
CHANGING WAYS / *Building Skills*

Vol 11, #1 Transforming conflict & promoting positive school climate in Maine schools Spring 2007

Opening Remarks *By Barbara Blazej*

Each year at this time, as we finally leave winter behind and move fully into spring, I'm always motivated to write about something exciting and hopeful. For more than a year now, we've been collaborating with the Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast and Troy Howard Middle School to create a more healthy, positive school climate through integrating various restorative practices. These have included the Community Circles process as well as an alternative school discipline model that also incorporates circles for conflict resolution and dealing with misbehavior. We have learned informally from the administration that, to date, they have seen substantial reductions in the numbers of discipline referrals and repeat offenses. And they will be looking at other indicators of climate change over the next several months. The results of our partnership are encouraging and highlight the effectiveness of a "whole school approach" to school climate initiatives.

On page 5 of this newsletter, we have included a chart from one of the

best books on restorative practices for schools: *Just Schools: A Whole School Approach to Restorative Justice* by Belinda Hopkins. As you can see, this type of approach includes various skills, practices, values and attitudes among all members of a school community. On the book cover, Hopkins features a graphic called a "restorative jigsaw" that includes all the "puzzle pieces" needed to form a complete picture of a restorative school. These are the various pieces of this restorative puzzle:

- An ethos of care and justice
- A listening school
- Belonging and connectedness—
 inclusive skills and strategies
- Circles to build community and/or
 solve problems
- Mediation for/by all ages
- Relationship management policy
- Emotional literacy
- Restorative approaches to challenging
 situations
- School council
- Happy playgrounds

Peer mentoring

And one piece with a "?"—for schools to fill in themselves.

Using this model as our foundation, when we met early on with members of our middle school staff, we all agreed that there would need to be several components in our whole school partnership. These included: working with a school Climate Committee; offering several workshops on these different restorative practices for the whole staff; collecting baseline data on school climate concerns from both students and staff; providing ongoing support and consultation for staff and administration; encouraging and supporting school-wide efforts to institute these practices (especially the use of Community Circles); involving students in leadership positions; and finding ways to continue these efforts over time. This type of comprehensive, long-term effort ensures the greatest chance of success and sustainability. We have learned first-hand in working with schools that wanted to pick and

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The Privilege of Bearing Witness *By Jan Stringos*

Conflict is not good or bad. It is part of life. We have our most frequent conflicts with the people we are closest to and the people we work with everyday. Children share an environment in a school setting with other students that is akin to a workday for adults. The school environment is ripe for conflict because of the close proximity children have to each other in the classroom, lunchroom, and the bus. Because of personal issues, or watching and listening to the problems of other students, children are exposed

to conflict on a daily basis. Without practical tools to problem-solve a that only adults can solve their conflicts.

Those of us working with conflict resolution are familiar with theories and best scientific practice and curricula but it can become nothing more than tiresome information to the ears of young people. Our children need doable, authentic tasks to be empowered to do their own work. They need time to do the work and adults who will bear witness to the work they are doing. With the support of our administrators,

Madison Elementary School (K-4) and Athens Elementary (K-8) have made a commitment to give children the time to work out problems with each other with an adult (i.e., principal, counselor, or teaching staff) facilitating the process. This support is the backbone

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choose just a few of these components that a piecemeal effort is much less effective in changing a whole school climate, and lacks the energy, participation, support and shared vision to survive over time.

In our most recent meeting with the whole school staff, we learned that circles have been used often over the past year in a variety of ways: for community-building at the beginning of the year, after vacations and at other times; to discuss issues such as bullying and other concerns; to work on curriculum choices; to process lessons including literature; as a daily check-in; to make important decisions; and as part of the discipline system (Detention Circles and circles to address group conflicts). The faculty reported that many students (though not all) have responded with enthusiasm to the circles, sometimes asking to have a circle because they could see the value in it. One teacher commented: “Our kids enjoy and look forward to the circles—it’s their two-and-a-half minutes in the limelight!” Others could see that the circles were helping students learn to work out their problems, communicate, respect others, take turns, and especially to become *better listeners*. This essential connection between the circle process and listening was perhaps best summed up by a teacher in this way: “So many of our students crave to be heard—to have the opportunity to talk about themselves, but more importantly, to have others truly listen!”

Staff members also expressed some of their concerns related to using circles in these different ways, ranging from time constraints and group size to disengaged students (especially some boys) and discomfort among some faculty and students with emotions that arise occasionally during circles. More than one person also noted that the entire school staff would benefit tremendously from using the circle process periodically to address their own issues. This last point deserves particular attention in any effort to change school climate. We have heard this concern repeated by faculty from other schools with which we have worked: Staff members typically focus their attention on *student* behaviors, attitudes and tensions while avoiding their own conflicts. We also know from first-hand experience that when adults in a school *do* engage in regular, sometimes difficult dialogues to resolve problems and strengthen their relationships (what we call “relational literacy”), they make a very important contribution to improving the climate of the entire school community. It is certainly heartening to be involved with a school that recognizes the value of incorporating restorative practices at all levels. For any school that wants to participate in this type of initiative, it is important that everyone understands the long-term, gradual nature of these efforts. Without going into details here, I have found Belinda Hopkins’ “five-stage model for school change along restorative lines” (from *Just Schools*, page 171) to be helpful in highlighting how a school might go about shifting to a restorative culture over time. This movement cannot be rushed, and requires commitment, support, vision, passion and especially patience from all the stakeholders involved.

We would like to invite other schools (elementary, middle or high) to consider incorporating restorative practices in this type of comprehensive approach. Toward that end, we are offering several resources:

1. Our lending library has many books and videos for loan to all Maine educators on this topic (see library list on page 6 for some of the titles and details on how to borrow them).
2. We have packets that contain fifteen articles on restorative practices that we will gladly mail out free to anyone interested. To obtain one, please email Barbara.blazej@umit.maine.edu with your request and be sure to include your regular mailing address.
3. Peace Studies will be offering a 3-credit course at the Hutchinson Center in Belfast, “Restorative Justice: A Promising Approach for Schools and Society,” (PAX 495) during the upcoming summer. The course will run for two weeks, July 9-20, and will focus primarily on the educational setting. See the description of this course on page 7.
4. We are currently working with the Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast and our colleagues at USM to organize a Fall 2007 regional conference on **Restorative Practices for Schools** that would include such experts as Belinda Hopkins and others at the forefront of this educational movement. See box below for details.

If we can assist you in any other way at this time, please contact me by email or telephone, 581-2625. Have a wonderful spring and a truly “restorative” summer!

Announcing the first statewide conference in Maine for Fall 2007 on:

Restorative Practices for Schools

The Peace Studies Program at UMaine, Maine Law and Civics Education at USM and the Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast will be co-sponsoring a statewide conference to explore Restorative Practices for Schools, the whole-school approach to integrating these practices, and what this means for improving school climate including discipline issues. You can read more about restorative practices in this newsletter (Opening Remarks and chart on page 5). The conference will take place in the late fall and we are currently working on finalizing the specific dates and location. We invite all educators who are interested in this area to attend the conference and especially encourage several members from a school community to participate together. If you would like to receive further details and registration materials for this conference when they become available, please email your request to Barbara.blazej@umit.maine.edu or call me at 581-2625.

	<p>RESTORING (Repairing harm done to relationships and community)</p>	<p>R/ (D rel co)</p>
<p>PROCESSES</p>	<p>(a) undisputed responsibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restorative Conferencing • Family Group Conferencing • Victim/Offender Mediation <p>(b) disputed responsibility, conflict, mutual recrimination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediation • Peer Mediation • Family Group Conferencing • Problem-Solving Circles • Restorative Enquiry 	<p>In</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • •
		<p>RELATIONSHI</p>

Staying Connected With Our Authentic Selves as Educators

By Peggy Smith

“When students feel supported and successful in the classroom, they rarely act out. When teachers feel supported and successful in their school, they rarely burn out.” Esther Wright

How do we stay connected to our authentic selves and live in harmony with our core values that led us on the journey to work in Maine schools? Consolidation, assessment, graduation standards, teacher leadership, Response To Intervention, Individualized Learning Plans, helicopter parents, global warming — the list of issues tugging on teachers and administrators grows daily with little relief in sight. How can the adults in schools maintain their authentic joy, be effective at their work and responsive to the needs of students and the community?

Authentic communication is vital to each of these challenges that we face in our work. This process, also called Nonviolent Communication (or NVC, developed by Marshall Rosenberg), shows us four simple, concrete steps that empower adults (and children) within the school environment to speak clearly and work effectively and peacefully with our colleagues, parents, students, administration, and others.

An underlying premise of this model details a shift from relying on our thoughts and judgments to a focus on observing behaviors, identifying feelings and needs, and making requests that include mutual respect and empathy.

Our culture teaches us to view things as right vs. wrong. We learn to evaluate by agreeing or disagreeing, judging others and things as good or not good enough. With NVC we learn to look with new lenses, new assumptions.

“The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.” Carl Rogers

Our basic human nature is to be motivated by joy and meeting needs, ours and those we care about. We can live our interactions from this giving and receiving place by using the four steps of Nonviolent Communication:

- Step one, making a direct observation free of judgment—what J. Krishnamurti called the highest form of human intelligence. This involves sticking to what a camera could record without our evaluative thoughts.
- Step two, opening deeply to our feelings. We have feelings in every moment, but we have been conditioned to ignore most of them. We learn the value of connecting to our authentic experience because it gives us information about our beautiful human needs. We come to learn that our feelings are not caused by other people’s behavior, they are indicators of our needs.
- Step three, coming to know and embrace our needs. In NVC we come to understand that needs are universal. All humans have the same needs, though we develop different strategies to meet those needs. When we become accepting and secure in our own needs we can see ways to connect to other’s needs, no matter what strategies they or we have been using.
- Step four, making a request to bring connection and meet needs. In this model we learn how to ask for what we want in a way that others can accept. We learn to make positive, do-able, connecting and measurable requests.

In the NVC model, we see that all of our words and actions are motivated by a desire to meet needs. These shifts can seem simple. The results are ultimately satisfying and transformative. In the school environment this awareness brings us opportunities to listen empathically and to create more effective communications with our students, our co-workers and anyone we interact with.

To bring NVC into your life, the Peace Studies Program will be offering a 3-credit course for the second time. PAX 495: Authentic Communication—A Training in Nonviolent Communication will run at UMaine in Orono from June 25-29, 2007. See page 7 for registration details. To learn more about Nonviolent Communication try www.MaineNVCnetwork.org or www.CNVC.org or call Peggy at 207-789-5299. Useful books include *Speak Peace in A World of Conflict: What you say next will change your world*, by Marshall Rosenberg, and *The Compassionate Classroom*, by Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson. [These books and others on NVC are available from the Peace Studies Library—see list on page 6. —Ed.]

The Privilege of Bearing Witness, continued from page 1

of our success. It is not uncommon to see our principals engaging students in a conflict-solving session. It begins with preschool and kindergarten classrooms with the message, “We use our words, not our hands.” Children are instructed how to give an “I message” and say how they feel about what happened. But what really works is when children brainstorm a way to bring resolution to the problem. This takes respectful listening to each other and is the difference between the problem really being solved or just going through the motions of “I’m sorry.” The adult mediator is most helpful at this stage of the resolution and this takes.....TIME.

I begin the school year with class instruction and demonstration of solving conflicts. I use puppets to play-act the scenarios with the K-2 grades. The children identify the problem and brainstorm solutions. They watch one puppet give an I message while the other puppet listens and then the process is reversed for the listening puppet to give an I message. Students can then practice with each other in front of the class. Teachers request these classes during those first weeks of school so students remember to use the skills they were taught the previous year and to introduce new students to the process. When I am asked to help students solve an issue, I go over the ground rules—no interrupting, listen to each other, try hard to solve it—and tell them no one is in trouble as long as they want to work it out. We do this sitting on the floor, chairs, or I squat down to the child’s level. This gives the message, through body language, that we are all equals in this process and I am not in control of the solution to the problem. I tell them they may not walk away friends but they will respect each other. By 3rd and 4th grade, students are requesting time for interventions and can work out minor problems on their own. I provide prevention classes on bully behaviors and this year trained all of the 3rd and 4th grades in mediation. They are taking those skills out onto the playground, wearing yellow vests to identify who is the mediator of the day. This works when the mediators have an adult to process their recess interventions. In past years we have trained middle school students as mediators. Finding time for them to do interventions has been the biggest obstacle as the pressures of adolescent academic schedules precludes time to work with other students. That said, the mediation training students receive is invaluable as a lifelong skill.

We have seen a change in our school environment over the last 15 years we have been working with the skills of conflict resolution. We are no longer “putting out fires” or giving punitive consequences to students when they are entangled in conflicts. Students know they can ask for an

intervention and teachers who do not have the time find someone in the school community who does. It has been a growth process for all of us (and we can use it as adults in conflict also!). I am always humbled when I mediate two students being so truthful with each other about their feelings and what they need from each other to bring resolution. Yes, it takes time but I can think of no greater privilege than to be their witness.

Recommended Resources: [*These items are available for loan from the Peace Studies Library. – ed.]

Building Aspirations in the Classroom

Principles for a Peaceful Classroom

Second Step Curriculum: A Violence Prevention Curriculum (Committee for Children)

Video: Sunburst Communications. *Conflict Managers*

* Cowan, David, et al. *Teaching the Skills of Conflict Resolution*

* Kreidler, William. *Creative Conflict Resolution*

* Rizzo, Sandy, et al. *Peacemaking Skills for Little Kids*

Jan Stringos is the elementary counselor for SAD#59. She can be reached at 207-696-4607 or 207-696-5639.

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

Books:

- Amstutz, Lorraine and Burke, Kay. What To Do With The Kid Who...: Developing Cooperation, Self-Discipline, and Responsibility in the Classroom (K12). 1992
- Canfield, Jack and Frank Siccone. 101 Ways to Develop Student Self-Esteem and Responsibility. 1995
- Dalton, Jane and Lyn Fairchild. The Compassionate Classroom: Lessons That Nurture Wisdom and Empathy. 2004
- Hanken, Dennis and Judith Kennedy. Getting to Know You! Social Skills Curriculum for Grades 1-3. 1998
- Hart, Sura and Victoria Kindle Hodson. The Compassionate Classroom: Relationship Based Teaching and Learning. 2004
- Hopkins, Belinda. Just Schools: A Whole School Approach to Restorative Justice. 2004.
- Kohn, Alfie. Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community. 2006
- Kreidler, William J. Teaching Conflict Resolution Through Children's Literature, Grades K-2. 1984
- Mannix, Darlene. Character Building Activities For Kids: Ready-To-Use Character Education Lessons & Activities for the Elementary Grades. 2002
- Nelson, Jane, Lynn Lott and Stephen Glenn. Positive Discipline in the Classroom. 2000
- Pirtle, Sarah. Linking Up!: Using Music, Movement, and Language Arts to Promote Caring, Cooperation, and Communication. Grades Pre-K-3. 1998
- Porro, Barbara. Talk it Out: Conflict Resolution in the Elementary Classroom. 1996 (two copies)
- Pranis, Kay. The Little Book of Circle Processes: A New/Old Approach to Peacemaking. 2005.
- Rosenberg, Marshall. Teaching Children Compassionately: How Students and Teachers Can Succeed With Mutual Understanding. 2004
- Rosenberg, Marshall. Life-Enriching Education: Nonviolent Communication Helps Schools Improve Performance, Reduce Conflict, and Enhance Relationships. 2003
- Rosenberg, Marshall. Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life. 2003
- Rosenberg, Marshall. Speak Peace in a World of Conflict. 2005

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 Making Things Right: Restorative Justice for School Communities – This video provides an overview of the principles and practices of Restorative Justice in school settings, and includes interviews with teachers, administrators, parents and students who have all been impacted by the process.
- 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

Website:

International Institute for Restorative Practices, www.iirp.org

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.

Upcoming Courses – Summer and Fall 2007

Summer at UMaine, Orono:

PAX 451 Mediation: Premises, Practices & Policies

40-hour training in the Transformative Model, 3 credits

June 25-29, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Instructor: Will Galloway

PAX 495 Authentic Communication: A Training in Nonviolent Communication

Based on the work of Marshall Rosenberg, 3 credits

June 25-29, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Instructor: Peggy Smith

Summer at the Hutchinson Center, Belfast:

PAX 451 Mediation: Premises, Practices & Policies

40-hour training in the Transformative Model, 3 credits

July 16-27, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Instructor: Will Galloway

Fall at UMaine, Orono:

PAX 360 Conflict Resolution

Semester-long study of conflict resolution theories and practices, 3 credits

Begins September 10, Mondays, 5:30-8:00 p.m.

Instructor: Will Galloway

New this year!

PAX 495: Restorative Justice—A Promising Approach for Schools and Society (3 credit course)

Restorative Justice affirms the interconnectedness of individuals, families and communities, and maintains that the most effective response to crime or violence will include all three. A number of programs in Maine schools have demonstrated the effectiveness of Restorative Justice in dealing with bullying and other disruptive behavior. Rather than isolating those students who have offended or leaving victims feeling afraid or ashamed, Restorative Justice in schools (also known as Restorative School Discipline) brings them together in what is called a “circle process” facilitated by teachers or representatives of a Community Resolution Team. This process encourages accountability on the part of the offender, supports the needs of the victim and, by its example, fosters a more positive school climate. These promising results point to a growing role for Restorative Justice.

Designed primarily for educators, this course can serve as an introduction to the field or a means to deepen one’s practice. We will explore the foundations of the Restorative Justice perspective and consider its application in schools and other community settings. Guest speakers from the field will supplement our discussions and experiential in-class work. A syllabus indicating selected chapters in the text, *Peacemaking Circles*, by Kay Pranis, will be available to those who sign up. Come prepared to be creative and share activities and experiences.

For more information on the course content, call Joanne Boynton at 338-1522.

(Minimum of 12 needed for the course to run.)

Dates: July 9-20, 2007, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Location: Hutchinson Center, Belfast

Instructor: 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.

For information on any of these courses, email Ellen.Woodhead@umit.maine.edu or call 581-2609.

To register for Orono classes, call 581-3143.

To register for Belfast classes, call 338-8000.

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.



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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, 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, fax 780-4239, email: pamelaa@usm.maine.edu.

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