

Stop the 'Fozzles'!
By MIRIAM LAWSON
Miami

Through cartoons and storybooks, Fran Schmidt helps kids work out their differences peacefully, without resorting to the 'foozles' — blaming, bossing, hitting, etc.

Meet Fran Schmidt — grandmother, educator, author and peacemaker. Fran and her late sister, Grace Contrino Abrams, also an educator, were pioneers in the fields of violence prevention, peace education and conflict resolution. Concerned with the Vietnam War, the nuclear threat, the struggle for civil rights, and the ever-growing menace of domestic violence, both believed that the peaceful and just resolution of conflict was the crucial challenge of our time and perhaps of all time.

Fran and Grace began writing their conflict resolution materials at the dining room table in their Miami Beach home. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s message of nonviolence provided the philosophical background to their writings. It was a tedious task as they had no computers and had to cut and paste their drafts. These early materials served as models for many of the peace education and conflict resolution programs that have become critical components of schools today.

After Grace died, Fran founded the Grace Contrino Abrams Peace Education Foundation in 1980 to continue their work. With her new co-author, Alice Friedman, she authored the PeaceWorks curricula, based on the Rules for Fighting Fair (for example, attack problems not people), which are used in more than 25,000 schools today. The foundation was the first to address the curriculum needs of educators in the area of peace education.

Around 1994, Fran found herself facing philosophical differences with the board of directors and the president of the foundation. She had turned over to the foundation all rights to her peace curricula, so when she left, she also left behind "everything I had worked so hard for — my hopes, my dreams."

After years of effort, in 1994 she faced starting all over. "I had two choices: Do peace education work or do nothing — walk away and retire," says Fran. "But peace education is such a part of my life that the choice really was no choice. I had to continue my work."

So, she reached down into her creative center and gave birth to what she calls her new messengers for peace.

Fran now believes that using the word *fighting* psychologically sets people up to think that solving conflicts is a battle, albeit a fair one. In the new PeaceMaker Series of storybooks and teaching materials, she now uses We Can Work It Out! Steps. These begin with stopping "foozles" — blaming, bossing, hitting, teasing, whining, making threats, name-calling. And they proceed to thinking, talking and acting.

These are lessons children learn not just in school, but at home, says Fran.

"We have the responsibility to create a caring and loving home and to be role models for our children," she says. "When we model respect, our children learn it. Our children listen and watch, and they learn. We need to be careful about what lessons we are teaching. We should remember that our children are our most precious resources."

WT