Teaching to Transgress (20)

Students naturally identify with good teachers and value their knowledge highly. A possible side-effect, however, is that the student may become reluctant to “go against” the teaching of their mentor/hero/professor. This reluctance occurs with respect to individual teachers as well as to society as a whole.

To prevent stagnation of knowledge, one useful strategy is for the teacher, as an integral part of their teaching, to teach “transgression”; that is, to go against the “received wisdom” — to test and rebel against it. The scope of such transgression should be wide and include all of a society’s rules, prejudices, and attitudes. Given the numerous levels of resistance, it is necessary to have active mechanisms that work toward change. The impacts of change need to be carefully evaluated, of course, because not all changes, even well-intentioned ones, work well. At the same time, however, the need for challenge and change has probably never been greater. All living organisms have the capacity to change with each new generation.

Written by John Thomas

Fair Trade (21)

Around the globe, production, trade and retailing of most goods and services are increasingly concentrated under the control of a few corporations. Fair trade associations made up of fair trade wholesalers, retailers, producers and consumers are needed to foster a more equitable and sustainable system of production and trade that benefits people and their communities. Fair trade means that trading partnerships are based on reciprocal benefits and mutual respect; that prices paid to producers reflect the work they do; that workers have the right to organize; that national health, safety, and wage laws are enforced; and that products are environmentally sustainable and conserve natural resources.

The rapidly growing fair trade movement is setting standards that could redefine world trade and, if adopted by the big players in the global economy, could play a big part in reversing the growing inequities and environmental degradation that have accompanied the growth in world trade.

Written by Buri Humana and Anna Nakana

Anti-Racism (23)

Efforts toward creating a desirable society continue to be hindered by unquestioned privilege, fear, and prejudice across race, caste, and ethnic divisions. The historical legacy of long-maintained racial divides and inequalities continue to affect any organization attempting to create a more just and sustainable society, even when racism is not the primary issue that an organization or movement wants to address. As with gender divisions, race, caste, and class hierarchies often intertwine to erode the effectiveness of organizations and their communication, especially when patterns of privilege and bias go unnoticed.

This pattern has two major dimensions: Anti-Racist Awareness and Anti-racist Action. Only by recognizing racism (personal and institutional) and actively challenging it, can we hope to overcome the racial divisions that inhibit effective problem solving and weaken progressive movements. An anti-racist orientation to social change can help organizations successfully challenge policies and practices that mask power, exploitation, and resource grabbing behind the guise of liberal individualism and national interests.

Written by Lori Bawott
Photo: Ben Shahn, sign in Ohio restaurant, 1938

Indigenous Media (55)

The lack of participation of indigenous communities in media production results in reduced diversity of ideas and perspectives in the media. This often results in manipulation, lack of political participation and knowledge about rights. It lessens opportunities to engage in politics or to assume responsibilities in government. Indigenous people who are denied their voice will find it difficult to fight oppression, work with allies, or maintain their culture. Without the means to make their voices heard, communities become atomized within themselves and invisible to the outside world.

Indigenous peoples need to create (and manage), communication and information systems that enable them to disseminate knowledge about education systems, health care, forms of involvement in governmental tasks, in the cultural life and many other aspects of social life. Society and NGOs should encourage and promote the development of media owned and managed by indigenous peoples themselves. People outside the indigenous community can become involved, but only in consultation with the indigenous community.

Written by Douglas Schuler and Miguel Angel Perez Alvarez