
CHANGING WAYS / *Building Skills*

Vol 10, #2

Transforming conflict & promoting positive school climate in Maine schools

Fall 2006

Opening Remarks *By Barbara Blazej*

“No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship.”

Dr. James Comer

“The development of emotional resources is crucial to student success. The greatest free resource available to schools is the role modeling provided by teachers, administration and staff.”

Dr. Ruby Payne

In reflecting on what I wanted to write about for this issue, I kept coming back to these two quotes (and several others) that I read in Ruby Payne’s excellent book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (2005), recommended by the folks at Richmond High School. I was also reading an article by Dr. Robert Brooks*, and he echoed this sentiment: “Students don’t care what you know until they first know you care.” Role-modeling, relationships, caring—I would consider these the basis for a positive, healthy school climate. And as Maine educator Chuck Sauffer has put forth, it is the adults in a school that shape a school’s climate to a large extent: in the ways they connect with each other and with students (or not) and in the behaviors and attitudes that adults model for students.*

I also came across a fascinating collection of research articles published in the September 2004 edition of the *Journal of School Health* (Vol. 74, No. 7). These articles were written expressly for a June 2003 event called The Wingspread Conference which brought together many leaders in the education field (and related fields) to address the importance of “school connectedness” in terms of students’ emotional development, academic success and safety. As a result of this gathering, participants developed the “Wingspread Declaration on School Connections,” which defined “school connectedness” as “the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals.” In a companion piece in this same journal issue, “The Executive Summary” by

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Talking Circles *By Jason Grundstrom-Whitney*

Of all structures in the world, the circle is perhaps the strongest. We have a half-circle framed with wood that comprises our Sweat Lodge. All great architecture from the Sistine Chapel to the great domes of mosques throughout the Arabic world use this form. These buildings have withstood all traumatic weather conditions and help us to see the symbolic view of the heavens. In Tai Chi the highest performance is to be like a round ball rolling, inflated with Peng energy so that anything that comes into contact will immediately bounce off.

As human beings we relate best socially in circles as well. When

international organizations meet, they meet in a circle. A circle in such settings disallows the vertical place of prominence that would denote power. Circles by their very nature in social settings say to all participants that you too are important, you too have a voice in these proceedings. So the first general rule of a talking circle is that, well, as the name suggests we meet in a circle.

In Native country when we do a talking circle we always smudge down first. Each participant is passed a smudge bowl usually filled with white sage and at times cedar, copal,

sweetgrass, etc. As the bowl makes its way around, the smell seems to bring you into sacred space. It is as if a memory, from long ago perhaps, is just on the edge of consciousness but not there. This sacred space is primordial, timeless. Today, given the restraints of the educational setting, I would like to suggest

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Opening Remarks, continued from page 1

Robert Blum and Heather Libbey, the authors summarize the key points of the Wingspread Declaration, which include among others:

“Increased school connectedness is related to educational motivation, classroom engagement, and better attendance. These are then linked to higher academic achievement.”

School connectedness can be built through fair and consistent discipline, trust among all members of the school community, high expectations from the parents and school staff, effective curriculum and teaching strategies, and students feeling connected to at least one member of the school staff.”

I find this notion of adults creating a “relational” climate in schools—one in which students can form strong bonds to school through positive connections with adults and peers—especially interesting because we have certainly seen how this dynamic works over the years in our ongoing efforts with schools to prevent conflict and violence. The climate of a school clearly impacts everyone within the community, positively and negatively, and what adults in a school choose to model influences the attitudes and behaviors of students. If we, as educators, hope to bring forth the best from our students, then we need to see ourselves as “relational leaders” in the sense of practicing and promoting strong connections between all members of a school based on mutual respect, compassion, open-mindedness, and trust. More specifically, we can work towards creating an environment within our classrooms and schools characterized by:

Fairness and Compassion: how rules and policies are applied; who is included or excluded (among staff and students); the kinds of rules imposed (restorative and/or punitive); the treatment of those who break the rules.

Respect and Connectedness: among and between all groups within a school community—students, faculty, staff, administration, parents; collegiality; mentoring; a “partnership” model (see, for example, Riane Eisler’s *Tomorrow’s Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education for the 21st Century*, 2000).

Engagement and Welcome: opportunities for empowerment through self-expression; being heard and affirmed; having choices and decision-making; a sense of “I’m excited to be here with you.”

Authenticity: an invitation to be oneself; a climate that encourages healthy risk-taking, in which mistakes and failures are seen as valuable learning opportunities; a community that supports, encourages and celebrates diversity.

Safety: adults who proactively address harassment and bullying among students and who do not themselves use threats, harassment or intimidation towards students or colleagues (more at Saufler, below).

“I’ve come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a person’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated or a person humanized or de-humanized.”

Dr. Brooks includes these powerful words by psychologist and educator Haim Ginott as a reminder to us that what we model for our students and what kind of climate we create, do matter a great deal in terms of student growth and success. And their impact reaches beyond any particular classroom or school as well, as these “local” efforts contribute to a much larger movement towards a global community based on respect, compassion, connectedness and peace.

(Quick note: This issue marks our tenth full year of publishing this newsletter, and we’d like to thank everyone for your interest and feedback over the past decade! We hope this newsletter has been useful to you in some way, and we look forward to continuing this service in the future. As always, we invite your comments, questions and ideas for upcoming issues as well as articles you might like to write.)

***Sources:**

Brooks, Robert, Ph.D. “The Educator’s Mindset: The Basis for Touching a Student’s Mind and Heart,” September 2005; also see by Dr. Brooks: “The Violence at Red Lake: Further Reflections about Creating Safe Schools,” April 2005, <http://www.drrobertbrooks.com>.
Saufler, Chuck, M.Ed. “School Climate and School Culture,” 2005, Maine Project Against Bullying, www.stopbullyingmaine.com.

The Twelve Governing Principles of Global Education
From the Council for Global Education
www.globaleducation.org

A **Teacher** is a role model and an example.

A **School** is an extended family.

A **School** is an inspiring physical environment.

A **School** lets music and the arts refine character and deepen emotion.

A **Parent** participates in continuous learning about the child.

A **Parent** is a role model, and mother a child's first educator.

A **Home** is a loving and caring environment where the child gets constant positive reinforcement.

A **Child** learns by doing, not merely through instruction.

A **Child** is exposed to diverse countries, cultures, languages and religions.

A **Child** competes with himself or herself, not simply others.

A **Child** learns to cooperate and value the interests of others.

Teachers, Parents, and the **Child** participate in on-going learning and evaluation, committing themselves to a process of continuous discovery and improvement.

Web Resources for Global Education

The American Forum for Global Education **www.globaled.org**

The American Forum for Global Education provides leadership to strengthen the education of our nation's youth by fostering the ability to think creatively, analytically, and systematically about issues in a global context.

Bridges to Understanding **www.bridgesweb.org**

Bridges is an online classroom program connecting indigenous and urban children worldwide through digital storytelling and other media.

Creative Connections Project **www.ccph.com**

The Creative Connections Project is a groundbreaking model of education that uses the arts and the internet to build cross-cultural understanding and community by directly linking predominantly U.S. K-12 classrooms with partner classes in regions of the world they are studying.

Friendship Through Education **www.friendshipthrougheducation.org**

Friendship Through Education is a consortium of organizations that creates opportunities for the youth of the world to interact both inside and outside the classroom in order to build a Culture of Peace.

IEARN **www.iearn.org**

Started in 1988, IEARN is the world's largest non-profit global network that enables teachers and young people to use the internet and other new technologies to collaborate on projects that both enhance learning and make a difference in the world.

Peace Studies and Maine Law & Civics Education (MLCE) have compiled a 60+ 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 Studies (see contact details on page 8) for \$10 to cover printing and postage. The manual will also be available on both Peace Studies and MLCE websites where it can be downloaded free of charge.

Stress and Burnout: *Using Mindfulness in Education*

By Nancy Hathaway, M.Ed.

Mindfulness is about paying attention to what is happening in this moment right here, right now. Being mindful means letting go of thoughts about the past, concerns about the future, and opinions about what is going on in the present. Indeed, Mindfulness addresses some of the central questions in education today: How do we develop interested, attentive students? How can we approach education from a place of joy, stability, and inner peacefulness? How can we help ourselves and our students see beauty and intelligence in ourselves and in others? How can we best nourish our students in the limited time we have with them? How can we and our students meet each moment with patience, courage, calm, and clarity? With the predominance of standardized testing in schools, how can we prepare our students for testing so that they can maximize the knowledge that they have? Our students' lives are increasingly stressful and filled with distractions and emotional needs. How can we help children cope with stress, while nourishing ourselves at the same time?

Developing powerful Mindfulness techniques can help teachers meet the multifaceted challenges that confront modern educators. In fact, Mindfulness is used in classrooms and institutions around the world—by professional athletes and teams (Chicago Bulls and LA Lakers), Fortune 500 corporations, law schools, and health care professionals. Teachers can practice Mindfulness in the classroom using simple but powerful techniques. Teachers and students can practice and benefit from Mindfulness simultaneously. Students can learn Mindfulness skills in two ways: 1) While practicing Mindfulness, the teacher provides a role model for the student; and 2) The teacher can teach Mindfulness skills to the students. Mindfulness is a skill that can be used to enhance both the classroom environment and family life. It is a lifelong tool for both students and teachers. Participants in Mindfulness trainings have experienced marked improvement in concentration, listening, interpersonal skills, clarity of thinking, creativity, stress reduction and patience.

Research has shown that incorporating stress-reduction programs into school curriculums improves academic performance, self-esteem, concentration, and behavior problems (Ballinger & Heine; Cheung; Dendato & Diener; Kiselica, Baker, Thomas & Reedy; Shillingford & Shillingford-Mackin). Childhood stress is a precursor for stress as adults because we carry behavior patterns learned as children into adulthood. Learning skillful techniques to reduce stress in childhood will help bring coping skills into adulthood. Incorporating Mindfulness-based tools for stress reduction and relaxation is essential for today's classroom for students as well as teachers.

When we are mindful, we implicitly or explicitly: (a) view a situation from several perspectives; (b) see information presented in the situation as novel; (c) attend to the context in which we are perceiving the information; and eventually (d) create new categories through which this information may be understood (Kabat-Zinn). If teachers and students develop their attention skills, teaching and learning can become more meaningful.

The core ingredient of Mindfulness practice is awareness of what is happening in one's body and mind with the use of the breath as a tool to become more aware and focused. Awareness of the breath has been reported to regulate the autonomic nervous system, focus the mind, and increase self-awareness. If teachers can be "present" they can increase the quality of their teaching performance. When teachers are more focused, they may be better able to deal with stress, which has important implications for teacher health and student learning. Students who model their teacher's use of the breath as an anchor for mindful attention have been found to be more on task than students who do not (Solloway).

Three Mindfulness exercises for the classroom:

1) The teacher begins the day by taking three quiet minutes before students enter the classroom. Sit or stand so that your body feels centered — feel the floor supporting your feet, back straight, chest open, and shoulders back. Notice your breath in its regular rhythm (it doesn't matter if your breath is fast or slow, just noticing it is what is important). The teacher becomes the role model of one who is centered rather than "telling" the students to be mindful. (important)

2) Stand at the door of the classroom and say, "good morning, name" to each student while making eye contact with each one as they enter.

3) In homeroom or before beginning the first lesson, have the students sit in their chairs and do a Mindfulness exercise, such as the following:

continued on next page

“Feel the floor under your feet, feel your legs, knees, feel the chair under you supporting your whole body, feel your straight back and imagine that the crown of your head is being pulled up by a string, feel the stretch of your back, feel your open heart, feel your neck, face, behind the eyes, forehead, and all your hair follicles” and “feel your breath breathing all by itself, feel the breath coming in, feel the breath going out, feel your belly rising out with the in-breath and falling back with the out-breath, in, out, in, out, breathing in; breathing out, breathing in; breathing out.”

During one of my Mindfulness workshops, a participant who is a film producer from Berlin, Germany told me that his fourth grade teacher had his class do these exercises each morning. This teacher and her classes were his all-time favorites!

Two one-day seminars for professionals in education entitled, *Rejuvenating Education: Bringing Mindfulness Techniques into the Classroom* will be offered in Spring 2007: University of Maine, Orono, Center for Teaching Excellence, Thursday, March 15, 2007 (for workshop details and registration, contact the Center for Teaching Excellence—CTE@maine.edu or 581-3472); and USM, Portland, Friday, March 16, 2007 (contact mmorrel@usm.edu in the Center for Continuing Education, 780-5931).

Nancy Hathaway, M.Ed., has studied with numerous teachers, including Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D. She has taught Mindfulness Meditation for 25 years. She has a private practice in Ellsworth and Blue Hill, Maine, where she offers group classes and one-on-one consultations.

Sources:

- Ballinger, D. & Heine, P. (1991 Spring). Relaxation training for children: a script. *Ophea Journal*, 31-35.
- Cheung, S. (1991). Relaxation training for high school students in Hong Kong. *International Journal for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance*, 35 (4), 133-135.
- Dendato, K. M. & Diener, D. (1986). Effectiveness of cognitive/relaxation therapy. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 33(2), 131-135.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full Catastrophe Living*. New York: Dell Publishing.
- Kiselica, M., Baker, S., Thomas, R. & Reedy, S. (1994). Effects of stress inoculation training on anxiety, stress, and academic performance among adolescents. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 41(3), 335-342.
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- Shillingford, J. & Shillingford-Mackin, A. (1991). Enhancing Self-Esteem through Wellness Programs. *Elementary School Journal*, 91(5), 457-466.
- Solloway, S. (1999). Teachers as Contemplative Practitioners. *Oklahoma State University Dissertation Abstracts* (0664), I-175.

Library Resources Available

The Peace Studies Program at UMaine in Orono, and Maine Law & Civics Education at USM in Portland have several hundred resources for loan on conflict resolution, community-building, school climate, peer mediation, youth violence prevention, bullying, diversity education and law-related education. These include books, curriculum materials, videos, and even a few music CD's. To receive lists of these materials or to borrow items, contact: Peace Studies, University of Maine, 5725 East Annex, Orono, ME 04469, tel. 581-2625, fax 581-2640, email: peace.studies@umit.maine.edu; or Maine Law & Civics Education, University of Maine School of Law, 246 Deering Ave., Portland, ME 04102, tel. 780-4991, email: pamelaa@usm.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 surveys. You can use one or a combination of the packets. The UM Research and Evaluation Center will provide analysis and reports. Request a cost sheet from Peace 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.

A Sampling of Resources in the Peace Studies Library (on topics covered in this issue)

- A Framework for Understanding Poverty. Ruby Payne, 2005.
- Building the Respectful School: School Climate Planning Done Right. Martin Fleming, 2004.
- Calling the Circle: The First and Future Culture. Christina Baldwin, 1998.
- Comparing Cultures: A Cooperative Approach to a Multicultural World. John W. Pickering, 1994.
- Creating Emotionally Safe Schools: A Guide for Educators and Parents. Jane Bluestein, 2001.
- One World, One Earth: Educating Children for Social Responsibility. Merryl Hammond and Rob Collins, 1993.
- Peacemaking Circles: From Crime to Community. Kay Pranis, Barry Stuart, and Mark Wedge, 2003.
- School Climate: Measuring, Improving, and Sustaining Healthy Learning Environments. Jerome H. Freiberg, 1999.
- Schools Without Fear: Group Activities for Building Community. Judy Brown Lehr and Craig Martin, 1994.
- Schools with Spirit. Linda Lantieri, 2001.
- Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership. Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson, 1999.
- The Global Classroom, Volume One. Michelle De Cou-Landberg, 1994.
- The Global Classroom, Volume Two. Michelle De Cou-Landberg, 1995.
- The Little Book of Circle Processes: A New/Old Approach to Peacemaking. Kay Pranis, 2005.
- The Multicultural Math Classroom: Bringing in the World. Claudia Zaslavsky, 1996.
- The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School. Rachel Kessler, 2000.
- Tomorrow's Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education for the 21st Century. Riane Eisler, 2000.
- To borrow these resources, contact the Peace Studies Program Library at 581-2625, fax a request to 581-2640 or email peace.studies@umit.maine.edu.**

Schools and Community Mediation Centers – A Peacemaking Partnership

By Tracy Quadro

Peacemaking begins at home, and in the community. There are three non-profit community mediation centers in Maine: Penquis Dispute Resolution Center in Bangor (1-800-215-4942), Community Mediation Services in Hallowell (1-800-381-0609), and Community Mediation Center in Portland (207-772-4070). Each of these centers provides low-cost mediation services to the areas they serve. Some individuals will qualify for free services.

The mediation centers are an excellent resource for school guidance departments, civil rights teams and peer mediation groups. Guidance counselors may wish to refer parents and teenagers to mediation to work out communication problems. Mediation may also be sought when there are difficulties between parents and teachers, or between teachers, administration and staff in any combination.

Civil Rights Teams may benefit from the training that centers provide in communication, diversity and sexual harassment awareness. The community mediation centers also have a wide variety of materials, including books, videos and curricula, available for borrowing.

Peer mediation groups may request support in the form of guest mediator speakers, training and mentoring. Wherever you are in the state, there is a community mediation center there to serve you.

Talking Circles, continued from page 1

another possible way to use the talking circle. In most buildings we are not allowed to use smudge. Instead what I have done in Winthrop is to start the circle with a moment's meditation. I usually ring a bell and we take several slow breaths, conscious of our in and out breaths before we start the circle.

What does this accomplish? First it allows students to become centered and relaxed. It allows them to drop the worries and concerns of the day and become centered on the here and now. When this protocol occurs, it always seems to allow for a more relaxed and contemplative session. Next we announce that we intend to do a talking circle. (Perhaps I have already mentioned it in the last class—doesn't matter. The beauty of a talking circle is that a maximum of processing can occur with a minimum of preparation). We then proceed to the intent of the talking circle. Having done this many times in Native country as well as the greater culture, I find the intent to be very important. In many years I have sat through some that have been focused on substance abuse, diabetes, domestic abuse, suicide, etc.

Once the intent or topic for the circle has been agreed upon, then it is time to start the circle. I say agreed upon, because let us suppose that as a teacher you have decided upon a topic to do for your circle and you get to class and the students wish to do another topic. Consensus is the key here. Sometimes we have to let go of roles and functions to allow the process to continue. Remember that once you are in the circle, you are no longer teacher, student, principal, etc. You are now simply, in sacred time, a simple human being. This is akin to Gandhi wearing the doti. Once donned he allowed himself to not be associated as this role or that. He had identified in wearing this garment with the poor. So we might have the class decide that there is something

more pressing on their minds that they need to process.

When it begins we can send around a talking stick, a rock, a feather (in Native country we use an eagle feather). One person talks at a time. As they talk, they hold the object. It is important here, if you have never done one, to lay the ground rules: 1) One person speaks at a time—no interruptions; 2) No comments afterwards—the stick simply passes to the next participant—with no time structure (some may have lots to say, others less—some may take some time—others are like a torrent); 3) No cross-talking, putdowns, or obvious physical or verbal violence.

Now the beauty of rule number two is that there is no analysis. Given such, the participant may speak freely from her/his heart. It has come to my attention, after being a social worker for over 20 years with teens, that we don't let people speak enough. And when we do, we are constantly trying to analyze without listening to the inherent beauty that spreads like wings from a teenager's heart. How beautiful! How frank! How totally honest and straight to the matter at hand!

Once the object has passed to all the hands and comes back to the one who started, then you have a choice. Continue another round, call it to an end, or perhaps agree on another topic to bring to the circle. I always like to thank everyone for their participation and attentiveness to one another. Sometimes, depending on the topic, there are tears, laughter, expressions of anger or the entire realm of expression. This is the power. This is the beauty. By allowing a person to speak, simply speak on a subject, they can have the control of how and in what way they express themselves. I have seen some people gain more from a talking circle than they have gained from therapy.

Like the physical structure, the social construct of the talking circle is perhaps the strongest shape known to man. The ability to simply be without role, the expression from the heart, and the circle that you know is supporting and nurturing your involvement can be a power stronger than you have ever felt.

Michelangelo, Leonardo, the United Nations, and the countless elders that formulated structures into circles knew exactly what they were doing. To be a microcosm we must realize the macro. Our lives are a circle from childhood to old age, death and childhood, much as this great mother we stand on, that also traverses the seasons and circles as she plummets though space.

Jason Grundstrom-Whitney is a social worker at Winthrop High School. He can be reached by email: lwhitney@megalink.net, or telephone, 377-2228 (ext. 307).

"Circles bring us together to share who we are beyond our appearances. They're places of listening - of hearing what it's like to be someone else. They're also places for being heard - for expressing what's on our minds and hearts and having others receive it deeply."

Peacemaking Circles: From Crime to Community by Pranis, Stuart, and Wedge, 2003.

"Dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn."

Harold Saunders, A Public Peace Process.



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Upcoming Events - Winter to Spring 2007

Mediation: Premises, Practices & Policies (PAX 451)

40-hour training in the Transformative Model, 3 credits
February 19-23, 2007 at the Fred Hutchinson Center in Belfast
Instructor: Will Galloway
For information, email ellen.woodhead@umit.maine.edu.
To register call 338-8000.

Bullying Prevention Training for School and District Coordinators

March 26–30, 2007, University of Southern Maine, Portland
FMI: Pam Anderson, email pamelaa@usm.maine.edu, phone 780-4991
Details available by January at: <http://mainelaw.usm.maine.edu/mlce/>

Advanced Training in Transformative Mediation (PAX 452)

40-hour advanced training, 3 credits
April 16–20, 2007 at the Fred Hutchinson Center in Belfast
Instructor: Will Galloway
For information, email ellen.woodhead@umit.maine.edu.
To register call 338-8000.

Discussing Controversial Issues in the Classroom

May 3–4, 2007, University of Southern Maine, Portland
FMI: Pam Anderson, email pamelaa@usm.maine.edu, phone 780-4991
Details will be available at: <http://mainelaw.usm.maine.edu/mlce/>

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