
CHANGING WAYS / *Building Skills*

Vol 12, #2

Promoting a safe, fair and responsive climate in Maine schools

Fall 2008

Opening Remarks *By Barbara Blazej*

“Relational Literacy: Skills, attitudes and practices that foster and strengthen human relationships.”

In supporting educators’ efforts over the past few years to create a safe, fair and responsive climate in Maine schools, we have found that many people appreciate this particular framework mentioned above: Relational Literacy. Educators recognize the value of building and maintaining connections with students, as these relationships promote both social/emotional and academic growth. And the field of Restorative School Practices, which we have been focusing on recently in this newsletter as well as through various public conferences and workshops, emphasizes the importance of establishing a base or foundation of connectedness among all members of a school. In fact, several writers in this field* have chosen to illustrate the “big picture” of restorative practices with a pyramid graphic, in which the bottom section the base represents the “universal” or whole-school approach of creating a healthy and positive culture through strengthening relationships and community within a school. This preventive and proactive “groundwork” in relational literacy then enables students and staff to work as partners in addressing conflicts that come up in a restorative way. In a future issue I will explore the upper sections of the restorative practices pyramid which look at repairing and rebuilding relationships that have been harmed, but at this time, I’d like to highlight six reasons for beginning the shift towards a “restorative” school through community-building efforts, including the use of Community Circles.

1. The skills that we teach and practice in relational literacy empower everyone to grow, achieve and succeed as members of a school community as well as citizens of our nation. These important skills and attitudes include active listening, empathy and perspective-taking, open-mindedness, patience, and the ability to express one’s needs and thoughts to others in a positive, effective way. And these skills come in especially handy when engaging in difficult conversations around misbehavior and conflict.

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Circles of Connection: A Tool for Building Relationships at Woodside School

By Barbara Moskol

Using the circle as a means of sharing information is an age-old method of talking and listening to groups of people in an egalitarian setting. This format allows all people to share and hear without a hierarchical physical positioning. The circle creates equality. The rules of the circle allow for equal air time but with the option of passing when a member of the circle is not ready to participate. The rules require that everyone eventually responds to the topic at hand.

This method of communication has been extremely effective with the classrooms of the 5th grade in Woodside School. From the circle work in 2006-7 and the topics shared, our students

came to know each other far better than they had before doing this type of activity. The circle work began with myself (the guidance counselor) and Vicky Dow, the 5th grade teacher.

During one such circle the topic was, “What are you afraid of?” A number of the students said that they feared old people. Some of the students said that old people looked scary. The discussion deepened with explanations about how old people carry history with them, that the history is very interesting, and that the children would some day be old, too, with their own history to tell. After the children said that they wanted to get to know old people so that they would feel more comfortable and less scared being around them, the

“Grandfriends Program” was born.

I contacted The Highlands, a local retirement community, and spoke with the activity director about a possible field trip to the facility. We decided that one visit would not be satisfactory. Having a series of visits with written biographies of the residents by the students grew out of

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2. The Community Circle process in particular is based on a set of core values honesty, trust, respect and responsibility and the use of Circles invites participants to experience and internalize these core values. The process has the potential to build a strong sense of “we” of our classroom and school as a community of individuals who care about each other, who accept each other’s differences, and who are accountable to the whole community.

3. In using Circles with students, adults have opportunities to model sharing power, healthy risk-taking and withholding judgment of others. The dialogue process encourages everyone to participate as equals, to voice different ideas, thoughts and concerns without fear, and to disagree in a respectful way.

4. All of these community-building efforts can potentially *prevent* some number of misbehaviors as connectedness between students and adults deepens and everyone gains competence in communication and conflict resolution skills.

5. When Community Circles are used regularly for social/emotional and academic learning, they become “normal” within the classroom and school culture. Consequently, when a Circle is then needed to address classroom problems or misbehaviors and to repair harm, everyone is familiar with the basic process and adults have some comfort level in facilitating the Circle.

6. Over time, it is possible and desirable to have students learn how to facilitate Circles, which will build and enhance their communication, interpersonal and leadership skills.

If you have any questions or would like further elaboration on any of this, please email me at **Barbara.Blazej@umit.maine.edu**. My partners and I are pleased to offer assistance and support to anyone interested in promoting relational literacy and Community Circles within schools.

(*See, for example, *The Challenge of Culture Change: Embedding Restorative Practices in Schools*, page 12, www.thorsborne.com.au/conference_papers/Challenge_of_Culture_Change.pdf)

SAVE THE DATE!

**Restorative School Practices
Summer Institute
June 24 - 26, 2009
Augusta Civic Center**

This 3-day Summer Institute will introduce participants to restorative school practices and restorative discipline, part of an international restorative justice movement that is helping to create safe, fair and responsive schools in Maine, the U.S. and abroad. Within a whole school approach, these practices build caring school communities that support students, staff and administrators in feeling connected and respected, which enhances learning outcomes. All members of the community are accountable for their actions, resolve conflicts, create positive relationships, and build an inclusive, respectful school culture. Discipline becomes part of a learning environment featuring accountability and support rather than punishment and exclusion. The institute will include presentations, discussions, interactive activities, and experience with the Community Circle process. Cost: \$300 per person for the 3 days, which includes materials, lunches and refreshments. FMI: Contact Pam Anderson at pamelaa@usm.maine.edu or Barb Blazej at Barbara.blazej@umit.maine.edu.

Sponsored by Maine Law & Civics Education, Peace & Reconciliation Studies Program, and Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast

Library Resources Available

The Peace & Reconciliation Studies Program at UMaine in Orono has several hundred resources for loan on restorative practices and discipline, conflict resolution, community building, school climate, peer mediation, youth violence prevention, bullying, diversity education and related topics. These include books, curriculum materials, videos, and even a few music CD’s. To receive a list of these materials or to borrow items, contact: Peace & Reconciliation Studies, University of Maine, 5725 East Annex, Orono, ME 04469, tel. 581-2625, fax 581-2640, email: peace.studies@umit.maine.edu.

Peer Mediation and School Climate

Assessment Surveys Available

State and federal agencies providing grants for peer mediation programs (e.g., Safe and Drug Free Schools) are requiring “outcome assessments” in order to provide funding to schools. Grade appropriate, user-friendly packets which will meet these requirements are available for assessing: 1) skills and attitude changes in peer mediators; 2) effectiveness of mediations for the disputants; and 3) general school climate. You can use one or a combination of the packets. The UM Center for Research and Evaluation will provide analysis and reports. Request a cost sheet from Peace & Reconciliation Studies at UMaine (581-2625) or Maine Law & Civics Education at USM (780-4991). Build the cost into your grant proposal as an allowable expense.

Why We Chose to Implement Restorative Practices: Three School Administrators Share Their Thoughts

Restorative WHAT?!?

Kevin A. Michaud, Principal, Winslow Jr. High School

I remember this as my initial response to a conversation that our guidance counselor, Penny Linn, had with me towards the middle of the 2007-2008 school year, as she introduced me to a concept being used at Troy Howard Middle School in Belfast. Several months have since passed, and now “enlightened”, I’m happy to say that our implementation of circling and fundamental Restorative School Practices [RSP] has proven beneficial to our small school! The staff members who are using these “new skills” on a regular basis have reported diminished behavioral outbursts in their classrooms, and are looking for further guidance with respect to special situations. Maryann Nyman, our circling coordinator, has done a tremendous job getting these principles put into schoolwide use; we are certainly fortunate to have her expertise! As we continue to hone our use of RSP’s, I’m excited about the concentric circle effect that we hope to have within our community, specifically towards the secondary level as time passes.

Realizing that it’s sometimes human nature to fear the unknown, I’ll admit that I was a bit skeptical to step away from the traditional disciplinary measures that were “handed down” to me as I moved upward through the various roles of administrator. Without an assistant principal in the building for the first time, several of us began to see the need for change during the previous year, and felt that restorative justice would fit OUR school’s needs, given the growing volume of low level behavioral incidences that were being referred to the office. One RSP course and a few trainings later, I feel very confident that we are moving in the right direction, and am pleased to be involved with this type of proactive, transformative program!

Reflections on Restorative Justice

Don Baker, Assistant Principal, Mt. Ararat High School

My experience as a parent and educator has led me to the conclusion that punitive means of discipline often times do not lead to sustained change in behavior, but, in fact, may perpetuate the undesirable behaviors we are attempting to eradicate. Punitive measures frequently erode adult/youth relationships, prevent young people from taking personal responsibility and do little to restore the emotional and social health of the perpetrator, victim or associated members of the community.

Restorative Justice practices offer hope that behavior can change, accountability can be accepted, harm can be authentically addressed and relationships can be restored

and enhanced. Restorative Justice takes considerable time, effort and commitment and offers considerable promise and opportunity.

This fall I have taken three steps towards integrating Restorative Justice Practices at Mt. Ararat Middle School and High School in Topsham, Maine:

1- Modeling Restorative Justice in my daily practice by giving students the opportunity to experience Restorative Justice principles and processes.

2- Building capacity and support from professional staff and parents by sharing Restorative Justice research and forming a small advisory group of teachers and parents for moving Restorative Justice philosophy forward.

3- Working with our district health coordinator to write and submit a comprehensive middle school /high school grant to implement Restorative Justice practices in grade 6-12.

I believe Restorative Justice offers an unprecedented opportunity to improve the quality of our relationships with students, improve the culture of our schools and increase student capacity for learning.

Our RSP Experience

*Jonathan Moody, Assistant Principal,
Messalonskee Middle School*

All good educators utilize restorative measures when dealing with students in their schools. Messalonskee Middle School has long been a place where teachers put students’ needs first while providing a rigorous and meaningful education. In the Fall of 2007, after having been trained in the circle process and many staff having used it in their Pride (advisory) classes, some staff members became more interested in more formalized restorative approaches. Later in the year a small group from our school had the opportunity to visit Troy Howard Middle School in Belfast; what we took away from that trip was a strong desire to change the traditional detention model we were using to one that both increased students’ accountability and addressed the relational damage that was caused by misbehavior. A group of five staff members took a UMO graduate course in restorative approaches in early summer and the momentum for change grew. In mid July fifteen staff members participated in a facilitation training hosted by Troy Howard staff. After this training nine staff members volunteered to pilot the program in the 2008-09 school year. In August the principal and I presented our plans to the school board and with overwhelming support began the program in September of this year.

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Peers for Peace

By Cynthia Martell

Last year, I had a vision. I started a new job as an elementary school counselor and I wanted to be proactive. I wanted to find ways to reach the entire school, prevent problems, and create a positive climate. I'd always believed in empowering students and I'd always admired peer mediation as a means of achieving this. But be careful what you say out loud! Before I knew it, my principal was on board and telling others that I was going to start a peer mediation program in our school. Yikes, I really had to make it happen!

At first, I was overwhelmed. Where to start? I did some research on programs in our area, and luckily connected with the Peace Studies Program at the University of Maine. Barbara Blazej was infinitely helpful, and provided us with lots of curriculum materials to sort through. I will forever be thankful to Barbara for providing me with encouragement and support, as it really did add light to a journey where I felt I was groping at first. I must also recognize how fortunate I am to have a principal who supported this vision. We decided to create a peer mediation program as one of the Student Leadership Groups that students and educators are encouraged to participate in at our school as part of the Aspirations Program that we have adopted from the Quaglia Institute. This gave the program some formality and a way to introduce it to the staff.



As I started wading through the curriculum, one of the first things that I read was that peer mediation programs tend to be most successful with more than one key person coordinating. This motivated me to “let go” and aim to share leadership of this program. I enlisted the support of four other educators at our school. Our first step was to divide the work of developing a program into specific tasks and set a timeline. We hoped to review and select a curriculum first, then plan a training and application process, set up the logistics of how the program would run on a daily basis, promote the program, and hopefully begin mediations by the spring. We dove in and reviewed the curriculum materials we had and selected one that we liked best. Additionally, we brought in specific aspects of other programs that impressed us.

Next we planned a training program. After settling upon what we felt was important to include in our training, we struggled with how and when to get together for eight hours of training. We finally decided upon four after-school sessions. We provided a healthy snack and parents provided transportation. The good thing about working as a team is that you don't all need to be there all the time. I believe that this sharing of duties has really cemented our team because we all feel that our time is valued, we recognize how busy we all are, and we jump in to help each other out.

After this, we developed an application process. We decided to take a four-sided approach. We asked for student commitment in the form of volunteering, and the follow-through to fill out an application. We wanted parent agreement, so parents needed to review a letter detailing the expectations of this program, and they needed to sign off that they would support their child in this endeavor. We wanted teacher input, so the students had to get two teachers to fill out a Teacher Recommendation Form. In order not to burden teachers with this, but still get useful information, we created a checklist for teachers and also allowed for further comment if necessary. The teachers appreciated the ease of this form, and were cooperative in returning it. Lastly, we asked fourth and fifth grade students to give us a list of three names, in an anonymous fashion, so that we knew whom they saw as the “natural helpers” at our school. We decided to invite 4th and 5th grade students to become trained as peer mediators. We set a goal to have at least 15 students trained, and hopefully have more of them at the 4th grade level so that they could return the following year as experienced mediators.

Then it was time to hammer out the logistics of the program. We needed a process for requesting, supervising, and following up after mediations. We decided that we would offer mediations for all students in grades 2-5. Our main reason for limiting it this way was that we decided an adult needed to be present at all mediations to help students feel safe and ensure that the process ran as it was intended to. At our school, students in 2nd through 5th grade have a shared lunch and recess time that we could cover as supervisors for mediations.

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Peers, continued from previous page

We developed a form for the students to request mediations and put these forms in accessible places with collection boxes. We also created forms for the students to fill out once a solution is reached, for the supervisor to use in evaluating the mediation, and for following up with the students to ensure that their solution continues to be effective. Most importantly, we created a notebook to track all this information to ensure that we complete the process, as well as for data purposes.

Which brings me to our final step, promotion of the program. We wanted our school community to know about our program and view it in a positive light. For this, we did lots of presentations. We did sessions for the staff as well as for the Parent-Teacher Group (PTG). We sent an informational letter home to all parents, and we did classroom presentations for every 2nd through 5th grade class. We sought out every opportunity for visibility. We made t-shirts for the team, and badges that both students and adults wear for the entire day that they are scheduled for duty. We called the local newspaper and they ran an article on our program. When our principal sent out a parent newsletter, we added updates on the peer mediation program, and we made posters that we hung around the building. We tried to make it hard not to know about the Peers for Peace Program at our school!

Of course, no story would be complete without the ending. We ended up with 19 mediators, twelve of them in 4th grade, and seven of them in 5th grade. Ten of our peer mediators were female and nine were male. Between the months of March and June, the peer mediators helped students resolve forty conflicts. 58% of our conflicts occurred between students in 2nd and 3rd grade, and by a small margin, more of the conflicts were between female students.

When school started this year, 11 of the 12 students who were trained as mediators in 4th grade were excited to be on the peer mediation team again this year as 5th graders. (The one student who left the team did so regretfully due to a time conflict.) Truly their enthusiasm for the program, and focus upon positive action in our school community has been inspiring to me. On a personal note, it makes my head spin to realize that all of this was no more than an idea a year ago.

At this time, we have not had any mediation requests – but if you listen, you can hear the Peers for Peace chanting their theme, “We will, we will help you!”

Cynthia Martell is a School Counselor at Captain Albert Stevens Elementary School in Belfast, Maine. The school includes grades pre-K-5, and currently has a student population of 322 students. Cynthia can be reached at cmartell@sad34.net.

Resources on Restorative School Practices (RSP) in Maine

***Beginning with this issue, we are including this regular column to highlight the resources available in Maine on Restorative School Practices.*

We have compiled a comprehensive packet of the best articles on restorative practices and discipline and we will send you one if you request it (email Barbara.Blazej@umit.maine.edu and include your regular mailing address). These articles include useful data from schools that have implemented restorative practices in the US and elsewhere.

We invite you to join our RSP listserv, created and facilitated by Pamela Anderson of Maine Law & Civics Education (MLCE). We use this listserv to share upcoming restorative practices events as well as information, ideas, questions, stories, etc., on restorative practices. Everyone on the list can use it for these purposes as well. If you would like to have your name added to the listserv, you can subscribe by visiting this website: <http://lists.usm.maine.edu/subscribe/rj-schl>.

Peace & Reconciliation Studies and MLCE have created a 50+ page resource entitled “Resolving Conflict with a Peer Mediation Program: A Manual for Grades 4-8.” This manual includes ideas on designing, building, implementing and sustaining peer mediation programs, as well as skill-building exercises, role plays and resources. You can order one from Peace & Reconciliation Studies (see contact details on page 8) for \$10 to cover printing and postage. The manual will also be available by Spring 2009 on the Peace & Reconciliation Studies website and can be downloaded free of charge at that time (www.umaine.edu/peace).

Our RSP Collaborative (Peace & Reconciliation Studies, MLCE and Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast) offers several different presentations and workshops on restorative school practices for educators who are interested in learning about and/or implementing restorative practices and restorative discipline in their schools. If you would like further details on what we can offer, including fees, please email: Barbara.Blazej@umit.maine.edu.

**A Sampling of Resources in the Peace & Reconciliation Studies Library on the Circle Process,
Restorative School Practices and Peer Mediation**
(*New Materials in the Library)

BOOKS:

- Amstutz, Lorraine and Judy Mullet. The Little Book of Restorative Discipline for Schools. 2005
- *Boyes-Watson, Carolyn. Peacemaking Circles and Urban Youth: Bringing Justice Home. 2008
- Claasen, Roxanne and Ron. Making Things Right: 32 Activities Teach Conflict Resolution & Mediation Skills, Grades 3-9. 1996
- Cohen, Richard. Students Resolving Conflict. 1995
- Fish, Candy L. and Sheryle S. Woodruff. Advanced Skill Building for Mediators Instructor's Guide, Grades 9-12. 2001
- Fleischman, Paul. Whirligig. (A fictional story of restorative justice for Grade 7 and up). 1999
- Hopkins, Belinda. Just Schools: A Whole School Approach to Restorative Justice. 2004
- *Levine, David. Teaching Empathy: A Blueprint for Caring, Compassion, and Community. 2005
- Mediation Network of North Carolina. Student Mediator Manual for Middle and High Schools. 1995
- Mikaelsen, Ben. Touching Spirit Bear. (A fictional story of restorative justice for Grade 7 and up). 2001
- National Resource Center for Youth Mediation. Student Mediation in Elementary Schools: Training & Implementation Guide. 1995
- Pranis, Kay. The Little Book of Circle Processes: A New/Old Approach to Peacemaking. 2005
- *Reclaiming Children and Youth: The Journal of Strength Based Interventions Theme: Restorative Practices. Volume 16, Number 2, Summer 2007
- Roffey, Sue. Circle Time for Emotional Literacy. 2006
- Schmidt, Fran. Mediation: Getting to Win Win! (Grades 8-12). 1994
- Tew, Marilyn. Circles, PSHE, and Citizenship: Assessing the Value of Circle Time in Secondary Schools. 2007

VIDEOS:

- Beyond Zero Tolerance: Restorative Practices in Schools. Documents the implementation of restorative practices in a variety of secondary schools in the USA and the Netherlands. VHS or DVD. 2003
- *Building Our Community. A 15-minute documentary about the positive impact of restorative practices in Collingwood Primary School, in Hull, UK. DVD. 2008
- * Mediation: Getting to Win Win! A visual demonstration of the mediation process, Grades 8-12, from the Peace Education Foundation. Helps mediators see how a simple conflict escalates and how mediators intervene. The narrator guides mediators, step by step, through the demonstration. 22 minutes. DVD. 1994
- Mediation Skills, Grades 5-9. This student workshop leads students through the mediation process. VHS. 1996

To borrow these resources, contact the Peace & Reconciliation Studies Program Library at 581-2625, fax a request to 581-2640 or e-mail peace.studies@umit.maine.edu.

Circles, continued from page 1

our discussions. We decided that this would be a project fulfilling the skills of interviewing, journaling, talking, listening and understanding differences.

Here are some of the writings and comments from our students: *“The Grandfriends Program has been an amazing program for the elderly people and for us. It has put joy into the hearts of everyone and taught us to overcome our uncomfortable feelings. The stories they have are incredible and real. It was exciting to meet our grandfriend. I used to be scared of them. Our grandfriend is always excited to see us. I used to just walk by older people, but now I want to know about them. This was super fun, I will remember this forever. I won't forget it. This makes me think of what I do, it affects others and makes me more open. Now I know that older people have exciting history. I received hugs from my grandfriend. I felt accepted. The questions turned into conversations.”*

As this program was so successful, we decided to continue it into a second year doing the Grandfriends work with the 5th graders. We began with the Circles of Connection, discussing differences and hearing the concerns children have with new and untried situations. The circles once again gave students the opportunity to listen and hear other points of view which then stimulated deeper thinking and examination. So in 2007-8 Woodside School (Topsham) returned to The Highlands with the Grandfriends Program but this time there were two 5th grade classes and a grant to help pay for the buses. Vicky Dow, Marybeth Browne, and I met with both the assisted-living and independent-living residents at The Highlands. The students wrote biographies of their grandfriends. The grandfriends became so involved in this program that some of them came to the school and visited the classrooms in May 2008. In June the final celebration of the program took place at The Highlands.

Without the Circles of Connection we would not have done this project. The importance of the circles cannot be overstated. They allow everyone to think and examine ideas, and the children truly appreciate the experience of honored listening and discussion with equal air time. When we use the Circles of Connection the students feel and think in a democratic, thoughtful manner. Here are some of the observations that our 5th grade students have made about this method of communication:

*I hear different perspectives that let me know more.
Talking together in a group is a great way to express myself.
When you say things to one person it doesn't get it out; when you are in a group it's out.
A group can do something about it.
Just one person can't get everything out—one person might forget or you might express nothing.
When you are in a group you can compare and find out more information.
With the talking stick you are heard because people are listening.
The stick makes your expression important.
Listening can make you help others.
Listening makes you a friend.
When you are not listened to, it is bottled up and eats away at you.*

Having this time as a shared group experience teaches tolerance and patience. When we use this tool, we cannot jump into someone else's time or thoughts; we are required to wait our turn. The circle gives the external discipline for the participants. Over time, those participants learn that there are expected, appropriate group behaviors. The Circles of Connection teach essential listening skills.

Barbara Moskol is a guidance counselor at the Woodside and Bowdoinham Schools. Her email is moskolb@link75.org.

Why We Chose, continued from page 3

We are currently using restorative circles in weekly detentions and in our Saturday detentions (8:00-12:00 in the morning, implemented to reduce our already low suspension numbers and increase student class time). Restorative circles have also been scheduled with guidance, administration, students, and parents in an attempt to support the students and their families through tough discipline situations. Through our CAB (Communities Against Bullying) Committee we have provided every teacher in the building with a copy of *The Little Book of Restorative Discipline for Schools* and staff members are continuing to use circles as a way to facilitate healthy conversations in our school.



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Upcoming Events: Fall 2008 -- Early Summer 2009

Bullying Prevention Training Institute

December 3-5, 2008, University of Southern Maine, Portland
Sponsored by Maine Law & Civics Education
Instructors: Chuck Saufler and Ansley Newton
To register, contact Pam Anderson, 780-4991, email: pamelaa@usm.maine.edu or visit <http://mainelaw.maine.edu/mlce>

Mediation: Premises, Practices & Policies (PAX 451)

40-hour training in the Transformative Model, 3 UMaine credits
At the Fred Hutchinson Center in Belfast
February 16-20, 2009
April 20-24, 2009
Instructor: Will Galloway
For information, email ellen.woodhead@umit.maine.edu.
To register call 338-8000.

Restorative School Practices Summer Institute

June 24-26, 2009
Augusta Civic Center
Presented by the Maine RSP Collaborative: Pamela Anderson, Barbara Blazej and Margaret Micolichek
See box on page 2 for details.

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