
CHANGING WAYS / *Building Skills*

Vol 13, #1

Promoting a safe, fair and responsive climate in Maine schools

Spring 2009

Opening Remarks *By Barbara Blazej*

As I begin these remarks in early March, it's snowing—again! It seems especially important nowadays to find ways to maintain a sense of hope (and humor) as winter drags on and the snow drifts get taller. Fortunately, I have been very encouraged and excited lately with the growing interest among educators in learning more about the restorative approach and in implementing this philosophy within their school communities. So, at the risk of sounding like a broken record, I will use this column to talk more about our work with restorative practices around the state. Many teachers and administrators have contacted us for information, presentations, and trainings in the restorative approach, and we have begun partnerships with two schools to integrate restorative practices in a whole-school approach over two years. As an important part of these efforts, we have developed a working definition of “The Restorative Approach” that clearly spells out what we mean by this concept:

The Restorative Approach is a philosophy or guiding principle (not a program or specific activity) that sees relationships as central to learning, growth and a healthy school climate for students and adults.

Restorative practices enable us to integrate and normalize this approach within a school culture. Restorative practices focus on building, maintaining and, when necessary, repairing relationships among all members of a school community. These practices include:

— *Language that invites and encourages curiosity, empathy, respect, trust, honesty, compassion, accountability, inclusion, repairing harm and collaboration, AND*

— *Tools for community building, such as Community Circles, and for addressing conflict and misbehavior, such as restorative dialogue, restorative reminders, peer mediation, problem-solving circles, Resolution Circles, and Restorative Conferences.*

It's also worth noting that the restorative approach is *collaborative*—it calls upon us to work *with* others (students, faculty and administration) to build a sense of community, to foster respect and trust, and to address misbehaviors. For

continued on page 2

Bringing Restorative Practices into the Community: Reflections from Midcoast Maine *By Paul Gagnon*

As a VISTA volunteer working with the Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast, I have been doing outreach with the schools in Knox County as well as facilitating circles involving juveniles referred to us through the justice system. Schools are interested in adopting restorative practices to address bullying, to reduce suspensions, and to shift the culture of the school to become a stronger community that supports all of its members.

When people first hear about what restorative practices are, almost everyone recognizes that on a personal level they already are using restorative practices to some extent. It is always good to see this moment when people make the connection that the roots of restorative practices aren't something new but rather a returning to our roots as members of a community and part of humanity. It is when people recognize that restorative practices aren't a new program to follow, but something that is already alive within themselves

that they realize that they are already well on their way.

Somehow in the last few generations our schools and communities have

continued on page 7

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Contents

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Opening Remarks | 1 |
| Reflections | 1 |
| Summer Institute | 3 |
| Winslow Jr. High | 4 |
| Research Articles | 4 |
| RSP Resources | 5 |
| Upcoming Events | 5 |
| LGBTQ Report | 6 |

Opening Remarks, continued from page 1

example, in traditional models of discipline, adults tell students what they have done wrong and impose penalties for their misbehavior. Within a restorative approach, however, all those affected by misbehavior or conflict—all the stakeholders—work together to hold offenders accountable for their actions and to find ways to repair the harm and restore damaged relationships. In a restorative context, “accountability” is much more than punishment—it invites all of us to own our mistakes and misbehaviors, to understand the impact of our actions on others, and to make things as “right” as possible.

The movement to promote the restorative approach in schools in Maine is very new—just a few years old—but in other parts of the US and around the world there are schools and districts that have been implementing restorative practices for several years. Consequently, we now have both quantitative and qualitative data that demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach in transforming student behavior and school climate, and in addressing misbehaviors in positive ways. Here is just a sampling of this data from the International Institute for Restorative Practices (www.iirp.org). You will also find a list on page 4 of this newsletter with some of the best research articles on restorative practices, including the two that contain this particular data (marked with *).

Palisades High School, Pennsylvania (1998-2002):

Detentions dropped from 844 to 332 per year.

Palisades Middle School, Pennsylvania (2000-2002):

Disciplinary referrals fell from 913 to 516 per year.

Springfield Township High School, Pennsylvania (2000-2002):

Incidents of classroom disruption fell from 90 to 26 per year.

Pattengill Middle School, Lansing, Michigan (2005-2006):

93% of students reported using restorative methods to resolve their conflicts;

90% of students reported learning new skills in their restorative experiences.

Primary and Secondary Schools in 4 Districts, Minnesota (1998-2001):

30-50 percent reduction in suspensions.

Waterloo Region District School Board, Ontario, Canada (2005-2007):

Elementary suspensions decreased 80%; secondary suspensions decreased 65%.

20 “Disadvantaged Area” Schools, Sefton, England (2003-2006):

59 restorative conferences resulted in 0% recidivism for misbehavior, from bullying and assaults to swearing at teachers.

As you can no doubt tell, we are very enthusiastic about the restorative approach and the alternatives it offers for preventing and addressing conflict, bullying, misbehavior, and miscommunication between all members of a school community. This summer we will be offering the first statewide Summer Institute on Restorative School Practices, scheduled for June 24-26, 2009 at the Augusta Civic Center. You can read more about this event here and on the next page. We look forward to meeting and working with some of you at this institute and we encourage you to register early as there are a limited number of spaces available. We also offer a range of services to assist schools in learning about and implementing restorative school practices, from introductory presentations to comprehensive, whole-school integration. See page 5 for other resources in Maine, and contact me if you have any questions, Barbara.Blazej@umit.maine.edu.

I’m keeping my fingers crossed that by the time you receive this newsletter, spring will have finally arrived in Maine!



REGISTER NOW!!

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

Tentative List of Topics to be Covered:

- What is the Restorative Approach?
- What are some different Restorative Practices?
 - The Community Circles Model
 - Restorative Dialogue
 - Problem-Solving Circles
 - Resolution (Detention) Circles
 - Restorative Conferences
 - Restorative Practices & Bullying
- The Whole School Approach to Implementation
 - Community Building Strategies
 - Getting Started
- The Change Process (and addressing resistance)
- What does a Restorative School look like? (videos)
- Resources/Services in Maine



Restorative School Practices Collaborative of Maine Presents:

Summer Institute in Restorative Practices

June 24-26, 2009

Augusta Civic Center, Augusta, ME

This 3-day Summer Institute will introduce participants to restorative school practices and restorative discipline. 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. Discipline becomes part of a learning environment featuring accountability and support rather than punishment and exclusion. The course will include presentation, discussion, interactive activities, and experience with the Circle process. Collaborative members and guest practitioners will present.

Cost: \$300 per person for the 3 days, which includes materials, lunches and refreshments.

Team Discount: For school teams of 3 or more, cost is \$280 per person. Registrations must be sent together to receive the discount.

CEU's: 2.0 CEU credits from UMaine will be awarded upon completion.

Schedule: Wednesday 8:30 am-4 pm; Thursday 8:30 am-4 pm; Friday 8:30 am-2:30 pm

Registration Deadline: May 29, 2009. Space is limited so register early!

FMI: Website <http://mainelaw.usm.maine.edu/mlce/> Updates will be posted regularly.

Pam Anderson, UMaine Law School: pamelaa@usm.maine.edu Tel. 780-4991

Barb Blazej, UMaine Peace & Reconciliation Studies: barbara.blazej@umit.maine.edu Tel. 581-2625

Margaret Micolichek, Restorative Justice Project: margaret@rjpmidcoast.org Tel. 338-2742

Registration Form: Restorative School Practices Institute 2009

*Name: _____

Position/Title: _____

*Organization/School: _____

*Address: _____

*City: _____

*State: _____ *Zip: _____

*E-Mail: _____

*Work Phone: _____

Home/Cell Phone: _____

____ Check enclosed. ____ Purchase Order Enclosed. * Required information. Thanks!

Make check payable and return to: Peace & Reconciliation Studies Program, University of Maine, 5725 East Annex, Orono, ME 04469.

Winslow Junior High School's "Restorative Journey" — So Far

By Penny Linn and Mary Ann Nyman

In May 2008 Winslow Junior High School (WJHS) embarked on a journey to incorporate restorative school practices into our school community. Initially we looked to this paradigm to replace the archaic and less-than-effective system of detention utilized in our school and most other public schools over the years, but discovered that the use of these practices reached well beyond this singular view. Restorative school practices provide many tools for fostering positive relationships that are the foundation for creating a healthy school. The circle process creates a positive and safe environment where students and staff work together in building a community.

Building community necessitates developing and maintaining relationships. Circling provides a forum to air concerns about the school community, as well as addressing harm that affects relationships. Following are some examples of how we have utilized circles within our school community.

Winslow Junior High School, like many schools, is confronted with name-calling and bullying between students. During the first three months of school there were multiple circles with the sixth grade classrooms due to the high incidence of teasing, name-calling and bullying. Generally, a teacher outside of the sixth grade team facilitated these circles so the classroom teachers could participate in the circles as well. Often these circles resulted in contracts reinforcing individual responsibility for repairing the harm that had been caused due to the student's behavior. Within a short time circles were being requested by both teachers and students to address a variety of behaviors occurring between students and between students and teachers. The results were very positive and by early February there were very few requests from sixth graders for circles due to harmful behaviors.

Circles have been used frequently at Winslow Junior High School to address student and teacher relationships. They provide an opportunity to clarify communication by offering a forum outside of the classroom facilitated by a neutral individual. Last year a student believed her teacher was not treating her fairly. The student was becoming very frustrated and disruptive in the classroom. She requested a circle. This allowed the student to voice her feelings and point of view, and in turn the student heard the same from the teacher. With direction from the facilitator each was able to express her needs and a plan was developed for giving signals to one another so misperceptions would not occur in the future. Although this relationship was restored with one circle, often times repairing relationships takes many circles.

Recently, WJHS launched a new comprehensive fitness program that necessitated changes in the daily schedule of the school and in turn impacted all community members. One eighth grade English class and their teacher requested a circle with the Fitness Committee in order to air their thoughts about the new program. The facilitator encouraged everyone to voice his/her concerns and express his/her feelings. There were many suggestions offered and two were implemented. Two student representatives from each grade will sit on the Fitness Committee, and the schedule will be modified so students are not late to class. The circle will reconvene in the near future to assess the effectiveness of these changes.

Implementing restorative school practices is analogous to teaching a new language to teachers and students alike. Initially it tends to be awkward for the adolescents and the adults as they experience this new paradigm shift, but everyone wants to have a voice and to be listened to. Circles provide a forum where all members of the community can be heard in a level playing field. The circles are providing this opportunity at Winslow Junior High School and the results indicate they are having a significant and positive impact on our community.

Penny Linn is the guidance counselor and Mary Ann Nyman is the circling coordinator at Winslow Junior High School. You can reach them at: plinn@winslow.k12.me.us and mnyman@winslow.k12.me.us.

Research Articles on Restorative School Practices

<http://www.iirp.org/pdf/apareport.pdf> "American Psychological Association Report Challenges School Zero Tolerance Policies and Recommends Restorative Justice" by Doug Graves and Laura Mirsky, September 5, 2007.

<http://www.iirp.org/pdf/ssspilots.pdf> "SaferSanerSchools: Transforming School Culture with Restorative Justice" by Laura Mirsky, May 20, 2003.

*<http://www.iirp.org/pdf/schoolresearch1.pdf> "Restorative Practices in Schools: Research Reveals Power of Restorative Approach, Part 1" by Abbey J. Porter, April 27, 2007.

continued on page 6

Resources on Restorative School Practices (RSP) in Maine

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>.

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.



Upcoming Events -- Spring, Summer and Fall 2009

Maine Bullying Prevention Education Program Presents:

Basic Bullying Prevention Workshop
May 1, 2009, USM, Portland

Advanced Bullying Prevention Workshop
May 8, 2009, Augusta Civic Center, Augusta

Trainers: Chuck Saufier, Ansley Newton, Pam Anderson
Fee: \$50 per person per workshop. Space limited; register early!
To Register: Contact Pam Anderson at 780-4991,
email pamelaa@usm.maine.edu
or visit <http://mainelaw.usm.maine.edu/mlce>.

Restorative School Practices Summer Institute

June 24-26, 2009, Augusta Civic Center
Facilitated by: Pam Anderson, Barbara Blazej and
Margaret Micolichek
See pages 2 and 3 for details.

PAX 360: Conflict Resolution: A Relational Approach to Working through Conflict (3 UMaine credits)

July 6-24, 2009, Hutchinson Center, Belfast, 8:30-11:30am
Instructor: Joanne Boynton
For more information or to register, call 338-8000.

PAX 451: Mediation: Premises, Practices & Policies (3 UMaine credits)

40-hour training in the Transformative Model of Mediation
August 3-7, 2009, UMaine, Orono
Instructor: Will Galloway
For more information or to register, email ellen.woodhead@umit.maine.edu or call 581-2609.

PAX 360: Conflict Resolution: A Relational Approach to Working through Conflict (3 UMaine credits)

Fall semester at UMaine, Orono
Meets Tuesdays, 5:30-8:00pm, beginning September 1st
Instructor: Joanne Boynton
For more information or to register, email ellen.woodhead@umit.maine.edu or call 581-2609.

New Course for Summer 2009

PAX 495: Nonviolent Communication &
Restorative Justice Circles (3 UM credits)

July 6-10, 2009, Hutchinson Center, Belfast
Instructor: Peggy Smith

This course will introduce participants to two powerful processes that can be used together to enhance a culture of peace. The RJ circles have developed ways for communities to promote responsibility and healing.

For more information or to register, call 338-8000.

LGBTQ Youth Commission Report Now Online

By Susan Savell

In May 2008, when the First Lady of Maine, Karen Baldacci, walked into Florian Hall and headed toward the podium, she was given a standing ovation by the 125 people gathered in that room. Why? Because she chairs the Governor's Children's Cabinet—a sub-group of his Cabinet composed of the Commissioners who head the state agencies working most closely with children, youth and families—which had commissioned a study on the challenges experienced by Maine's lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and questioning youth. This "LGBTQ Youth Commission" was convening a meeting of key stakeholders that day from across the state to help formulate recommendations, and the ovation expressed appreciation for the courage of the Children's Cabinet and its Chair.

The report of the LGBTQ Youth Commission can be found on the website: www.maine.gov/cabinet under "Reports and Documents." Reviewing the best statewide and national research currently available, the Commission found that "there is a substantial body of evidence that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning youth and young adults are experiencing discrimination, harassment and/or violence in schools and communities....Second only to negative comments about appearance, anti-gay slurs are the most frequent hostile comments in middle and high schools. Students hear anti-gay slurs on average more than 25 times a day in school—once every 15 minutes." It is not surprising then, that the first recommendation of the LGBTQ Youth Commission is to "Give Maine Schools Priority Attention." According to the report, this means implementing a wide variety of strategies, from "special training for child care providers on the recognition and support of gay, lesbian and transgender families" to "encourage the formation of Gay Straight Alliances in all secondary schools."

The creation and support of Gay Straight Alliances are encouraged by one of the key organizational members of the Commission, GLSEN, the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network, because research has shown that the existence of these organizations actually creates greater safety for *all* students. The Commission Report concludes:

*"States that have laws specific to LGBTQ safety, and schools that have LGBTQ-specific support (such as gay-straight alliances) and anti-harassment policies that specify LGBT, tend to be significantly safer places for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender expression. It is not yet clear what is cause and what is effect. Nationally, about half of schools have harassment policies that are inclusive of sexual orientation. Students in the seven states that forbid gay-positive policies experience less school safety for all students. Students in the nine states that have laws inclusive of sexual orientation experience greater school safety. But, anti-harassment policies that do not include specific mention of sexual orientation create no more safety than no anti-harassment policies at all. *Explicit* leadership by school administrators is a crucial necessity."*

In Maine, there are only 40 Gay Straight Alliances out of 160 middle and high schools. But the Commissioner of Education, Susan Gendron, is proposing that the Coordinated School Health Network take the lead in helping schools consider this addition to their efforts to create a healthy and safe school climate for all students. As the Commission Report says, "All youth and young adults in Maine should be free of any discriminatory actions, harassment, and/or violence, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity." Gay Straight Alliances, along with professional development and the enforcement of non-discrimination laws and policies, make up the "big three" best practices for reducing LGBTQ bias, especially because these advocacy groups allow students to be leaders and agents of change on their own behalf.

Susan Savell is the Executive Director of Communities for Children and Youth, a prevention and positive youth development initiative of the Governor's Children's Cabinet.

Research Articles, continued from page 4

*<http://www.iirp.org/pdf/schoolresearch2.pdf> "Restorative Practices in Schools: Research Reveals Power of Restorative Approach, Part 2" by Abbey J. Porter, June 6, 2007.

http://www.safersanerschools.org/library/beth06_heyryan.html "Restorative Practices in the Souderton Area School District" by Gail Ryan and Christopher Hey, October 2006.

(Contact me at Barbara.Blazej@umit.maine.edu if you would like these links sent to you electronically or if you'd prefer hard copies.)

Bringing Restorative Practices, continued from page 1

moved away from the roots of restorative practices to depending on the rules of the institutions and the people hired to enforce those rules. We have become a culture that relies on specialists instead of nurturing the strengths and wisdom that already are within our communities and within individuals. Restorative practices empower all people in a conflict by inviting them to be part of the solution, by encouraging authentic dialogue within the circle, and by emphasizing connection rather than separation. Unlike our current systems, restorative practices emphasize the needs of the victim(s) and empower the wrongdoer to make things right.

At first glance some people think restorative practices and the circle process hand too much power over to the students. While it does even out the traditional hierarchical structure a bit, it also helps redefine what community, and responsibility within that community, looks like. Instead of trying to control kids' behavior through the threat of penalties, restorative practices allow kids to take responsibility for their behavior on a whole new level. When people feel listened to they also begin to listen to others, and it is this simple shift that helps students who are struggling in school make connections and learn from their mistakes.

The circles I have co-facilitated, while not within the school setting, were with school-aged people ranging from 9 to 16 years of age. All of them were referred by the juvenile system for reasons that would probably have resulted in suspension if they had happened on school grounds. In every circle a collective wisdom emerges that I feel honored to be a part of. It is rare in our society that people who are in conflict have the opportunity to sit down and speak their truths while also having the opportunity to listen to what others have to say. People often feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, and judged going into the circle, but they leave the conference feeling much better about the situation and themselves.

When a person is given the opportunity to be accountable and be part of the process to "make things right" there is a

healing that takes place. Instead of being led to feel that they have failed and need to be punished they leave feeling that they do have the skills to make good choices and work with people they had felt separate from. The human desire to try to make up for one's mistakes seems to be so strong that as a facilitator, I have seen the need to help kids see that their initial suggestions as to what they can do to make things right are a little too severe.

In the circles I have been part of the victim leaves feeling better about the situation and about the offender. When the wrongdoer has the opportunity to be accountable, which often includes an apology, they become humanized in the eyes of the victim. The victim is also able to ask the wrongdoer any questions that have been bothering them about the incident and be part of restoring balance, able to contribute to the solution. Both of these opportunities are important to the healing process, but are seldom offered in the current system.

A circle process also involves community representatives. The voice of the community observers serves to help all see the ripple effects of the harmful actions. Involving people not directly affected by the wrong action truly brings the sense of the greater community into the room. Victims feel validated and offenders are able to gain a new perspective. The offenders see the far-reaching impact of their actions—that people they never thought of before are harmed. They also see that people they haven't met, or only knew in one context, are interested in helping them through an uncomfortable situation.

The circle process allows participants to see that the harmful action is often simply a symptom of the true problem. It is when the underlying cause of the wrong action is brought to the surface,

whether it is that they are being bullied or that there are challenges at home, that lasting change can begin. I saw one teen so empowered by his experience in the circle (where he had been the offender) that he went on to become involved in a community group. By being asked to speak about what he was thinking at the time of his offense and hearing people reflect on what he said in a non-judgmental way, he was able to see himself in a new, more positive light. If people are struggling and are made to feel even worse, their chances to address the underlying issues are diminished, but if they are supported by the community while being held accountable for their wrong action, the possibility to move in a positive direction is opened.

Additionally, while the wrongdoer is asked to look at their own actions, all participants, as representatives of the community, are also asked to look at *their* responsibilities. It becomes a question of how the community can support and guide the individual while creating a supportive environment that will help people before they make poor choices. This can be an uncomfortable process as it might include admitting personal or community shortcomings, but if the offenders are asked to take responsibility and find solutions, shouldn't we in the community be willing to walk down the same path?

I have been encouraged by the enthusiastic response of people within schools, the justice system, and the community as a whole to restorative justice and restorative school practices. The philosophy of restorative practices empowers people and communities to be an active part of positive change. The evidence is out there—in the form of fewer detentions and suspensions and people's stories—that restorative practices work.

Paul Gagnon is currently a VISTA volunteer with the Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast in Belfast, Maine.



Peace & Reconciliation Studies Program
5725 East Annex, Rm. 211
Orono, ME 04469-5725

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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 this page) for \$10 to cover printing and postage. The manual will also be available in Spring 2009 on the Peace & Reconciliation Studies website and can be downloaded free of charge at that time (www.umaine.edu/peace).

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.

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Editorial Staff:

Barbara Blazej
Christopher Jander
Jennifer Stoudt

We thank those who contributed to this issue:

Paul Gagnon
Penny Linn
Mary Ann Nyman
Susan Savell

Send ideas, articles and questions to:
Peace & Reconciliation Studies Program
University of Maine
5725 East Annex, Rm. 211
Orono, ME 04469-5725
Tel: 207-581-2625
Fax: 207-581-2640
Email: peace.studies@umit.maine.edu

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