
CHANGING WAYS / *Building Skills*

Vol 12, #1 Transforming conflict and promoting positive school climate in Maine schools Spring 2008

Opening Remarks *By Barbara Blazej*

I'm happy to report that our co-sponsored conference last November in Portland, "Transforming Discipline: Building Community through Restorative Practices," generated a good deal of interest and enthusiasm around the impact that restorative practices can have on changing school climate, culture and discipline in positive ways. I think this excitement stems from what many of us see as the potential of restorative practices to transform both individuals and whole communities; to reduce and prevent misbehavior and violence while promoting accountability, learning from one's mistakes and "repairing of harm done"; and to strengthen such values as respect, compassion, honesty, trust and connectedness among all members of a school community. My colleagues and I, of course, would love to see a growing number of schools in Maine that would like to implement restorative discipline and other practices in a whole-school approach. For anyone considering moving in this direction, here are some "readiness" questions to reflect on:

- What is your current understanding of restorative discipline and practices?
- What interests you about restorative discipline and practices?
- What are some concerns you have that you would like to address through restorative practices?
- What practices do you currently use to address these concerns?
- What does a whole-school approach mean to you?
- Is there a strong sense of respect and connectedness in your school?
- Do current discipline policies help students learn from their mistakes?
- Do current discipline policies address underlying needs, concerns and challenges of students who misbehave?
- Do current discipline policies address the needs of those who have been harmed or affected by others' misbehavior?

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Restorative Practices Increase Student Learning *By Kim Buckheit*

Something is working at Troy Howard Middle School. Something is leading to increased academic performance. Something is leading to a continuous decline in office referrals and after-school detentions. Something is causing students to be more kind and respectful of their peers and teachers. Clearly identifying what "something" is, however, is not easy. We have not conducted a controlled study, changing only one variable, while all others remain constant. We can only speculate as to what changes in practice have been the most significant. I am certain, as are other professionals from outside of our school community, that the change in practice related to student discipline that began two years ago,

during the 2005-2006 school year, is a significant element of the "something" that is working at THMS.

Troy Howard Middle School is located a mile from the coastline in Belfast, Maine, serving 460 sixth, seventh and eighth graders. Nearly half of the students attending Troy Howard qualify for the federal lunch program making us a Title I school. Failing test scores during the 2002-2006 time period placed us on the Priority School list in 2006 and began our work in Formative Assessment with the State Department of Education this current school year. Twenty percent of our students qualify and receive Special Education support. We provide all levels of service including day treatment on site.

Arguably, there are many factors working against the students and staff at Troy Howard Middle School.

I write not as an expert but as a practitioner sharing the experience of changing the way people interact with each other during the school day. There are countless interactions within a school daily: student to

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After you've thought about these issues, we invite you to get in touch with us if you'd like to explore this further (**Barbara. Blazej@umit.maine.edu**). We also have a number of resources and upcoming opportunities focused on restorative discipline and practices that we are offering to anyone who is interested.

Our library in Peace Studies contains most of the books and videos that exist on restorative practices, discipline and school climate, and we are pleased to loan these out to all Maine citizens (see partial list on page 3).

We have compiled a comprehensive packet of the best articles on restorative practices and discipline and we will send one to anyone who makes a request (email me at **Barbara.Blazej@umit.maine.edu** and include your regular mailing address). These articles include some impressive data from schools that have implemented restorative practices in the US and elsewhere.

My colleague Pam Anderson at Maine Law & Civics Education at USM has created an electronic listserv on restorative practices for those who would like to participate in this type of educational networking forum. We will be using this listserv to publicize upcoming restorative practices events as well as information on restorative practices, ideas, questions, stories, etc. 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 in one of two ways:

Visit the following website: **<http://lists.usm.maine.edu/subscribe/rj-schl>**

OR

Email your request to **listserv@lists.usm.maine.edu**. Leave the subject blank. In the BODY of the message, type: SUB RJ-SCHL Your full name (for example, SUB RJ-SCHL John Doe).

Another colleague, Joanne Boynton, will be teaching a 3-credit UMaine course this summer (*Isn't it nice to imagine summer?*), PAX 495: Restorative School Discipline, to be held July 7-11, 2008 at the Hutchinson Center in Belfast. See page 6 for details about this course.

In early fall, we will be co-sponsoring an all-day workshop on restorative discipline and practices as a follow-up to the Fall 2007 conference, both for those who attended and for new folks as well. This session will explore the circle process and how it can be used for community-building, problem solving, classroom misbehavior and more serious infractions. This will take place on Saturday, September 20, 2008, at the University of Maine in Augusta. It will run from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. There will be a \$40 charge for this workshop to cover the space, snacks, materials and other expenses. Lunch will be on your own. At this time, we will take "reservations" for those who would like to attend, and we will confirm the reservations and request payment on June 1. Participation in this workshop will be limited to 50 people. To reserve a space, **email Barbara.Blazej@umit.maine.edu or call 581-2625 by May 10** (We will reserve spaces on a first-come, first-served basis).

Switching gears now—(*In case you were wondering if I'm able to write about anything besides restorative practices!*)—I do want to thank all of you who completed and returned the school climate survey that we included in the Fall 2007 issue of Changing Ways. If you'd like to read the final report that we compiled from the responses, email me (address above) and I'll send you the report electronically.

Thank you for your continued interest in school climate, conflict resolution and restorative practices in Maine schools. I hope to hear from at least some of you and I wish all of you a wonderful spring and summer!

A Restorative Justice Framework for Schools

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sees relationships as central to building community <li style="padding-left: 20px;">* Focuses on harm done rather than only on rule-breaking <li style="padding-left: 20px;">* Addresses the needs of those harmed * Recognizes the purposes of misbehavior <li style="padding-left: 20px;">* Invites and encourages accountability by the wrongdoer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Works to "put right" or repair the harm * Uses inclusive, collaborative processes to put things right <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Seeks to heal * Empowers everyone involved to learn, grow and change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Aims to improve the future |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Adapted from The Little Book of Restorative Discipline for Schools, L. Amstutz & J. Mullet, 2005.

Resources in the Peace Studies Library on Restorative Practices, Restorative Discipline and School Climate

Books:

- Amstutz, Lorraine and Judy Mullet. The Little Book of Restorative Discipline for Schools. 2005
- Bluestein, Jane. Creating Emotionally Safe Schools: A Guide for Educators and Parents. 2001
- Brown, Juanita, et al. The World Café: Shaping Futures Through Conversations that Matter. 2005
- Deal, Terrence and Kent Peterson. Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership. 1999
- Devine, John. Making your School Safe: Strategies to Protect Children and Promote Learning. 2007
- Duke, Daniel L. Creating Safe Schools for All Children. 2002
- Fleischman, Paul. Whirligig. 1999 (A fictional story of restorative justice for grade 7 and up)
- Fleming, Martin. Building the Respectful School: School Climate Planning Done Right. 2004
- Freiberg, Jerome H. School Climate: Measuring, Improving, and Sustaining Healthy Learning Environments. 1999
- Hopkins, Belinda. Just Schools: A Whole School Approach to Restorative Justice. 2004
- Kohn, Alfie. Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community. 2006
- Lehr, Judy Brown and Craig Martin. Schools Without Fear: Group Activities for Building Community. 1994
- Mikaelsen, Ben. Touching Spirit Bear. 2001 (A fictional story of restorative justice for grade 7 and up)
- Morrison, Brenda. Restoring Safe School Communities: A Whole School Response to Bullying, Violence and Alienation. 2007
- Nelson, Jane, Lynn Lott and Stephen Glenn. Positive Discipline in the Classroom. 2000
- Novick, Bernard. Building Learning Communities with Character: How to Integrate Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. 2002
- O'Connell, Terry. Conferencing Handbook. 1999
- Pranis, Kay. The Little Book of Circle Processes: A New/Old Approach to Peacemaking. 2005
- Redekop, Paul. Changing Paradigms: Punishment and Restorative Discipline. 2007.
- Roffey, Sue. Circle Time for Emotional Literacy. 2006.
- Schirch, Lisa. The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects: A Practical Hands-On Guide. 2006
- Sulley, Paul. Safe Places to Learn: 21 Lessons to Help Students Promote a Caring School Climate. 2007
- Tew, Marilyn. Circles, PSHE, and Citizenship: Assessing the Value of Circle Time in Secondary Schools. 2007
- Wessler, Stephen L. The Respectful School: How Educators and Students Can Conquer Hate and Harassment. 2003

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Transformation: A Process of Change Over Time

The Searsport District High School Story

By Judy Cohen

Anyone who turns on the radio or television cannot escape the current political rhetoric espousing the promise of change, or the importance of change or the need for change. I believe that change is constant and inevitable. It is the common denominator of life itself. This article is the story of the ongoing transformation of the school climate at Searsport District High School (SDHS) through my perspective as the student assistance counselor/school social worker. Even as global climate change can affect the evolution of the planet, and humans are inextricably tied to both the causes and effects of change in climate, so the students, staff, parents and the greater SDHS community are tied to the causes and effects of our school climate.

I want to begin by describing my early impressions of Searsport District High School when I first began working here 14 years ago, and attempt to contrast those perceptions to the present time.

I was hired in the fall of 1994. The school resembled a long trailer. The hallways were dimly lit and the tile floors were a pattern of squares that were dull clay, dark green, dark beige and black. The walls were a dingy tan color. There were no windows in the corridors and the windows in the classrooms were small. The outside sheathing of the building had peeling paint and there was no outside sign identifying the school. All-in-all there was a poor and shabby feeling to the physical building and grounds. Inside, during the time everyone was in the hall passing from class to class, it felt crowded and noisy, and at times rude or threatening words or gestures could be heard as one simply walked down the hall minding one's own business. One could hear lockers slamming, offensive slurs such as *bitch*, *shut*, *fag*, and *f_ing fag*, or worse, be hit by a penny that someone flicked as you walked by; or, you could be innocently standing at your locker with your backpack on and you might be pulled to the ground or knocked off balance by someone who "muckled" onto your pack as they quickly passed you. The hallways did not feel safe, physically or emotionally. There were fist fights both in and out of school that school officials didn't know about until after the fact. Students were meted out punishments with little concern for their well-being and no focus on connecting anti-social behaviors to underlying issues such as poverty, disenfranchisement or lack of a functional parent. Students accused of a wrong deed were dealt with by separating them from the community, much the way prisons operate. Activities that poked fun at women and gays were permitted. The entire system was one based on power and control.

Presently, it is March 2008. The school has had a tremendous face lift. We went from a status of not being accredited because of our physical plant to being accredited. There has been a huge addition constructed complete with new windows, a new cafeteria/auditorium, a new library, state-of-the-art technology, new restrooms and many other physical changes. The hallways are now brightly lit with the school colors of white and blue mirrored in the floor tiles and wall color. Large windows letting in natural daylight and outside courtyards and gardens describe our physical plant. At every entrance there is a sign proudly naming our school. Inside the hallways are lined with artwork, students' projects and appropriate notices. There are only very occasional signs of physical violence. There are students gathered together in groups chatting and any occasional altercation or problem is addressed initially with a conversation in the office. The common and consistent response to harassment or name-calling or other wrongdoing is one of communication and education, along with an opportunity to right a wrong. How did this change come about? How did we shift from a school environment that was unable to address prejudice, intolerance and fear to one that is more accepting, tolerant, safe and inclusive?

We've come a long way since my early experiences in this school. There have been a multitude of reforms, many changes in administrative leadership and many long-time teachers and staff have worked hard, including myself, to promote an atmosphere of love and trust and belonging rather than one of power, control and alienation. We have begun to connect the wellness of the school along with the needs to improve literacy and numeracy and academic rigor. We have introduced programs that ensure more equity such as replacing homogeneous grouping (tracking or separating students based on scholastic aptitude or socioeconomics) with heterogeneous grouping (no tracking). We've instituted advisors and advisory groups that stay together for the students' entire high school career, helping to create a culture of continuity and belonging. We've expanded our school universe, including exposure to people of other races, cultures, countries and states by hosting Kenyan students and sending a group of our students to Kenya, and by having a sister school in Brooklyn, NY, where there is a student partnership exchange each fall and spring (through Operation Breaking Stereotypes). We were the recipients of a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant which enabled us to create a *community council*, a group comprised of students, teachers, staff and community members. This group meets regularly and can process any proposal for change submitted

continued on next page

by any member of our school community. We've incorporated life-changing programs like Challenge Day to introduce all incoming freshmen to the importance of being "change agents" that support inclusion, understanding, belonging and acceptance. "Be The Change" has become a school motto and students and adults are recognized for good deeds. The drama team last year performed *The Laramie Project* promoting tolerance and combating homophobia.

Most recently we are involved in the establishment of Restorative School Discipline and a Peer Mediation Program focused on replacing punishment for misbehavior with accountability and repairing the harm done. These processes encourage communication and understanding rather than blaming and ignoring the reasons behind conflicts. They offer people the opportunity to take responsibility for their wrongdoing and the harm they've inflicted rather than proclaiming innocence as their only defense. This actually gives students and adults tools for resolving conflicts and creating positive change. Punitive approaches such as reprimands, detentions, suspensions and expulsions tend to alienate students and adults, and they don't offer ways to make amends or tools for improving relationships.

There is no one reason or simple explanation for the transformation at our school. Change is not an event, as some politicians would like you to believe. Rather, it is a process, and I would guess that the main reason for our transformation at SDHS has to do with a paradigm shift from a school climate based on power and control to one based on relationship-building and trust. I can't say that we've accomplished a perfectly fair school or one that completely embraces the ethic of connection and trust. There are still difficulties between staff members, among students, between students and teachers, parents and teachers, community and school board, administration and staff, and so on. We are a work-in-progress and rather than seeking perfection we seek commitment to our values and to the process itself. We have lots more work to do and I for one count myself lucky to be a part of this extraordinary and progressive educational experience.

Judy Cohen is the student assistance counselor and social worker at Searsport District High School. She can be reached at jcohen@msad56.org.

Library Resources, continued from page 3

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. 2003

[Restorative Strategies for Schools: Roundtable Discussions \(2 Parts\)](#) In Part 1, four expert practitioners of restorative practices discuss how to address a range of disciplinary and behavioral issues in schools, including attendance issues, bullying and working with parents. Part 2 covers topics such as restorative consequences, making apologies and dealing with difficult situations. 2003

[Six Conferences: A Composite View of Conferencing in Programs for Troubled Youth](#). By combining footage of actual restorative conferences for offenses ranging from truancy and leaving school grounds to theft and bringing a knife onto a school bus, this video provides a realistic view of conferencing. 2004

[The Worst School I've Ever Been To: Empirical Evaluations of a Restorative School and Treatment Milieu](#). A film about the 1999-2000 school year at an alternative school in Lansdale, Pennsylvania. This film follows the lives of 3 students at a Community Service Foundation/Buxmont Academy school/day treatment program for troubled youth in Pennsylvania. 2004

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.

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 the Peace Studies website where it can be downloaded free of charge (Summer 2008).

Upcoming Courses and Events- Summer and Fall 2008

Summer at UMaine, Orono:

PAX 451 Mediation: Premises, Practices & Policies

40-hour training in the Transformative Model

3 credits

June 23-27, Monday through Friday

8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Instructor: Will Galloway

To register, call 581-3143.

PAX 495 Authentic Communication:

A Training in Nonviolent Communication

Based on the work of Marshall Rosenberg -

See description below

3 credits

June 23-27, Monday through Friday

8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Instructor: Peggy Smith

To register, call 581-3143.

Speaking Peace In a World of Conflict

*How do I communicate effectively with
people I think I disagree with?*

Violence and peace both begin in the language we use. This one-week training in Nonviolent Communication (NVC), as developed by peacemaker and mediator Marshall Rosenberg, teaches simple skills that enable people to connect with their own and others' needs in a way that inspires compassionate response and the possibility for peace.

FMI: maineNVCnetwork.org

Summer at USM, Portland:

Education Law Conference, July 28-31, 2008, Abromson

Center at University of Southern Maine in Portland, featuring

a keynote by Robert M. Lippincott, Sr. Vice-President for

Education, PBS. The registration link is www.edlaw.org.

Fall at UMaine, Orono:

PAX 360 Conflict Resolution

Semester-long study of conflict resolution theories and practices

3 credits

Mondays, 5:30-8:00 p.m.

Begins September 8

Instructor: Will Galloway

To register, call 581-3143.

Fall at University of Maine, Augusta:

Restorative Practices Workshop

See page 2 for details

September 20, 2008

9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Facilitators: Barb Blazej, Pam Anderson, Margaret Micolichek

Call 581-2625 to register.

Registration deadline - May 10

PAX 495 RESTORATIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

July 7-11, 2008 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

The Hutchinson Center, Belfast, Maine

Restorative School Discipline, a 3-credit course through the Peace Studies Program, University of Maine, offers a constructive model for dealing with conflicts and wrongdoing in schools. This model responds to the needs of victims, holds offenders accountable for their actions, while extending the opportunity to make things right, and recognizes that the school community itself suffers from any harm done and therefore has a vital role in restoring a sense of safety and fairness within the school.

This is an interactive course designed for school personnel and others engaged in, or interested in developing, restorative discipline programs for their school or community setting. The "Circle Process," which is at the heart of restorative practice, will be the format for most class activities. Drawing on the expertise of local practitioners in the field, as well as the valuable experience of class members, we will explore such topics as setting up a restorative school discipline project, establishing positive connections with law enforcement and developing strategies to overcome obstacles and build long-term support from students, staff and community. We will alternate such discussions with small group work and practice in the specific skills which strengthen the circle process and promote a positive school climate. Prerequisite: Some experience in working with children in a school or community setting.

Please join us as we share and collaborate in exploring this promising field.

To register call the Hutchinson Center at 338-8000.

For information, please e-mail the instructor: Joanne.Boynton@umit.maine.edu.

Joanne Boynton is a member of the UMaine Peace Studies faculty, a mediator and a facilitator with the Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast. She has completed training in Restorative Justice from Eastern Mennonite University.

Restorative Practices, continued from page 1

student, student to adult, adult to adult. Each interaction influences the next interaction creating what is referred to as the climate and culture within a school. THMS set out in 2005 to increase positive interactions while at the same time decreasing destructive ones. Initial staff development was related to facilitating “community circles” and using them in a variety of ways to allow all members of the school community to have an equal voice. A community circle is a process developed by the University of Maine Peace Studies Program. Circles began to be used in the classroom in a variety of ways: instruction, debating hot topics, processing emotional issues such as national school shootings or a death in the community and making everyday decisions. Circles are also used during staff meetings replacing large, less productive forums. Circles are used to discuss and resolve the many peer relationship conflicts that inherently occur at the middle level.

Individuals—adults and students—were beginning to feel that their voice could be heard and that what they said would be valued by others. It was an important step forward in 2005 but we were not experiencing any significant change in disciplinary practices, office referral rates or student learning. The climate committee, made up of and led by teachers, was having regular conversations with the Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast during the 2005-06 school year. It was at the conclusion of this school year that we looked to take the next step and made plans to integrate the practices of restorative justice into our traditional detention model the next school year.

Ten volunteers were solicited to start the 2006-07 school year. These individuals agreed to take turns performing the weekly detention duty that occurred every Tuesday and Thursday after school for one hour. Detention in the past was a duty shared by all staff during the year and each teacher chose to run detention however they saw fit: students watching the clock for an hour, students reading a book, students talking with the teacher or friends, or students doing homework (which they often would report having none to do). The ten volunteers had just one meeting with the director of the Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast who had previously conducted a half-day staff in-service providing instruction related to Restorative Practices. A facilitator’s script was created and all ten detention volunteers agreed to stick to the script. Restitution contracts for students to complete and sign at the completion of the circle were made. The logistics were arranged and we embarked upon a new adventure.

Detention now involves students sitting in a circle with one teacher acting as the facilitator. Initial feedback from students involved in the circle detention process was not positive, which was GREAT news. Teachers and students reported back that the circle detention was not fun and very uncomfortable. Students take turns being accountable for their behavior. Other students awaiting their turn serve as community members offering their perspective on how someone else’s disrespectful or callous behavior may have impacted them as well as others in the school community. Other detention participants acting as “victims” was not something that we predicted but is part of what makes the process effective. Plans of restitution are completed by each participant and returned to the administrator. It is the teacher facilitator’s responsibility to follow up with students the next day to ensure that they completed their plan. Another detention circle is assigned to a student who fails to complete the agreed-upon plan of restitution.

Over the course of the first year of implementation, office referrals dropped significantly and the number of students sitting in the detention circle got smaller and smaller. We have continued the model this school year but included nearly all building staff as circle facilitators. The number of students being sent out of class and requiring the consequence of a circle detention has now decreased to only one or two a week. This has created a whole new problem for us in that a circle of one is less than productive. It is a welcome problem and not one that we would have anticipated a year ago.

The ratio of constructive to destructive personal interactions that occur during my day, a teacher’s day, a student’s day at Troy Howard Middle School has changed remarkably in the last three years. Teachers have assumed ownership of conflicts that occur with students and their peers, aggressively seeking ways to resolve them, rather than letting them fester and grow. Students, too, assume responsibility for resolving conflicts that occur with their peers and teachers. Students and staff are more aware and able to identify how their interactions and behavior influence and affect other members of the school community. Something is working at Troy Howard Middle School, that’s all we need to know.

Kim Buckheit is the principal at Troy Howard Middle School in Belfast. She can be reached at kbuckheit@sad34.net.





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5725 East Annex, Rm. 211
Orono, ME 04469-5725

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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 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.

Library Resources Available

The Peace 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 Studies, University of Maine, 5725 East Annex, Orono, ME 04469, tel. 581-2625, fax 581-2640, email: peace.studies@umit.maine.edu.

Changing Ways/Building Skills (Vol 12, #1)

Editorial Staff:

Barbara Blazej
Alana Brown
Maridawn Lamb

We thank those who contributed to this issue:

Kim Buckheit
Judy Cohen

Send ideas, articles and questions to:

Peace 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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