letters to eco pen pals, to greening your school grounds. The program endeavours to actively engage students and teachers in environmental learning and sustainability education.

To browse the selection of new and returning programs available for classrooms in Alberta this year, visit [www.green-street.ca](http://www.green-street.ca). You can register for any program online. Just click on Book a Program. As a teacher, you are welcome to register for more than one program.

For more information, contact the Green Street coordinator, Allison Freeman, at [afreeman@green-street.ca](mailto:afreeman@green-street.ca) or 1-877-250-8201 (toll free).

Green Street is available in French at [www.marueverte.ca](http://www.marueverte.ca).

# *Teaching Controversial Issues:* A Free Guide from Oxfam

Oxfam, a leading international-development organization, has launched a free online resource that aims to help classroom teachers address major issues such as poverty, racism and terrorism. *Teaching Controversial Issues* forms part of Oxfam's work in educating members of the next generation in the hope that they will go on to fight global poverty. The guide is available at [www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/teachers/controversial\\_issues/downloads/teaching\\_controversial\\_issues.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/teachers/controversial_issues/downloads/teaching_controversial_issues.pdf).



# Kids Around the World

Kids Around the World ([www.katw.org](http://www.katw.org)) lets you and your students meet children from other parts of the world to see what it would be like to be a kid in the Americas, Europe, Asia or Africa.

The website takes a child-friendly approach that involves asking questions such as “How would you celebrate your birthday in Benin?” and “Would you like to fly a kite in the Dominican Republic?” Through the answers of real-life children around the world, students receive first-hand knowledge of other cultures.

This project of the US National Peace Corps Association has recently added Haiti, Mozambique and Sudan to the countries profiled.



*GEOEC at the Beginning Teachers' Conference*

# Permission for Use of Photographs or Student Work

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) requests the permission of parents/guardians for the reproduction of photographs depicting their children and/or the reproduction of work assignments completed by their children. The photograph/work will be reproduced in the Global, Environmental and Outdoor Education Council (GEOEC) newsletter, *Connections*, and is intended for teacher professional development.

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**Name of student** \_\_\_\_\_

**I, \_\_\_\_\_ (printed name of parent/guardian of student), agree to the use of this photograph/work for the purpose stated above.**

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Relationship to student** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**Postal code** \_\_\_\_\_

We have recently begun posting archived issues of *Connections* on the GEOEC website ([www.geoec.org/newsletter](http://www.geoec.org/newsletter)). Are you willing to have your child's written work posted on the Internet as well?

- Yes, I agree to have my child's written work posted on the GEOEC website.
  - Yes, I agree to have my child's written work posted on the GEOEC website, using a first name only.
  - No, I do not want my child's written work posted on the GEOEC website.
- 

**Please fax or mail forms to**

**Karen Virag  
Publications Supervisor  
The Alberta Teachers' Association  
11010 142 Street NW  
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Phone (780) 447-9491  
Fax (780) 455-6481**



**The Alberta Teachers' Association**



# Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council

## Mission Statement

To promote involvement in quality global, environmental and outdoor education

## Objectives

- To provide a vehicle for Alberta teachers for professional development and communication in global, environmental and outdoor education
- To study and make professional recommendations about global, environmental and outdoor education issues
- To network with other provincial organizations that have similar concerns

## Membership

- Regular member—Members of the Alberta Teachers' Association, as specified in ATA bylaws, are entitled to full privileges of council membership, including the rights to vote and to hold office.
- Student member—Student members of the ATA are entitled to all benefits and services of council membership except the right to hold office.
- Affiliate member—Persons who are not ATA members as specified by ATA bylaws receive all the benefits and services of council membership except the rights to vote and to hold office.

## Publications

- The GEOEC recognizes the wide range of interests among members and strives to foster the exchange of ideas and provide information and articles relating to

the various components of the elementary and secondary curricula through publication of *Connections*.

## Annual Conference

- The annual conference features a blend of activities, indoors and outdoors, ranging from hands-on workshops to social gatherings. All grade levels are represented in sessions. The emphasis is on practical information and application. The annual general meeting of the GEOEC is held in conjunction with the conference.

## Executive

- Volunteer teachers are elected to serve on the GEOEC executive.
- Contact the president of the GEOEC through the ATA office if you are interested in running for a position.
- Elections take place at the annual general meeting during the conference.

## Environmental Action Representatives (EARs)

- News to and from your provincial area is relayed through a person acting as a GEOEC representative for that school area.
- If you are interested in being an EAR for your school, please indicate so on your membership application.

## Enviroshops

- Various activities and workshops organized by the council
- Presentations in different locations around the province

## JOIN NOW AND BECOME INVOLVED IN THE GLOBAL, ENVIRONMENTAL & OUTDOOR EDUCATION COUNCIL

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Alberta Teaching Certificate No \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

School or Employer \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level/Specialty \_\_\_\_\_

New Membership

Renewal of Membership

\$25.00 Regular and Affiliate Membership

\$12.50 Student Membership

\$45.00 2-year membership

\$30.00 Subscription for nonmembers

\$65.00 3-year membership

I would be interested in serving as an Environmental Action Representative Yes  No

Make cheque payable to the Alberta Teachers' Association and mail it with the application to the Association at 11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton T5N 2R1.



# GEOEC Executive 2006/07

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Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council

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GEOEC website: [www.geoec.org](http://www.geoec.org)

