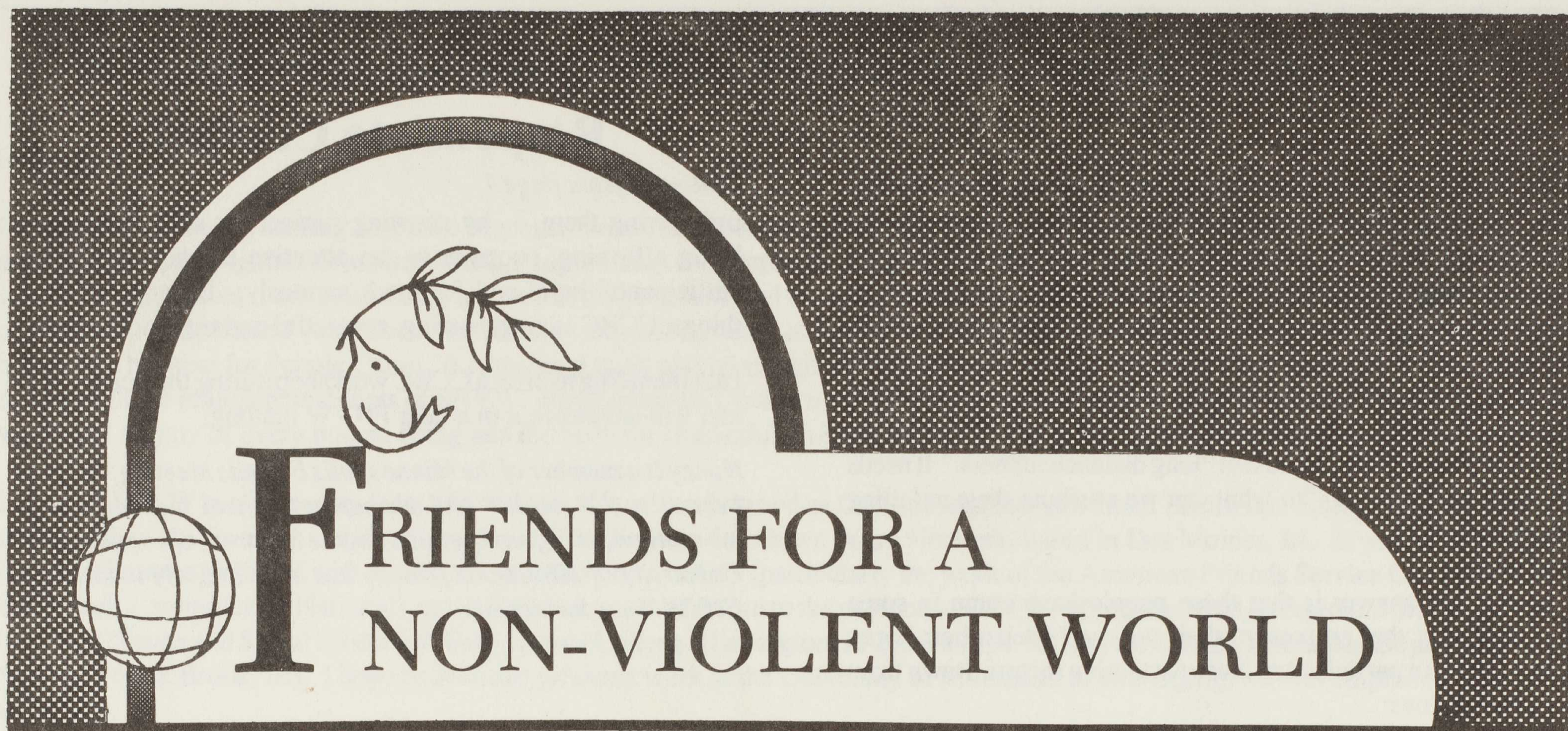




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Children's Creative Response to Conflict

by Nancy Helfrich

"If we are to reach real peace in this world...we shall have to begin with the children." —Gandhi

Ever heard of "Children's Creative Response to Conflict" (CCRC)? Well, I hadn't either until April '87 when I came across their handbook, *The Friendly Classroom for a Small Planet*, while visiting a friend. The title of the book and the program intrigued me and, upon looking more closely at their history, philosophical underpinnings (which get integrated into CCRC in action), methods, activities and descriptions of their actual work in several classrooms, I became very excited — so much so that I called to inquire about becoming trained to work within the program and was told they offer internships for that purpose. So...after much thought, planning, work and effort, my husband Doug (a St. Paul special education teacher) and I both became interns at Nyack, N.Y., for the '88-89 school year. Our two children, Kenda (8) and Devin (10), rounded out our sojourning foursome — oh, and two cats.

Our time there proved to be challenging, scary, growing, enriching, wonderful, stressful and difficult — as life is wont to be, especially when undertaking new challenges.

Our training consisted of first observing skilled CCRC facilitators, then gradually building to co-facilitating workshops, then eventually to being able to facilitate on our own, although co-facilitating is preferred since planning, facilitating and evaluating all are enhanced by having more than one person involved.

We worked with kids from K through 6th, in an upper middle class school near Nyack and in several New York City schools — including a run-down, drug-infested area where morale was low. We facilitated both teacher trainings (6 to 8 two-hour sessions after school) and in-classroom workshops involving teachers.

The planned outcome of their involvement was that they would move to co-facilitating and doing CCRC workshops on their own as well as integrating CCRC concepts and activities into their approach to children and teaching in all areas.

Historically, the program began in 1972 as part of the Quaker Project on Community Conflict of New York Yearly (Quaker) Meeting. CCRC is now an affiliate program of the Fellowship of Reconciliation though it receives some Quaker financial support.

The first handbook was published in 1974, with the 8th edition having come out this past spring. There are now 14 branches of CCRC in the U.S. and one in Canada. Although initially and frequently used in classrooms, the program can be and is utilized by persons working with groups of children in various settings, including parents with their children.

Believing that the seeds of violence become instilled at an early age, the program focuses on elementary-age children, though it can be modified to suit older or younger children.

In a nutshell, through activities in the three themes of cooperation/group building, communication, affirmation/self-esteem, an atmosphere is built and skills developed and reinforced wherein children can and want to deal constructively with the conflicts in their lives — leading into the fourth theme of conflict resolution itself. CCRC's adult training and children's workshops are experiential in nature, stressing active involvement, with a minimum of theory, as learning by doing seems most effective and meaningful, as well as interesting and fun!

One of the aspects of the program which feels so "right" to me is the way in which a training or workshop is done. The facilitator not only verbalizes the themes, but models them by

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