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**Keeping the Faith:
Teaching and Social Responsibility
in Challenging Times**

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Keeping the Faith
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by
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It's been a tough ten months. The images are seared in our minds: the planes crashing into the World Trade Center; bombs falling on Afghanistan; Palestinian suicide bombers killing Israeli civilians; Israeli tanks leveling Palestinian settlements; India and Pakistan exchanging threats and gunfire and raising the specter of nuclear war. The pain of the world lies heavy upon us. We fear what the future will bring—for ourselves and for the children we are working so hard to nurture in our schools and homes.

The continuing crisis has also spawned many stories of heroism. That's what I'm going to focus on this morning. Police officers and firefighters have received acclaim for their bravery and sacrifice—as they should. But let's not forget the teachers! Teachers too—including, I bet, all of you sitting in this room—filled many an “unforgiving minute with 60 seconds worth of distance run” during this most challenging of school years.

And so I'm going to begin by telling some stories of teachers who in the hard, long months after September 11 “did the right thing.” Like the police officers and fire fighters, these teachers would say, “It was nothing. I was just doing my job.” They would be right. They were just doing their jobs. But to me a “hero” is someone who does ordinary things under extraordinary circumstances.

Public School 2 (not its real name—I have changed all of the names of the schools I'm going

to talk about) has families of many different backgrounds, including Christians, Jews, and Muslims, who are recent immigrants from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia. Educators for Social Responsibility Metropolitan Area (ESR Metro) has worked with the school since 1985, training and coaching teachers and students in conflict resolution. Two families lost fathers and one teacher lost her brother in the World Trade Center tragedy. After a series of meetings, the school leadership team hit on the idea of involving the school's families in creating a mural as a memorial to the people lost and an affirmation of the school's long-time commitment to nonviolence and celebration of diversity. They got permission to use an outdoor wall of the school's annex that is visible from the street. Kathleen, the school's art teacher, threw herself into the project, guiding more than 50 parents and children who came out on four Saturdays this spring to create a beautiful mural celebrating the cultures represented in the school. The project had special significance for Kathleen because she was the teacher who had lost her brother on September 11.

Public School 4's students are primarily Latino with small numbers of Chinese and South Asian Muslims. Immediately after September 11, fourth and fifth graders in the after-school program organized bake sales through which they raised nearly \$500 for victims of the World Trade Center attacks. In October, a police officer

came to an after-school assembly of the fourth and fifth graders to accept the money the children had raised and to speak about the rescue efforts. During the question and answer time, a fifth grader raised his hand and asked if it was true that the United States was bombing Afghanistan. When the officer answered yes, the entire auditorium spontaneously burst into applause.

The incident stirred concerns among school faculty, who were sure that the children did not fully understand what they were applauding. Accordingly, with some assistance from me, Petra, a fifth grade teacher, and Julio, the library teacher, set about educating the students about the war in Afghanistan.

To find out what students knew, we began by writing “Afghanistan” on the chalkboard and asking for their associations with the word. We corrected misinformation (“No, Afghanistan is not in Africa. Here it is on the map.”)

We explained that Afghanistan had not attacked the United States and that the terrorists were not Afghanis; according to available information, the attacks were carried out by Al Qaeda, a terrorist organization using Afghanistan as a base. We gave mini-lessons on Afghanistan, Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, the Middle East, and Israel and the Palestinians. We encouraged students with diverse points of view to share their views:

“I’m glad we’re bombing them. They deserve it for letting Osama bin Laden use their country as a base.”

“But we’re killing the wrong people. We’re killing civilians—women and children—but the terrorists aren’t even there.”

Julio was struck by the level of hostility and desire for revenge on the part of some boys, which he attributes to their watching the World Wrestling Federation on television. He challenged them, reminding them that violence begets violence and pointing out the difficulty of finding the people actually responsible for the attacks. Says Julio: “I tried to get them to think critically rather than just go with their gut reaction.”

To give the students some background on Islam, Petra read the students *Magid Fasts for Ramadan*, an excellent children’s book about an 11-year-old Egyptian boy who wants to fast but comes into conflict with his parents who feel he’s too young. Through an engaging story about a

family, the book provides a wealth of information about Muslim traditions and many starting places for discussion.

As events unfolded, Petra and Julio continued to provide time for sharing of information, opinions, and discussion. Their aim was not to push a particular point of view but, as we say in *ESR Metro*, to “complicate” the students’ thinking.

P.S. 8 has a mix of low-income and middle-class children. The school is tracked, and many of the middle-class children are in “talented and gifted” (TAG) classes. In dealing with September 11 and its aftermath, Amy, a second grade teacher, took her lead from her students. In her classroom, children had many avenues for expressing themselves. In weekly community meetings, for example, they could talk about what was happening, share their feelings, and ask questions. They could write in their journals or express themselves through drawing, painting, and collage. “I let them know that their questions were important and relevant,” says Amy. “I avoided being the source of answers. My role was to facilitate. Disagreements would arise. Micaela would say, ‘The Afghan people don’t have the food they need to survive. We ought to try to help. Could we donate food or money?’ Tyler would respond, ‘Why? What good would that do?’ I tried to help them learn how to discuss and share their perspectives without attacking each other and closing down communication.” One of Amy’s deep concerns is the tracking system in the school. She has objected to it at faculty meetings, but her concerns are brushed aside with the retort that without tracking the middle-class parents would flee. Undaunted, Amy and the teacher of the second grade TAG class got permission to combine their classes several times a week for a variety of activities. Although not a complete victory, Amy sees this as a step in the right direction.

I.S. 10 is a small middle school whose students are African-American, Latino, and Arab. The Arab students are recent immigrants from Yemen, whose dominant language is Arabic. They spend the day in separate bilingual classes, and tend to stay together as a group on the playground during the lunch-time recess. Before September 11, there had been tension and an occasional fight between Arabic-speaking students and other students in the school. Not surprisingly, after September 11, the tension

increased. One day this spring, after an altercation broke out on the playground, a group of African-American and Latino students chased Arab students into the school. Someone broke a bottle for use as a weapon, and one of the Arab students was cut. The school administration dealt with the incident through the usual disciplinary processes, but everyone acknowledged that the tension needed to be addressed on a deeper level.

Bea, a social studies teacher, and Debbie, a staff developer in the school, rose to the occasion. Bea is African-American; and Debbie is Muslim—she was born in Yemen and immigrated to the United States at age three. Bea involved her eighth grade homeroom class in writing letters and providing a gift as a gesture of sympathy and support for the Arab student who had been injured. She set up a program of “reading partners”: Every Thursday, students from her class would pair up with Arabic-speaking students and they would read together. Some students resisted (“I don’t want to go with those Ay-rabs!” one said), but Bea persisted. Meanwhile, Debbie was going from class to class, sharing her experiences as an Arab and Muslim and answering students’ questions. The tension didn’t go away. (“Why don’t they act more like black people?” one of Bea’s students asked.) But the issues were on the table, and some dialogue was occurring. In June, with Bea and Debbie taking the lead, a broadly representative committee of staff and students organized a culminating multicultural celebration, which included classroom presentations by speakers on various aspects of Arab and Islamic culture; dancing, music, and poetry in the auditorium; and a feast of ethnic food prepared by parents. If you’re thinking this is the happy ending of this story, well it wasn’t exactly. For as part of the presentation in the auditorium, two students from another small school in the building read poems that the UFT (United Federation of Teachers) chapter chairperson, who is Jewish, found offensive. He wrote a letter to the administration protesting the poems, and got six other teachers to sign on. Soon the teachers who signed the letter had put Israeli flags up on the doors of their classrooms. After a series of meetings and conversations, the hullabaloo died down. Debbie assured the teachers that no one had intended to give offense. The chapter chairperson acknowledged that he might have overreacted. But Debbie and Bea would be the first to

acknowledge that the work at this school has just begun. Bea observed: “You’re obligated to try and do something. You’re never sure where it’s going to end up. But you have to do something.”

Some common threads run through these stories:

The teachers saw a need—of their students, of their school community—and they responded.

They stuck their necks out, took some risks.

They departed from the curriculum, went beyond their job descriptions. An eighth grade teacher whom I loved—Mr. Pletzer—used to give out “ABCD” awards to students who made extraordinary efforts. ABCD stood for “Above and Beyond the Call of Duty.” Kathleen, Petra, Julio, Amy, Bea, and Debbie surely deserve ABCD awards.

They weren’t sure what their efforts would lead to—the territory they were exploring was uncharted.

Above all, they were doing the best they could to fulfill their duty as teachers in a multicultural, democratic society: to prepare students to understand and work with people of diverse backgrounds, to help students understand that their opinions count, to inform them about the issues of the day, to give them opportunities to sharpen their thinking in dialogue with others whose perspectives may differ from theirs, and to show them that they share the responsibility for creating a fairer and more peaceful world. In short, these teachers were “keeping the faith”—the faith that I refer to in the title of this talk.

Keeping the faith means pursuing the highest aim of education in a democratic society, which is to foster in students the values and skills of democratic citizenship. It is to help them imagine a world where people treat each other with fairness and respect, to enable them to have personal experience of such a world in their classroom and school, and to imbue them with the convictions and skills they need now and in the future to move humanity toward that vision.

I don’t need to tell you how tall an order that is.

Never has humanity faced greater challenges. President Bush speaks of an axis of evil. If there is an axis of evil, it’s not Iran, Iraq, and North Korea, as the President would have us believe. It is rather the degradation of the environment, the chasm between rich and poor, and a world awash in weapons.

As educators in a democratic society, we ought to be preparing citizens to understand and address these issues. Instead, teachers are under intense pressure to “cover” pre-set curricula full of what Alfred North Whitehead called “inert ideas.” And while New York State keeps raising the bar, it balks at providing the state’s poorest children with resources for even the “sound, basic education” required by the state constitution.

It’s “no easy walk to freedom!” as the Peter, Paul, and Mary song says. What should educators be doing to keep the faith in these challenging times?

Three broad tasks lie before us.

First, we need to teach social studies. This seems obvious, but the pressure to prepare kids for reading and math tests has pushed everything else to the margins in many schools. We must not give in to this pressure. We must protest the increasing tendency of centralized authorities to dictate what teachers teach and enforce their dictates with high-stakes standardized tests. And we must be clever in finding win-win solutions—ways to help kids meet legitimate standards without sacrificing good teaching. For example, ESR Metro’s high school curriculum on nuclear weapons includes lessons specifically designed to prepare students for part of the Regents exam that has “document-based questions.” And when we in ESR Metro found that our conflict resolution programs were being shunted aside by the focus on literacy, we developed The 4Rs Program (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution), which integrates conflict resolution and language arts for grades k-5.

There are so many wonderful picture and chapter books about social studies topics that elementary school teachers can make a great contribution to students’ understanding of their country and world simply through their choice of books to read aloud and discuss with their students. I’m talking about books like *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Palaco, which can open up the whole topic of immigration; *Encounter* by Jane Yolen, which portrays the coming of the Spanish to Puerto Rico through the eyes of a Taino boy; or *Harriet Tubman* by Ann McGovern. All of these books, and many more, are part of ESR Metro’s 4Rs curriculum.

In many of our classrooms and schools, there are tremendous opportunities for social studies learning if we simply give the kids and their par-

ents a chance to meet and learn from each other. I have described how Bea and Debbie began to do that at their school. In orchestrating the mural project at her school, Kathleen set the stage for lots of informal learning among families from diverse backgrounds. The 4Rs curriculum includes an activity in which children create banners with words and symbols representing values and traditions important in their families; then each child presents the banner to the class, explaining what the symbols mean and sharing information about their culture. Teachers invariably find that the sharing of “family banners” is rich; it opens up conversation among students and is a good first step in promoting intercultural understanding.

The field of social studies lends itself to projects like the one that was a high point of my older daughter’s elementary school education: an eight-week integrated study of the Civil Rights Movement culminating in a play that involved all of the students in the class and told the story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Especially in these times, a social studies curriculum worth its salt must also make room for current events. With the ubiquity of television, even young children are exposed to what’s going on in the world. I have described how Amy provided avenues for her second graders to express their concerns and questions through class meetings, journals, and art; and how Petra and Julio corrected misinformation and deepened the understanding of their fifth graders about the war in Afghanistan. After September 11, Tom Goodridge, a teacher of five-to-seven year olds with developmental disabilities in Harlem, used play therapy to help his young children deal with the traumatic images they’d seen on television and with the grim conversations they heard their parents having. They built towers and airplanes from Legos, took turns knocking down the towers with the planes, then after a discussion of the human consequences of a building collapsing, brainstormed what they could do to help and acted out rescue efforts.

So this is our first broad task: to teach social studies. I hope you’ll bear with me for a few more minutes as I discuss what I think is involved in teaching social studies well—whether we are teaching about current events or American history or “communities around the world” or, with the youngest children, the family and the neighborhood.

The name I'm going to give to what I consider good social studies teaching is "teaching for understanding." In *The Unschooled Mind*, Howard Gardner argues that the simplistic views of the world that crystallize when we are young (say five or six years old) are stubbornly resistant to teachers' efforts to bring them more in line with what is known—whether in science or the humanities. For example, a student will spend weeks studying the tangled causes of World War I, and then turn around and explain current events in terms of good guys and bad guys. (Our President has a tendency to do the same thing, I might add.) In short, Gardner is saying that it's not at all easy to do what Petra and Julio were trying to do with their fifth graders, that is, to complicate their thinking. But complicating our students' thinking is exactly our project, if we're teaching for understanding.

How can we effectively challenge students' simplistic views of the world and help them understand reality in its richness and complexity? This is one of the main questions Educators for Social Responsibility has been paying attention to since our founding 20 years ago. The approach we've developed over the years begins with the art of inquiry. Foremost among the skills of inquiry is asking good questions. I'm not talking here about the teacher asking good questions, important as that is. I'm talking about developing our students' ability to ask good questions. "Why did they attack us?" "Are we safe now?" "Why did the buildings fall down?" Those were some of the questions Amy's second graders were asking in the wake of September 11. When I asked Amy what she felt was the most important thing she did in addressing September 11 and its aftermath with her class, she answered: "To provide space for children to ask questions—and sometimes the questions are the answers. Sometimes you have to live in the confusion."

Her comments brought to mind these words from Rainer Maria Rilke in his *Letters to a Young Poet*: "Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart. And try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a foreign language. Don't search for answers that could not be given to you now because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then some day far in the future you will gradually without even knowing it, live

your way into the answer." Good advice for a young poet—and for young students and their teachers as well.

ESR Metro has short curriculum pieces on our website that engage students in beginning inquiries on current controversial topics. A piece that's especially useful for elementary teachers is our "Ten Point Model for Dealing with Controversial Issues." I used this approach in helping Petra and Julio launch their inquiry into the war in Afghanistan with their students. It begins with the teacher writing a key word (for example, "Afghanistan") in the middle of the chalkboard or a piece of chart paper and asking the students to share the words, ideas, and thoughts that come to mind in response to that word. The teacher charts the students' responses, drawing lines from the key word to the responses—thus we call it a "web." After five or ten minutes, the web has a wealth of information about the students' knowledge (or lack of knowledge) about the topic. Questions often come out as well. The web is a starting place for inquiry. The teacher can correct misinformation, perhaps answer some of the students' questions, and select one or more of the questions for follow-up research.

Another aspect of teaching for understanding is approaching a question from multiple perspectives. Perspectives include: historical, political, geographical, economic, cultural and religious, and ethical. To understand and evaluate our government's actions in Afghanistan, for example, students should know where Afghanistan is located, its size, what the land and climate are like. They should know something of its history. They should know how many people live there and how they live and provide for their basic needs. They should know something of the cultural traditions, including religion. They should understand the political situation—the Taliban and their relationship to Osama bin Laden. Then, of course, they need information about the war—how our government is conducting it, how it's affecting the people of Afghanistan. Last but not least, there are the questions of right and wrong. Is the United States justified in waging war in Afghanistan? If not, why not? Did we have other options besides going to war? If so, what were they? If we're justified in waging war, are we conducting the war in the most humane way under the circumstances? What's our responsibility to the ordi-

nary people in Afghanistan? These are the kinds of questions students ought to be grappling with. They may not find or agree upon the answers. But we *can* hope to “complicate” their thinking enough so that at least they won’t cheer the bombing of Afghanistan—or of any country.

A third aspect of teaching for understanding is constructive controversy—encouraging debate, dialogue, and disagreement in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Controversy is a great motivator and an excellent strategy for sharpening students’ thinking. We can expose students to opposing points of view on issues through newspaper articles and statements of public figures as well as through discussion with their classmates. One useful activity that we use a lot in our curricula is “the opinion continuum.” One end of the classroom is designated as “strongly agree,” the opposite end is “strongly disagree,” the middle of the room is “not sure.” The teacher reads a statement, and students go to the part of the room that matches their response. Turning to students standing in the “strongly agree” area, the teacher asks for a volunteer or two to explain why they’re standing there. Then students in the “strongly disagree” section explain their thinking. Finally, the students in the middle say why they chose to stand there. With the teacher facilitating, students may respond to their classmates’ statements and argue back and forth. We usually introduce the opinion continuum with statements on light topics, such as “Vanilla ice cream is the best.” But we use the activity also to elicit students’ opinions on hot topics: “Children’s television watching should be limited to one hour a day” or “It’s a good idea to begin every school day with the Pledge of Allegiance” or “The United States is right to bomb Afghanistan.” If the discussion gets heated, the teacher can ask students to paraphrase what they’ve just heard before making their own statement. Through this activity, students see that different people have different opinions on different issues and that that’s okay. They can agree to disagree. The teacher can appreciate the bravery of a student who is standing alone, stating an opinion that no one else in the room agrees with. The students get to hear their fellow students’ thinking, and sometimes they change their minds as a result.

So if we are going to keep the faith, our first broad task is to bring social studies back into the elementary curriculum. I hope I’ve communicated my enthusiasm for the many rich and quite

practical ways to do this. And I hope my suggestions for how to do this well—to teach for understanding—make sense to you.

Let’s move on now. Our second broad task is to strengthen community in our classrooms and schools. I first experienced the power of a liberating community at the East Harlem Block Schools. The Block Schools began as nursery schools founded by a group of Puerto Rican parents with anti-poverty funds in 1965. A few years later they added an elementary school and a few years after that a college program for parents. I worked at the Block Schools for seven years as teacher-director of the elementary school. One of the best friends I made at the Block Schools is Anna Rivera. In 1966, Anna was a high school dropout running a candy store and living with her husband and two small children in a room separated from the store by a curtain. She was isolated and depressed, and saw no future for herself. She even contemplated ending her life and the lives of her children. Fortunately, she saw a flyer advertising the Block Schools, and she enrolled her son in the three-year-olds class. That turned out to be the beginning of a new life for Anna. She started out volunteering in classrooms and serving on school committees (the schools were parent-controlled); then she became an assistant teacher and later parent coordinator. She earned her high school equivalency diploma and, by 1978, had earned a Bachelor’s Degree from Goddard College through the Block Schools’ college program. After several years as director of the college program, she returned to the classroom as head teacher of the three-year-olds in one of the Block Nurseries, a post she held until her retirement a couple of years ago. “Looking back,” she says, “I can see that I needed a body of people real bad. Before I got involved, it was just my kids, my husband, and me. That was my whole life. My parents were in Puerto Rico. I had no family here except my own. So I attached myself to the school. My husband used to discourage me in everything. He wanted to keep me that way I was when I first came to the schools so that he could control me. He was to be the main one. I was to be a mother, wife, and housekeeper—that was all. At the schools, it was different. When I’d say, ‘I can’t go on,’ people would say, ‘Oh yes you can. You can do it, Anna. Where you need help? And I’d say, ‘I don’t really need help—I just need you to tell me that I can do it.’ And they did. Constantly. That’s why I’m still here.”

Not all communities are liberating. Sometimes I'll hear people say of their schools, "We're like a family here"—and I think to myself: Well, that may be a good thing or a bad thing depending on what kind of family we're talking about. We have a romantic notion of the virtues of "family" despite the fact that many of us fled from our families as fast as we could. Some communities can be stifling. And even the best community can't be everything to everybody. In my book, *A SCHOOL OF OUR OWN: Parents, Power, and Community at the East Harlem Block Schools*, I provide a portrait of the Block Schools, warts and all, show how people's lives were changed, and try to understand why it worked as well as it did. Many factors contributed to the Block Schools' success and staying power, but the essential ingredient was this: a group of people of diverse racial and class backgrounds coming together with a common goal (of educating young children) and a shared commitment to work together on a basis of mutual respect, challenging oppressive attitudes and practices rooted in racism, sexism, and class bias. As the story in the book unfolds, you see how that commitment played out in practice. It wasn't easy. Growing up in a racist, sexist, class-based society, we all absorb attitudes about ourselves and others that affect our personal horizons, our expectations of others, and our relationships. And while dealing with these internal issues, the parents had to fight "the system" (in this case, the city's day care bureaucracies) to preserve the very qualities of the schools that were making them effective. But through their ups and downs people cared about each other over a long period of time and that made all the difference.

A liberating community is one of the best antidotes to the trauma of an event like the September 11 attacks. Looking back on the past year, everyone on my staff at ESR Metro mentions our "Listening Circles" as a high point. In the weeks following the attacks, those of us who were in the office at a designated time (usually about six people) would gather, and each of us would have five minutes to say whatever was on our minds. While each of us took a turn, the others listened, paying good attention. The Listening Circles brought us closer together as a staff, and gave us the strength we needed to cope with the situation. We encouraged teachers to have Listening Circles at their schools. When we

take an airplane flight, we're told that if there's a sudden change in cabin altitude, we should put the oxygen mask on ourselves first, then on our children. And as educators we have to take care of ourselves if we're going to do our best thinking about the children.

In the stories that opened my talk, we saw teachers struggling to strengthen community in their schools and classrooms: Kathleen's mural, Bea's reading partners, Bea and Debbie's multicultural celebration, Amy's efforts to challenge tracking and build bridges between the classes at her school. These efforts are critically important to the effectiveness of our schools and the well-being of our children.

You probably read in the paper of the study commissioned by the New York City Board of Education that found that months after the attacks, large numbers of children throughout the city are still showing symptoms of trauma. One of the most interesting findings of the study is that for a majority of children, September 11 was not the first major trauma they had experienced in their lives. I'm sure that finding comes as no surprise to you, but I'm glad the study documented it.

A principal of a Brooklyn elementary school told me that she went into the school cafeteria recently and two girls came up to her crying. "What's wrong?" she asked. "They took my father to jail!" one of the girls sobbed. "They took my father to jail too," sobbed the other girl. While Yvette sat with them, they cried and cried. It turned out that the arrests—two separate incidents—had happened more than a year ago. Because the girls had been acting out, the guidance counselor had involved them in an anger management course. In this class, one of the girls had shared the story of her father's arrest. Her father owed drug dealers some money. They had come to the apartment with guns. The girl and her mother had hidden under the bed and finally managed to call 911. When the police came, the men with guns got away, and her father was arrested. Hearing that story, the other girl told hers. Thus, the girls found each other and a sympathetic adult to hear their story. Their tears were part of their healing. Their misbehavior stopped.

Our schools are full of hurt and angry children. They need adults who will listen and understand, and are able to create classroom communities where students can be there for

each other. They also need lots more guidance counselors like the one at P.S. 24!

ESR Metro is trying to help strengthen community in classrooms through our 4Rs Program, which I mentioned earlier. The thrust of the 4Rs is building a caring classroom community. In the first unit, the teacher and students construct their vision of what they want their classroom to be. Subsequent units give students and teachers tools for moving toward their vision (for example, listening well, handling feelings, acting assertively, solving problems nonviolently).

Children aren't the only ones who are hurt, angry, and overwhelmed. In the wake of September 11, adults in many schools have been sorely tested. There were the schools that had to evacuate and set up temporary quarters for their students in other schools. And then there was the directive from the Chancellor that all of the schools in New York City should begin the day with the Pledge of Allegiance. In the heated emotional climate after September 11, the issue of the Pledge created tension among some school staffs. In a faculty meeting at one school, for example, a teacher expressed her reservations about the pledge, saying she found it meaningless for young children. Her statement brought a quick and angry reply from a teacher she'd always considered her friend: "My husband [a firefighter] lost 12 friends in the World Trade Center. I don't want to hear anybody putting down the Pledge or my country. For all those who died, it's the least we can do."

Controversial issues will continue to arise, and school faculties need ways they can discuss issues and share feelings without impugning other people's motives or patriotism. Like the children, the adults need processes for engaging in non-confrontational dialogue. It's best to put these processes in place and practice them before a hot issue comes up. The "opinion continuum" is useful for adults as well as children, but ESR Metro has lots of other strategies to help adult groups deal well with conflict and strong feelings.

So our first broad task is to teach social studies. Our second is to strengthen community. *Our third is to speak up.* Here I am talking as much to myself as to you. In his remarks at ESR's 20th anniversary celebration recently, Ted Sizer challenged us to look inward, to clean up our own house. "Listen for the silences," he said. "Attend to what nobody is paying attention to." He gave

two examples of these silences. One is the profoundly inequitable financing of schools. "We talk about standards of achievement," he said, "but not about standards of fairness." A second is the assault on intellectual freedom. Here he was referring not only to those who question the patriotism of anyone who disagrees with Bush administration policies but to the growing tendency to give the content and shape of the curriculum over to centralized authorities and to enforce their authority with standardized tests. Sizer recalled how Nathan Pusey, then president of Harvard University, stood up to Senator McCarthy in the 1950s. "I don't see that kind of backbone now," he says. "I see instead the timidity of our profession. We have our private passions, but organized voices are publicly acquiescent."

Sizer's message hit home. As far as ESR Metro is concerned, we've been so absorbed in providing service to hundreds of public schools throughout New York City that we haven't spoken up as much as we should have in recent years about issues like school funding. But the work we're doing to teach kids life skills and strengthen school communities will be seriously undermined if the schools don't receive adequate funding. And no matter how clever we are, our efforts to teach kids to question and understand will be severely limited if high stakes standardized tests become the only measure of success.

To Ted Sizer's two issues on which educators need to speak up, I would add a third: the aggressive new military and geopolitical doctrine that the Bush administration is enunciating under the guise of the war on terrorism. If implemented, this new strategic doctrine, as described recently in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, and *The Nation*, will cost a huge amount of money not only for the next few years but for decades to come, effectively eliminating the possibility of increased funding to improve education, provide adequate health care, clean up the environment, or reduce poverty—any time in the foreseeable future. Bush's plan would also have us develop a new generation of nuclear weapons. And in my view it doesn't offer one whit of protection from the kind of attack we experienced on September 11. In fact, it will only make the world our children have to grow into immeasurably more dangerous.

Educators concerned about the danger of nuclear war founded ESR Metro 20 years ago.

Our first act was to mobilize teachers to take part in the June 12 march that drew a million people to Central Park to protest the nuclear arms race and support a nuclear freeze. The nuclear freeze movement of the 1980s spurred millions of people to action, created widespread public awareness of the danger of nuclear war, and contributed to ending the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. Jonathan Schell, Randy Forsberg, William Sloane Coffin and others who led the movement 20 years ago are now calling for a new movement to confront the nuclear dangers we're facing in 2002. We need to lend our hearts, minds, hands, and voices to that movement.

We must not get so absorbed in the day-to-day that we neglect the big picture. To paraphrase Bea, "We're obligated to try and do something. We're never sure where it's going to end up. But we have to do something." And miracles can happen. In our lifetimes we've seen the Soviet Union collapse and apartheid in South Africa come to an end without the bloodbath most of us expected. Those outcomes were the

result of good leadership, not only on the part of the famous people whose names are in the papers—the Gorbachevs, the Mandelas—but on the part of so-called ordinary citizens like you and me.

"What can ordinary people do when they face an enormous fire?" asks Amos Oz, the Israeli novelist. "They can try to flee the flames, abandoning to their fate all those who either cannot run or have nowhere to run to. They can stand around and moan. They can blame others. And they can also fill the teaspoons they hold in their hands with water, over and over again, and splash it on the blaze. Everyone of us has a teaspoon. During these days, every man and woman of peace must draw water—at least enough to fill the spoons they hold—and pour it on the fire: make their voices heard..."

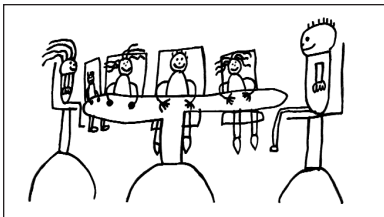
The teaspoons we educators have are as good as anybody's. And as we use them, we may find that they grow into tablespoons, or cups, or gallon jugs, or even—why not—a hook and ladder company!

Tom Roderick has served as executive director of Educators for Social Responsibility Metropolitan Area (ESR Metro) since 1983. In 1985, he co-founded the nationally recognized Resolving Conflict Creativity Program as a collaboration of ESR Metro and the New York City Board of Education.

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The Child Development Institute was established in 1987 to enhance existing programs in child development at Sarah Lawrence College and to serve as a base for new activities.

Through its ongoing programs, conferences, lectures, and films, the Institute continues to serve as a resource for professionals in child development and education.



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