

DR. STIRLING MCDOWELL  
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RESEARCH INTO TEACHING



# TEACHING AND LEARNING RESEARCH EXCHANGE

## Restorative Action in the Elementary School

A Community-Based Approach  
to Peace Building and  
Conflict Resolution

by  
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Project #128  
June 2006

This research was partially funded through a grant from the McDowell Foundation. However, the points of view and opinions expressed in project documents are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

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# Acknowledgments

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There once was a man who had been traveling for a long time. Having run out of food, he was weary and hungry from his journey. When he came upon a small village, he thought, "Maybe someone could share some food." When the man knocked at the first house, he asked the woman who answered, "Could you spare a bit of food? I've traveled a long way and am very hungry."

"I'm sorry, but I have nothing to give you," the woman replied. So the traveler went to the next door and asked again. The answer was the same. He went from door to door, and each time he was turned away.

But then one villager said, "All I have is some water." "Thank you," the traveler said, smiling gratefully. "We can make some soup from that water. We can make stone soup." He asked the man for a cooking pot and started building a small fire. As the water started to boil, a passing villager stopped and asked him what he was doing. "I'm making stone soup," the traveler replied. "Would you like to join me?" The curious villager agreed.

"First, we must add a special stone," said the traveler. "One with magic in it." He reached into his knapsack and carefully unwrapped a special stone he'd been carrying with him for many years. Then he put it in the simmering pot.

Soon people from the village heard about this strange man who was making soup from a stone. They started gathering around the fire, asking questions. "What does your stone soup taste like?" asked one of the villagers. "Well, it would be better with a few onions," the traveler admitted.

"Oh, I have some onions," the villager replied. Another villager said, "I could bring a few carrots." Someone else offered, "We still have some potatoes in our garden. I'll go get them."

One by one, each villager brought something to add to the pot. What had started as just some water and a magic stone had now become a delicious soup, enough to feed the whole village. The traveler and the villagers sat down together to enjoy their feast and the miracle they helped create.

"Stone Soup", cited in Hetty van Gorp, *The Peaceful School: Models That Work* (Winnipeg: Portage & Main Press, 2002) at p. 20.

The League of Peaceful Schools organization encourages schools to develop a culture of peace using their own blend of ingredients. Vanscoy Elementary has experimented with some, and would like to share that experience with others.

We must thank the number of people who have contributed their time and expertise to the development of the Vanscoy program: Saskatoon Community Mediation Services, and in particular, Jane Dimnik; the Saskatoon West School Division, Ken Dueck and Judy Edwards; Tim Nickel; and Patty Keeler. We would also like to express our sincere appreciation to the Dr. Stirling McDowell Research Foundation for the support to conduct this research.



# Introduction

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## THE NEED FOR DOCUMENTATION AND RESEARCH

Conflict resolution and peace education is a rapidly growing field.<sup>1</sup> For the past two decades, materials and seminars highlighting conflict resolution and a safe, caring school climate have become increasingly popular. Educators searching for new, innovative ways to help students resolve conflicts are drawing upon the resources of conflict resolution and peer mediation training. The incentive to search for remedies in this area has increased since the government of Saskatchewan's request that every school adopt a policy or program in response to the problem of bullying.

At the same time, recent changes in our justice system have encouraged non-adversarial, non-punitive responses to conflict. New legislation in the criminal arena encourages the use of "restorative" principles to deal with youth who have been charged with criminal offences. In many settings, approaches grounded in respectful conflict resolution are a growing alternative – youth and adults alike are being encouraged to work through their differences, to use negotiation and communication skills to generate acceptable solutions. Educators have begun exploring restorative justice practices to help students restore and repair relationships when in conflict.

Vanscoy stands out as a unique example in this area. It has adopted a "whole-school" and staged approach to conflict resolution education. Vanscoy sits within a relatively enclosed rural community, and enjoys a high degree of parent involvement in the school. It has delivered its program using both internal and external resources for maximum coverage. It includes teacher inservicing and parent education, extensive conflict resolution training from K-7, and is being delivered through a partnership that the school has struck with two community-based resources.

In this sense, the program follows the direction of the Saskatchewan government in its recent School<sup>PLUS</sup> initiative. With the establishment of the School<sup>PLUS</sup> program, schools are being encouraged to reach out and develop partnerships of various kinds within communities. The Vanscoy program naturally gravitated towards a partnership model – a model which moved the program further than it could have, confined to its internal resources.

Despite the growing interest in school-based conflict resolution programming (both in the literature and inside the school system), there is a need for qualitative research in this area. The Vanscoy program has developed progressively since its inception. It has matured both in content and in process, and it seemed an ideal time to pause and evaluate on both of these fronts. It offers an ideal opportunity for us to learn about the impact of conflict resolution programming (and its new developments) in the school, lessons that can be translated into future

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<sup>1</sup> Tricia S. Jones and Randy Compton, eds, *Kids Working It Out: Strategies and Stories for Making Peace in Our Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), at 19. The authors point out that as of the early 2000s, conflict resolution education programs were estimated to exist in 15,000 to 20,000 of the U.S.'s 85,000 public schools.

changes in the direction of such programming, however small or large. At a more philosophical level, it presents an opportunity to learn about how the evolution of values in the justice system can inform the development of ideas in the school setting: the importance of restoring relationships, implications of interest-based versus adversarial approaches, the impact of shame, bullying and victimization, and the role of ownership and accountability.

This study explores the impact of a whole-school approach to conflict resolution on students and the school environment – from the perspective of children, as well as teachers, administrators and parents. This study offers some information relating to School<sup>PLUS</sup>; the strengths and weaknesses of the partnered, community-based model to program delivery. Ultimately, we hope that this information will assist in the evolution of programming in elementary schools at many levels.

This report includes a description of Vanscoy’s model and how it was developed, and the results of our evaluation. We have been increasingly influenced by a restorative justice philosophy, and this report includes some reflections about the merits (and possible differences) in a restorative justice approach. Finally, we have discussed the extent to which the Vanscoy model complements the province’s School<sup>PLUS</sup> initiative, and our observations about the strengths and challenges inherent in a partnered approach to program delivery.

We are hoping that our school can learn from the experience, and that others who are embarking, or considering, similar programming can learn too. We offer this report to:

- advance research on the effectiveness of whole-school, community-based conflict resolution or restorative justice programs; and
- help particular schools or school districts make decisions about the value and structure of such programs.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature describing conflict resolution programming in the school system, and its impact, is relatively rich. Our brief review of that literature will be summarized below. Much less academic attention has been paid, however, to the use of a *restorative justice model* for the delivery of conflict resolution education in the elementary school setting. Since the current research project targets this issue, the literature (more accurately, this gap in the literature) is also identified in the following review. We have also included a brief discussion of the restorative justice literature in the criminal justice arena, and its potential to inform this study. Where we have found the literature particularly helpful to our analysis, we have also integrated references throughout the rest of this report.

### **RANGE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS**

Public awareness and interest in the area of conflict resolution has increased rapidly. More than half of our schools have recently adopted conflict resolution programs (Sauerwein, 1995), leading to the conclusion that the long-term goal is to “offer conflict resolution education to more people in every school, over a sustained time frame” (Bickmore, 1999, p.31).

Such programs have fallen across a wide range of models, and a range of central themes. Regardless of the type of program, there is generally a focus on one or more of the following aspects of conflict resolution: nature of conflict, conflict type, conflict style, win/win orientation, and skills.

### ***NATURE OF CONFLICT***

Most literature and curricula devote considerable time first to helping teachers and students understand the nature of conflict. “To transform conflict into congruence, teachers and students must understand the nature of conflict, what causes it, and how to manage it creatively and constructively” (Michlowski, p.1). Typically the definition of conflict is discussed, as are the causes of conflict. Conflict resolution curricula generally attempt not to eliminate conflict, but to help children focus on the constructive versus destructive aspects of conflict. The goal is to “...empower children to find creative and non-destructive ways to settle conflicts” (Peace Education Foundation, 1997).

### ***TYPES OF CONFLICT***

Conflict resolution programs may also devote discussion time to the aspect of conflict types. Although there are a number of types mentioned in the literature, most include conflict of resources, conflict of needs, conflict of goals, and conflict of values – when a person’s beliefs or ideals are challenged (Palmer, 2001, p.1).

### ***CONFLICT STYLES***

Conflict response style may also be addressed within conflict resolution programs. These are the approaches which naturally emerge when an individual encounters conflict. In conflict resolution programs, students may come to a deeper understanding of their learned conflict style (Falikowski, 1999). It is assumed that this new-found awareness will inform students of their strengths and weaknesses when approaching conflicts.

### ***WIN/WIN ORIENTATION***

Although conflict resolution curricula advocate all conflict management styles in various situations, the preferred collaborative conflict style has been coined “win-win.” With this type of collaborative solution, all parties are satisfied and feel positive about the resolution (Kreidler, 1994).

### ***CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS***

Conflict resolution skills are a vital component of conflict resolution programs. In particular, listening, communication, problem-solving, negotiation and mediation skills may be formally taught in conflict resolution programs. Since effective, clear communication is a vital component within conflict resolution, a substantial amount of time is usually devoted to this skill. An important communication skill which is found in all conflict resolution curricula is the use of “I-Messages.” They allow children to assertively stand up for their rights while respecting the feelings, dignity and rights of others (Schmidt, Friedman, Brunt, & Soloroff, 1993). Body language and non-verbal communication is also an important component of many conflict resolution programs, as “ninety percent or more of an emotional message is non-verbal” (Gust, McChesney, Gechtman, 1997, p.36). Active

or reflective listening is also a focus, and is considered one of the most direct paths to understanding and problem-solving (Adams, 1994).

In preparation for conflict resolution, a great deal of time is devoted to developing problem-solving skills. Concentration is given to these skills because “the more comfortable your students become with problem solving skills, the more likely they will be to use them when faced with personal problems and social conflicts in their own lives” (Whitney, 1999, p.76). These problem-solving skills will then be utilized in negotiation and mediation settings.

Accompanying the learning of negotiation skills, a process is usually presented to the students. This process is considered to be the integral substance of conflict resolution. Johnson and Johnson (1996) assert that “students must be taught a concrete and specific procedure for negotiating integrative agreements” (p.583). These processes may be displayed as an acronym or as step-by-step procedures. Some resolution programs focus on mediation. Peer mediators learn specialized skills such as how to act impartially (Angaran & Beckwith, 1999). Programs such as “The Collaborative Student Mediation Project” train elementary students to serve as mediators in playground conflicts” (Gregg, 1998, p.2).

Once students have been introduced to the skills and processes of constructive conflict resolution, literature emphasizes that practice of these skills is imperative. It is recommended that students begin practicing their new-found skills in situations which are not emotion-laden. “Hypothetical situations allow students to experiment with new responses in an atmosphere of safety, without something important at stake” (Sadalla et al., 1990, p.II-1). The most frequently recommended means of practice is that of role play. In this scenario, students feel safe to work on their new-found skills openly, without defensiveness, fear, or embarrassment (Whitney, 1999, p.10). It is expected that “[o]nce students have become familiar with the skills [in practice scenarios],...they will be ready to begin applying their new knowledge to the more complex emotion-laden situations that arise in real life” (Sadalla et al., 1990, p.II-1).

## **IMPACT OF PROGRAMS**

The introduction of conflict resolution education can have wide-ranging benefits, such as: a better functioning classroom, an improvement in school climate, the acquisition of useful social skills, and improvement of school learning. The impact on children ranges from increased emotional literacy to increased communication and problem-solving skills. The literature describes conflict resolution education as laying the groundwork for a culture of peace that can carry into home environments and other aspects of children’s lives.

Research studies indicate that a collaborative or constructive approach to conflict resolution in a school has a positive impact on school and classroom climate. Studies have reported a sense of increased cooperation and positive attitudes towards school (Harris, 2001, p.26). The classroom environment can be described as more peaceful (Johnson and Johnson, 1996) and cooperative (Kreidler, 1994), with teachers and administrators spending less time handling complaints. With constructive resolution of conflict, incidences of conflict diminish, peer relationships thrive, and an atmosphere of safety develops (Drew, 1999).

As a result of decreased conflict, teachers tend to benefit as more time is freed up for teaching and less time is spent on discipline and indiscriminate control (Vatalaro, 1999). In a study by Johnson and Johnson (1996), after constructive conflict resolution training, the frequency of student-student conflicts that teachers had to manage dropped by eighty percent (p.585).

The individual student benefits academically and socially from conflict resolution training. A child's achievement in school will improve as students become more effective in working with each other (Sadalla et al., 1990). There is a developmental advantage of control and autonomy for the child when he or she resolves conflicts without the aid of an adult. This results in feelings of control and autonomy (Johnson & Johnson, 1975, as cited in Vatalaro, 1999). The student's problem-solving skills are also developed. "It turns the problem solving process over to them a little at a time, until they can accept full responsibility" (Sloane, 1998, p.3). With the child's new-found ability to problem-solve and demonstrate a number of cooperation strategies, s/he is more likely to be socially successful and to establish reciprocal, mutually satisfying friendships than are other children (Jewett, 1992, p.2). Perhaps most importantly, studies have found that students as young as kindergarten age are able to transfer the conflict resolution procedures to nonschool conflict in the home (Drew, 1999; DeMasters & King, 1994 as cited in Michlowski, 1999).

## **ANALYSIS OF PROGRAMS AND THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE THEME**

The literature clearly documents the range of programs used to deliver conflict resolution education, and the relatively unchallenged benefits of such programming. Less has been written, however, about the foundational differences between program models. The following references offer some guidance.

Some authors have noted a polarization in conflict resolution programs between those which promote moral development (values) and those which are more skill-based (Jones and Compton, 2003; and Vollmer, et al., 1999). Those authors have gone on to caution that the most successful programs are both adapted to the individual school's needs, and are built on strong philosophical foundations (Jones and Compton, 2003, and Vollmer, et al, 1999). The perhaps inevitable tension between skills and philosophy, became of interest to us in our study. This topic, along with the accompanying literature, is discussed further at pages 22-23 of this report.

While there is a wealth of literature on peace education in schools, there is less to be found on the topic of restorative justice programming in particular. Current literature tends to explore restorative justice as a disciplinary program or measure in the schools – not as a preventative, capacity-building concept (for example, see Ierley and Claasen-Wilson, 2003). There is some recent evidence of the potential for "restorative justice" to be interpreted more broadly in the school setting. For example, the Fraser Region Community Justice Initiatives Association has consciously adopted a restorative justice philosophy to develop preventative conflict resolution programs in schools in the Vancouver area.<sup>2</sup> However, for the most part, the concept of restorative justice has retained a disciplinary focus in the education literature.

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<sup>2</sup> For information about this program, see [www.cjibc.org/programs.htm](http://www.cjibc.org/programs.htm) and [www.sd35.bc.ca](http://www.sd35.bc.ca).

In some ways, this has evolved as a natural development, given the roots of restorative justice in the criminal law arena, where restorative justice arose as a “process philosophy” to deal with incidents resulting in harm to one or several people. Restorative justice processes attempt to blend the goals of accountability with restoration and healing in a way that is distinguished from what often happens in the mainstream criminal justice system.

In the legal literature, a growing number of books and articles are beginning to address the impact of restorative justice programs. A number of process models have been used under the umbrella of restorative justice, from two-party victim-offender mediation models to circle conferencing, and these are often described and analyzed in the literature. Literature on process models tends to explore design issues such as: who should be involved, what role the victim and offenders and their support people should have, what kinds of remedies are appropriate, and whether the processes operate to anyone’s disadvantage.

Even in the legal arena, however, less has been written on deeper theoretical issues: What does restorative justice hope to accomplish? What are the values which underlie restorative justice processes and the field in general? Finally, to what degree do those values enrich other mainstream approaches to conflict resolution? Recent authors in the justice field affirm the importance of identifying underlying goals, but also acknowledge that there is little agreement on how exactly those should be articulated (Zehr, 1990; Sharpe, 2004; Zehr and Toews, 2004; Toews and Katounas, 2004). Although the legal literature captures a theoretical debate that is only beginning to evolve, it still offers important guidance in this project. Drawing on this literature, we decided to consider whether values surrounding restorative justice may enrich conflict resolution programming in the elementary school system. For a more detailed discussion of the restorative justice literature in the legal arena, and how it complements the work done at Vanscoy School, please refer to pages 24-25 of this report.

## THE PROJECT: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

With the support of the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching, we were able to begin to plan a research project for the 2004-2005 school year. The study involved four central questions:

1. What is the impact of a “whole-school” conflict resolution program, from the perspective of students, teachers, administrators and parents?

This included questions about impact (if any): on school environment and classroom dynamics, on the understanding that students and others have about conflict, on the capacity of students and others to respond to conflict in positive ways (at school and home).

2. What can we learn from the use of a partnered, community-based model for the delivery of this program?

Exploring strengths and weaknesses of using outside resources and a community-based approach.

3. How can the legal system's experience with restorative justice best inform principles and practices within the education system?
4. Given what we have learned through the first three questions, what would be the best design for a restorative action model in a rural elementary school?

Our study's focus has been to gather information about peoples' varied experiences with the program. Using a primarily qualitative methodology, we collected data through four primary tools: observation, focus groups, interviews and "School Review" survey data.

After obtaining approval from the University of Saskatchewan Ethics Review Board, we gathered feedback from five groups of participants: students, parents, teachers, administrators, and program trainers.

## STUDENTS

The research involving children in grades 4 and up included two components: observation of children in the conflict resolution training sessions, and year-end focus groups. Children in grades K-3 were involved in year-end focus groups only.<sup>3</sup> Parents were contacted directly and were invited to consent to their child's participation in each component. Only children for whom signed consent forms were received were included as research participants. Four focus groups were held (K-1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-7) in June 2005, each 30-35 minutes in length. Each group included six to eight children, three to four from each of the two grades.

## PARENTS

The research relating to parents included two components. Parents who attended the parent information evenings were invited to submit written comments and feedback (at the same time that they were invited to participate in the research). A group of six parents also participated in a year-end focus group, where they were asked for their feedback about the conflict resolution programming as a whole and for observations about their children, and for their feedback about the parent information sessions. This focus group, in June 2005, lasted over an hour in length.

## TEACHERS

After each of the three student training sessions, teachers of grades 4-7 were asked to participate in a short reflective interview about the session. In June 2005, teachers of all grades were invited to participate in a focus group discussion.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that the K-3 component of the program was recently evaluated: Krista Memory, *Conflict Toolbox: Resolution Strategies in Early Elementary Classrooms* (University of Saskatchewan, College of Graduate Studies and Research, July, 2004).

## **ADMINISTRATORS**

The two school administrators (principal and vice-principal) participated in a joint year-end interview and also had the opportunity to participate in the June focus group with teachers (one administrator was present for that discussion).

## **PROGRAM TRAINERS**

Input was also sought throughout the year from those involved in delivering the program.

Copies of our research instruments are available on request from any of the report's authors.

# Documenting Our Story

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For a number of years, Vanscoy School had been laying the groundwork for a comprehensive, whole-school approach to conflict resolution programming. Peace education, including social skills training, violence prevention programming and bullying awareness had been implemented, building a foundation for the school's most recent focus on conflict resolution and restorative justice practices.

## “PEACE” STUDIES

Although the school was considered to already offer a relatively safe, peaceful and caring environment, teachers were interested in further developing this aspect of the school climate. The school began its journey with a general study of “peace” and peace practices. In 2000, Vanscoy School committed to a year-long focus on “Peace.” The principles of Peace Education were researched and implemented in classrooms through programs such as *Peacemaking Skills for Little Kids* and the “I Care Rules.” Students from all grades were exposed to the language and ideology of peace education. All students signed a “Peace Pledge” which indicated that they would listen to and care for the rights of others. School-wide peace education practices were initiated, all designed to further a peaceful school climate. The arts (drama, music and visual arts) were utilized as a school-wide vehicle for studying the topic of “peace” and educating for peace. This culminated in a school-wide celebration and “Peace” Assembly where students demonstrated their understanding of the value of peace and interacting through peaceful means. As a result of Vanscoy School's efforts for “Peace” that year, the school was given membership in the League of Peaceful Schools. This overall study of “peace” and peace education practices set the stage for a variety of initiatives, all designed to engender peace within the classroom, school, and community.

## PEACE INITIATIVES

### VIOLENCE PREVENTION

One such peace initiative was that of violence prevention. In 2000, Vanscoy was inserviced in, and began implementing *2nd Step*, a violence prevention curriculum designed by the Committee for Children. *2nd Step* purposes to develop students' empathic skills, increase their problem-solving abilities, impulse control and anger management skills. The staff decided to focus on each of these skills as a whole school, simultaneously. Empathy, for example, was the initial focus. Resources supporting this topic were gathered in a central location and grade level progress was discussed on a regular basis.

### SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

*Skills for Success*, a program which teaches basic social skills, had been introduced to the school in 1994. However it remained a consistent focus within the school – both for individual groups, learning needed skills, as well as for entire classes. Skills

such as “active listening” and “ignoring distractions” coincided well with similar lessons introduced in peace education and *2nd Step* curricula.

## **BULLYING AWARENESS**

Several grades within the school also began investigating materials dealing with bullying awareness and prevention. Two experts in the field provided inservice on bullying and victimization to the staff. Programs such as *Bullyproofing Your School* were implemented or used as a resource. Concurrently, several grades in the school were participating in a division-wide bullying survey. As a result, consciousness of parents, students and staff was raised in terms of the nature and effects of bullying.

## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

While the aforementioned initiatives were being explored within the school, another aspect of peace education was becoming an increasing focus within the younger grades. Conflict resolution, a cornerstone in developing a peaceful classroom and school climate, was being implemented in kindergarten through grade three.

In 2001, Vanscoy began implementing a program developed by one of its teachers. For the third consecutive year, students in grades K-3 were introduced to the *Conflict Toolbox*. Since students are often confused about which conflicts to solve themselves and which to take to the teacher, as well as how to implement conflict strategies themselves, the *Conflict Toolbox* Program was designed to help students recognize the type of conflict they are having and then utilize “conflict tools” to help solve the conflict. With the help of visual tools, students are taught to identify conflict, negotiate through it and choose appropriate solutions.

## **THE NEED FOR GRADES 4-7 CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAMMING**

As a result of the implementation of the *Conflict Toolbox* Program in all primary grades, a commonality in language developed, as did a conceptual understanding of conflict type and strategies within the younger grades. However, there was no cross-grade “conflict resolution” programming in place for the older grades. The concern was expressed that students may begin to lose the conflict resolution strategies and language that had been developed in the K-3 grade levels. The nature of the *Conflict Toolbox* Program was such that it could not easily be transferred into the older grades. There became a felt need, therefore, for conflict resolution programming in grades 4-7 which would build upon concepts and language introduced in the primary grades, but be framed within the context, language and interest areas of older grades. The underlying goal of all students, kindergarten to grade 7, having a common conflict resolution language and understanding became of utmost importance.

## A COMMITTEE IS STRUCK

At this point in time, staff were put in contact with Jane Dimnik from Saskatoon Community Mediation Services, a not-for-profit organization which focuses on education and training in the conflict resolution field. As a community educator, she routinely works with older students, introducing them to the topic of conflict resolution and various negotiation strategies. Over a period of time, a partnership was initiated with Jane, as well as with a number of community-based individuals interested in seeing the goal of school-wide conflict resolution implementation come to fruition.

Michaela Keet became an integral member of the Committee, as both law professor and specialist in mediation and restorative justice, as well as parent from the community. She helped in the delivery of the program as well as through guidance in the areas of conflict resolution and restorative justice.

Cindy Keet, an instructional assistant in the school who has taken extensive training in mediation, as well as a parent from the community, became involved in both student and parental components of the program.

As the vision developed, two counsellors from the school division with training in mediation and conflict resolution, Ken Dueck and Judy Edwards, were invited to become involved in the planning and delivery of the program. Ken and Judy were a natural fit, as they were already teaching conflict resolution skills both in individual counselling settings, as well as with entire classes of students. They also helped to fill the role of liaison amongst students, staff, school division, and the Committee.

Krista Memory, a teacher at Vanscoy School, trained in mediation and conflict resolution, was a part of the Committee and program delivery, as was the principal, Rick Gosselin. The school division's assistant director, Heather Shockey, was regularly consulted in terms of division policy and direction.

Tim Nickel, a registered psychologist practicing in the Saskatoon area, became an important resource to the Committee. Although not physically part of the Committee, he consistently led the parent information sessions throughout the year, and helped in staff training. His expertise in the areas of emotions and conflict resolution was heavily relied upon by several members of the team.

Patty Keeler, a mediator with the local community justice committee (Valley West) became a resource person in the program's second year.

This Committee began to meet regularly, with the purpose of designing and delivering a relevant conflict resolution program to grades 4-7. Year-end meetings, including all stakeholders and the assistant director, were held to summarize the year's progress as well as to plan for the upcoming school year.

# THE STUDENT COMPONENT

Through this team of support, Vanscoy School was able to offer continued conflict resolution training. In the spring of 2004, during the first year of the program implementation, SCMS and various presenters worked solely with grade 7. These students received several intensive days of training in conflict resolution. In the 2004-2005 school year, Vanscoy extended its commitment to conflict resolution programming, by offering advanced training to students in grades 4-7.

Each grade received an average of two full days of workshops, along with two follow-up sessions later in the year. These sessions covered topics such as the nature of conflict, perspective taking, emotional literacy, perception, paraphrasing, “I Messages” and positive self-talk. Students demonstrated their ability in listening, using non-blaming statements, paraphrasing, as well as in sharing “I Messages”.

Finally, grade 7 students finished with an extra session, as they prepared for integration into a composite high school the following fall. A smooth transition from grade 7 to grade 8 in Delisle was seen as paramount, with students needing to have a common “conflict” language and a similar understanding of how to handle conflict, as they would be converging the following year. Therefore, presenters expanded their training sessions to the neighbouring high school, holding similar sessions for Delisle grades 7-8 students, to familiarize them with the same conflict resolution language and skills as grade 7 students from Vanscoy. The final SCMS training session in May was seen as having a dual purpose, also being a vehicle for developing friendships between Delisle and Vanscoy students before grade 8.

Although the overall structure of the grades 4-7 programming remained the same, minor changes were made in the second year of its implementation. The program was again delivered over three two-day sessions throughout the year (November, January and March). The first set of sessions were delivered to each grade as a whole group (between 22 and 34 students per group), and were co-taught by Jane Dimnik and Ken Dueck. Each grade received between two and three hours of instruction during that first two-day session, with a focus on the following topics:

- Understanding what conflict is;
- Understanding the impact that conflict has on us (what happens to our bodies and our emotions);
- Exploring different styles of conflict resolution;
- The importance of understanding each other’s point of view (and some techniques to help accomplish this); and
- How to help yourself and others during conflict.

Sessions were highly interactive, with students doing a fair amount of brainstorming, role playing, and games.

After the first session, the conclusion was reached (based partly on advice from the teachers) that the group size was too large. After consulting with each teacher, grades were divided into two smaller groups (11 to 17 students) by gender, except grade 5, which was divided randomly into two groups. Each classroom teacher rotated back and forth between the two groups. The second sessions focused on:

- Exploring and understanding feelings and emotions;
- Strategies for dealing with conflict;
- Understanding point of view, needs and interests;
- Communication skills:
- Using “I feel” statements to identify concerns;
- Active listening skills (including reflecting, open questions, etc.);
- Some assertiveness skills; and
- Negotiation and problem-solving steps (ABCD negotiation).

The third session was used to practice and review what was learned in previous sessions, with an extra focus on:

- The importance of self-talk;
- Communication skills;
- Feelings and emotions; and
- ABCD negotiation process.

## THE PARENT COMPONENT

Committee members felt that it was important to support the student programming with a parent component as well. This was instituted in two distinct ways – via parent information evenings as well as through newsletters.

The first parent information evening was held in the spring of 2004, as conflict resolution programming began to be extended into the older grades. The first session was attended by almost 60 parents, as well as by interested individuals from outlying communities. As a result, some teachers from neighbouring schools became interested in our conflict resolution programming. This led one of the Committee members to give inservices in these two schools and the schools using aspects of Vanscoy’s conflict resolution programming.

During the 2004-2005 school year, parent information evenings were held on three occasions, to accompany the student sessions, in order to engage parental interest in and support for the conflict resolution program. One of the Committee’s goals was to offer parents the opportunity to learn a common language and common skills to share with their children, and reinforce what they were learning in their school sessions.

A portion of the evenings were reserved for Jane Dimnik and others to outline the content and purposes of the school-wide conflict resolution programming. A significant portion of the evenings was devoted to the information shared by Tim Nickel, a registered psychologist from Saskatoon. His services were employed to share with the parents background knowledge to support what their children were learning in school. He deepened parents’ understanding into the nature of emotions and conflict, through discussion and experiential learning on topics including anger, communication styles and listening skills. He eventually came to be seen as a peripheral partner with us – as a resource person for the Committee.

Topics covered in the parent information evenings included:

- Understanding conflict and its impact;
- Understanding anger and emotions;
- Communication skills - active listening skills;
- How to have difficult conversations;
- Understanding points of view; and
- Negotiations and problem-solving steps.

Parents were also given handouts and optional activities to do at home with their children.

The second initiative in increasing parental awareness and education in conflict resolution was the “Conflict Corner” addition to the monthly school newsletter. This monthly article included general information about the conflict resolution program, topics students were currently taking in their conflict resolution sessions, as well as tidbits regarding how they could best help their children in conflict situations and activities they could do at home (for example, discussion questions, crossword puzzles or word searches with a conflict resolution theme).

Attendance at the parent information evenings dropped considerably from the original 60 people attending the first session. On average, between 10 and 20 parents or community people attended each of the 3 sessions held during the 2004-2005 year.

At the end of the 2004-2005 school year, Cindy Keet produced a Parents’ Handbook, which included information on all of the key concepts covered with students during the school program. One handbook was sent to each family, to serve as a resource at home.

## THE TEACHER COMPONENT

In addition to educating students and parents in conflict resolution practices, teachers were also further exposed to the conflict resolution language and concepts being presented in the student and parent sessions. Through SCMS seminars and a staff inservice, staff became more aware of and familiar with the language and philosophy of conflict resolution - in order to support what students were learning.

SCMS offered Vanscoy and Delisle a select number of spots in their full-week “open” conflict resolution and mediation training. Through these sessions, conflict language was explored and skills being introduced to grades 4-7 students were experienced at a deeper level, making the concepts more concrete and personal for teachers as they worked with their students. As a result of these sessions, educators further discovered the usefulness of conflict resolution strategies in their lives, as well as those of their students.

Conflict training was also provided to the entire staff in an inservice by Tim Nickel and Jane Dimnik. Topics such as emotional literacy, empathic listening, “I

Messages,” and assertiveness were of particular interest. Following the years of inservicing staff, conflict resolution remained at the forefront of the school’s goals.

At the conclusion of 2004-2005, Krista Memory produced Conflict Resolution Resource binders for grades 4-8, which included handouts and lessons including all of the key conflict resolution topics covered with students throughout the year. A binder was provided to each grade level teacher, as well as one binder containing all of the materials to the resource room teacher.

# Learning From Our Story: Interview Results and Other Data

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Our research focus was relatively broad, and while we explored participants' views about the program, we were not attempting a detailed examination of the use of different conflict strategies and techniques, or their impact. The School Review data, discussed first, shows the overall success of and support for the Vanscoy program. Feedback from participant groups (students, parents and teachers) begins to identify the program's particular strengths and challenges it still faces.

## SCHOOL REVIEW SURVEY DATA

During the 2004-2005 school year, Vanscoy School completed its "school review" evaluation process. The evaluation included a survey of all parents, teachers and staff, and older students, with generally high participation rates; 67 percent for parents, and almost 100 percent for students.<sup>4</sup> Questions were inserted in both of these surveys to explore the overall impact of the conflict resolution programming, and revealed generally positive results:

Grade 6 and 7 students were asked to respond to these two statements, with an indication that they agreed, did not agree, or were not sure. To the question, "I feel I know what conflict is," 44 said yes, 1 said no, 5 were not sure, for a positive response of 98 percent. To the question, "I am good at solving problems with my friends," 37 said yes, 3 said no, and 12 were not sure, for a 93 percent positive response.

Questions for parents targeted their observations about the value of the programming and their observations about the extent to which their child was using the skills. To the statement, "My child has been using conflict resolution skills learned at school in out-of-school activities," 1 strongly disagreed, 7 disagreed, 47 agreed, and 15 strongly agreed (with 7 being neutral), for a positive percentage of 89 percent. To the statement, "I feel conflict resolution training is valuable to my child," 0 strongly disagreed, 1 disagreed, 31 agreed, 42 strongly agreed, and 3 were neutral, for a 99 percent positive response.

Teachers were asked two questions about the conflict resolution program. "I support the integration of conflict resolution training in the school setting," and "I have seen students using conflict resolution skills at school." To the first, there were 5 agrees and 5 strongly agrees, and to the second, there were 6 agrees and 5 strongly agrees, for an overall 100 percent positive response, and an overall average response of 3.5 out of a possible 4.

The conflict resolution component in the school received an overall rating of 3.32 out of 4. The school review team concluded with a number of recommendations, including the recommendation to "continue the school's emphasis on the Conflict Resolution initiative."

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<sup>4</sup> Saskatoon West School Division, No. 42, *Vanscoy School Review*, January 2005, unpublished.

# FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS

One of our research objectives was to investigate the impact of a whole school approach to the delivery of conflict resolution programming, and we therefore gathered feedback across all of the grades. The discussion of focus group results will be separated into the younger grades (K-3) and older grades (4-7) because the nature of the programming at each level is different.

## GRADES K-3

Children in grades K-3 displayed an understanding of what a conflict is and what may happen if conflict remains unresolved. When asked about ways to deal with a conflict, children in these grades could easily name the strategies (chance games; sharing or taking turns, walking away, talking and truth-telling, involving an adult) and could use the corresponding labels (the ACTS wheel, the “speech bubble” or “I feel” statement). Although kindergarten children seemed to have a grasp of the conflict resolution ideas and caring language, they were more likely to indicate that they would “tell a grown-up” if they had a conflict, and were less likely to know how to use an “I feel” statement.

When invited to identify the kinds of conflict they were encountering, Grade 3 students were more likely to give examples of social exclusion, either from sports or from games. Although Grade 2 students also mentioned exclusion, the Grade 2 and younger students were more likely to identify resource-type or simple conflicts (not relationship-based).

For the most part, children in these grades talked about the strategies “working” for them. One Grade 3 child talked about a situation where the use of the Peace Table to deal with a longstanding conflict with one child ended up facilitating a new friendship between those two children. Children in Grade 3 also talked about the continual presence of conflict (“We have conflict everyday” and “I feel like we know more about it and we use it 4 or 5 times a week”) and the prospect of using conflict resolution skills in the future (“When you’re older, you might get faced with something and you wouldn’t know what to do, like peer pressure.”). On the other hand, there was a noticeable shift happening in Grade 3. Grade 3 children acknowledged that they are beginning to use the skills less, and were finding “I feel” statements less useful; “[some] kids ... are mean to you when you use it,” and “It doesn’t work with my brothers; they just laugh at me.”

## GRADES 4-7

Again, children in the older grades could easily identify different types of conflict, and strategies for dealing with conflict. Children in grades 4-7 tended to admit that the conflict resolution programming could be valuable (and in particular, learning how to identify feelings), but characterized it as something for the younger grades. They often described the programming as repetitive of what they had learned as younger students – which discredited it in their eyes.

The most common struggle that older students appear to have is revealed in their comments about the use of the “I feel” statement: “It doesn’t really work. It’s wussy. They just say ‘buzz off’” (Grades 4-5 focus group); “They just laugh” and “We try it with older siblings and they don’t listen” (Grades 6-7). Grades 6-7 in particular

described this kind of approach as “taking too long,” and indicated a need for something that “we can use quickly.” This reaction to “I feel” statements reveals the complexity of how teens and pre-teens deal with emotion, but it may also be a reaction to the early training that Vanscoy students receive in such skills. Both dimensions will be discussed further below.

In terms of how the programming was delivered, students clearly preferred the hands-on components of the sessions (role playing and games).

## FEEDBACK FROM PARENTS

### **ON PROGRAMMING FOR STUDENTS:**

Parents described the whole school approach as “paramount,” observing the importance of starting in the early grades and reinforcing in the older grades. They described a number of benefits from the programming: children have brought some of the skills home; they are more likely to identify their feelings; and they are more empowered and more confident they can handle issues on their own. Parents described this as considerable progress over how previous generations had been taught to deal with conflict. There is no question that parents viewed the program as beneficial and the training as inherently valuable.

Parents identified a few gaps in the content of the current program. Parents expressed the concern that the “I feel” statement had become a trigger for negative responses in older children, and suggested that a more mature or sophisticated approach be introduced at that level. They also suggested that the program deal more directly with protracted conflict and conflict resulting from the misuse of power (bullying), and that it address the “bystander” problem. Parents also talked about the particular needs of certain classes of students and suggested that the program be able to shift in its content to address those particular needs or characteristics. Finally, in terms of program delivery, some suggested that the program be integrated more fully over the course of the year (not limited to three sessions), and that there may be an opportunity to involve older children actively in the teaching of the younger grades (for example, dramas and role plays, making pamphlets, etc.).

### **ON THE “PARENT COMPONENT” OF THE PROGRAM:**

Parents indicated that they received some valuable information at the parent sessions, information which they have been able to incorporate into their lives; for example, asking themselves what they need from a situation rather than responding in anger or “focusing on the direction and not the result” (the idea of building up better communication over time). Parents appreciated learning some new skills, and especially being informed about what the children were learning in school, so that they can use the same language with their children.

Parents’ main interest was in being able to reinforce the skills in their home setting. For example, when parents at the second session were asked, “What are you looking for from these sessions?” all of the five sets of parents at that session

indicated that they would apply it at home, with their children. One said, “I have two teenage [children]. I expect to use it a lot with them.”

In terms of the format and delivery of the parent education sessions, parents also offered a number of suggestions. There was a mixed response to the role playing (some appreciating it and others being uncomfortable), but a clear interest in hands-on skills and techniques (rather than theory), handouts (to help reinforce what they had learned), and the monthly newsletter section. Parents were more comfortable with the smaller classroom setting, rather than the lecture-oriented setup of the gym. They appreciated the variety of presenters and some were especially interested in hearing from the “internal” people. Focus group participants acknowledged the problem of attracting parents to the evening sessions, and attributed it to busy lifestyles, or in some cases to a worry that attendance would mean an admission of communication problems at home. Some ideas were discussed as to how these hurdles could be overcome.

## FEEDBACK FROM TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Teachers and administrators agreed that the conflict resolution programming at Vanscoy School has had an overall impact on interactions between students – that students are more likely to understand that conflict is normal, and have options to deal with it. They found students to be more open and more able to use problem-solving strategies in small groups. Students are less likely to get into physical confrontations, although still have difficulty dealing with a flaring of emotions, especially on the playground. “For the most part, you see kids talking it out more now.” Teachers and administrators generally credited these developments to the growth and maturity of Vanscoy’s peace education programming over a period of several years.

One of the more important priorities for teachers has been the quest for “common language” – common ideas, concepts and vocabulary across the grades, so that “everybody is on the same page.” They see the whole school approach as key, as “it is important to keep some of the threads going,” and “continuity is important.” They like the emphasis on communication skills and especially listening skills and describe children as learning about people while they learn about different styles and approaches to conflict. Although some overlaps have been identified between the conflict resolution program and other initiatives such as *2nd Step* or *Lion’s Quest*, this overlap has not caused concern. Indeed, some have commented, overlap is helpful since it leads to greater reinforcement.

Challenges that teachers identify are as follows. Although the children may know intellectually how to respond, they have difficulty applying the knowledge in the heat of the moment. They still struggle with the management of emotions. Children most likely to use conflict resolution skills are those with natural strengths in social skills, and those most in need of new techniques find them more difficult to apply. It was also noted that children in the younger grades are more easily, and noticeably, applying the skills.

One of the common observations across teacher interviews was that each class of students is unique and has certain attributes – a particular set of strengths and needs. In a small, rural school with a very stable school population, a class’s character can carry over from year to year. In this context, there is the opportunity

to alter conflict resolution programming so that it responds to the needs of particular groups. In fact, each teacher identified a dimension of the training that was more important for their group (for example, listening skills for the Grade 4s, and perspective-taking for the Grade 5s). A couple of teachers indicated that they would appreciate input into the program planning for the year, and in particular, into the content for their grade's session.

Overall, teachers valued the "team-approach" to the training. They appreciated having different people involved and using "experts" in the conflict resolution area. The view was expressed that the involvement of "experts" can build credibility with the teachers and staff as well as with the students. Since the facilitators were new to the children, a different person with a different kind of relationship with the children may have been an advantage. Children may have been more likely to talk or open up to that person. On the other hand, the opposite view was also expressed - that if the children were more familiar with the presenter, then more open discussion would have occurred.

The downside of the program structure for older grades, as identified by teachers, was that the skills may not be integrated into the day-to-day life of the classroom. The gaps between the sessions (without material to reinforce it in between) could be a problem. Teachers observed that without guidance on how to apply conflict resolution skills "in the moment," in day-to-day interactions, students would have more difficulty learning them. A few mentioned that it would be better if the sessions were more frequent, more "progressive and sequential" over the year, especially with Grades 4-5. Teachers also indicated a need for handouts, worksheets, and suggestions for activities - small, manageable chunks of information for the teachers to integrate into the classroom. By the end of the year, some had received resource binders, and expressed appreciation for that; "If you want teachers to proceed with this [integrating and reinforcing in the classroom], they'll need materials."

A couple of teachers felt preoccupied with classroom management in the training sessions, and could not participate as much in the training itself. With two of the grade levels, keeping the children in their regular classroom may have minimized the disruption which interfered with the learning. Teachers responded in a mixed way to the division of classes into two small groups, boys in one and girls in the other, concluding that it had to be arranged with consideration for the needs of the particular group of students.

Teachers observed that the Grade 4s need the information kept relatively simple (that they are in a transitional year), but that otherwise the program needs to be more progressive. Again, older students were seen as not relating to "I feel" statements (older students "need to feel that they're being respected," which translates into being treated differently from the younger students). "I feel" statement may make the older students feel more vulnerable. Teachers also suggested that older students need to learn respectful assertiveness skills. On the other hand, a couple of teachers observed that older children are still absorbing important information in the training, even if they appear to be rejecting parts of it on the surface. They felt that keeping older students in touch with the ideas is still essential, and that it lays the groundwork for skills they will use in adulthood.

## SUMMARY

The results show that the Vanscoy program has clearly benefited from the injection of expertise and ideas from Saskatoon Community Mediation Services and its other outside partners. One of the primary goals behind the extension of the program to a whole-school model has already been achieved: the reinforcement of common language, concepts, and skills to resolve conflict. Indeed, the results go on to identify what might be labeled “second stage” challenges for the implementation of a partnered, whole-school conflict resolution program.

Parents, teachers and the students themselves all identified ways that the program needs to move from common principles into individualized instruction. Participants in all of these groups spoke about the unique strengths and needs of particular grades; one group of students might, for example, need more work on listening skills, and another might need more work on dealing with abuses of power. Moving into grade 3, the students are identifying more complex kinds of conflicts and a frustration with the simple tools. They also tend to see the “I feel” statement as a quick, formula-type solution, rather than the beginning of a process. This suggests that grades 3-4 students might need more reinforcement about the context of communication skills – the larger objectives of a problem-solving approach.

Grades 6-7 students need something that builds on earlier components, but is designed especially for them – and is perceived to be different and more advanced concepts and skills. In a school where they have received programming in this area since kindergarten, they need to feel that they are being treated as more mature students. Their discomfort with using “I feel” statements may simply reflect this tension (that they have been told to say “I feel” since they were 5 years old), but it likely also reveals a deeper social discomfort – the dilemma that as children approach their teenage years, they absorb strong and subtle messages about the importance of not displaying their emotions or vulnerabilities. While we do not necessarily have the answer to this challenge, the results of this study suggest that this is not a dilemma to be ignored.

In this way, the feedback about “I feel” messages illustrates the current challenges for the Vanscoy program. Such an important communication tool cannot be abandoned, but it will need to be re-shaped to address the varying needs of students at different levels. Vanscoy will need to maintain its emphasis on common language, but build in room for continued consultation, flexibility and sequencing across the program. Even though some of the program’s goals have been met, the results also show how long cultural change can take. In order for students to be fully using the skills and concepts that they have learned, they will need an environment that fully supports students and adults alike in this kind of work.

# Our Reflections

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General observations about our experience with the Vanscoy program and its development, along with an overall analysis of the research results, have been reviewed in the above discussion. There are two dimensions of the program, however, that we view as potentially unique. The first issue surrounds the philosophical nature of the conflict resolution program and the role of restorative justice in the development of programming in the school system. The second issue concerns the structure of the Vanscoy program, and the degree to which its integration of outside resources mirrors Saskatchewan's School<sup>PLUS</sup> model. Both of these issues will be discussed in greater depth below.

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: REINFORCING A VALUE BASE FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAMMING

### CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAMMING AND THE TENDENCY TO FOCUS ON SKILLS

Conflict resolution programs have fallen across a wide range of models and a range of central themes. Some programs used locally encourage the development of foundational values and moral intelligence (Michelle Borba's work, for example), or the development of internal awareness (Glasser's Control Theory). Others focus on the prevention of bullying or on the development of problem-solving, communication and social skills (*Peacemaking Skills for Little Kids*, *Lion's Quest*, *2nd Step*). Yet others target the development of a uniquely-trained team of mediators (Peer Mediation Programs).

While it is important to avoid generalizations which might minimize the strengths of these individual programs, we have observed a polarization between the promotion of moral development (values) and skills. Few programs consciously integrate the two, one of the challenges that we encountered in Vanscoy.

Vanscoy School began its development of the conflict resolution program with a commitment to the League of Peaceful Schools network – an allegiance that was primarily value-based. We were also looking, however, for comprehensive skills-based instruction. The quest for the integration of skills has taken more of our focus in the last two years. Meanwhile, we have noticed how easy it is to lose touch with the foundation of value-based goals. We have also noticed that when this occurs, the skills lose their potency.

One small illustration is what may happen with the bare use of "I feel" statements as communication tools. At Vanscoy, "I messages" were introduced as a useful listening skill, a tool to use when problem-solving (the larger set of skills).<sup>5</sup> Students may perceive them as a "quick fix" that is losing impact in the older grades. Without the ability to identify one's emotions, "I messages" are relatively empty, as listening is an empty activity without the capacity to empathize.<sup>6</sup> But

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<sup>5</sup> "I messages" are part of a larger series of steps that usually progress in the following way: calm down, use I messages to explain your perspective, listen to understand the other person's perspective, and look for joint solutions.

reinforcing these two things may not be enough to make it a sustainable skill for the child if it doesn't answer the overarching question "why?" In other words, why would empathy be an important motive for listening, and why should self-awareness drive "I messages"? What are the overall goals that the young parties to that conflict are trying to achieve?

A prior research study concerning the implementation of a conflict resolution program with K-3 students indicated similar findings regarding the importance of a meaning-filled approach. "I increasingly felt a need to investigate the importance of attitude or interest propelling [the program]. I sensed that everyone involved – the students, teachers, and myself, was sometimes bogged down in the mechanics of the program and seemed to lose some perspective for the ultimate purpose of the program"(Memory, 2004, at 120).

Other authors have identified this as an inherent risk; an allegiance to a particular "program" may mean that the value-based root system is not properly developed. "There is a tension between adopting and implementing pre-prepared (or "canned") programs and focusing on philosophies of CRE [conflict resolution education], which results in flexible practices" (Jones and Compton, 2003, at 291). Consider the following observations:

There is a serious tension between pre-prepared programs or curricula that are administered in a lockstep fashion and conflict resolution education initiatives around a basic philosophy or set of principles that allows for flexibility in selecting practices geared to accomplish those objectives. We'll talk about this tension as "program v. practices". In all of the schools we visited, and indeed, in all of the conversations we have had with colleagues, this tension presents itself as a critical challenge facing the field, schools and practitioners.

... All the successful schools we talked with have something in common: none of them used a canned program without adaptation to accomplish their CRE goals.

... Most successful CRE efforts are the results of careful consideration of the underlying principles and philosophy the school is trying to achieve (Jones and Compton, 298-299).

Conflict resolution requires a sure foundation to take it beyond the excitement of a new initiative in education (Vollmer, et al, 1999, p.1).

In Vanscoy, at this stage in the program's maturity, we have found ourselves struggling to "work from a philosophy" again,<sup>7</sup> and have found some additional direction in the concept of restorative justice.

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<sup>6</sup> Rachael Kessler makes this point in "The Heart of the Matter: Social and Emotional Learning as a Foundation for Conflict Resolution Education" in Tricia Jones and Randy Compton (eds), *Kids Working It Out: Stories and Strategies for Making Peace in Our Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Jones and Compton go on to advocate for school-wide discussion about underlying principles and goals, for "working from a philosophy," at 300.

## THE INFLUENCE OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Restorative justice principles have gained considerable influence in the youth criminal justice system in recent years. With the introduction of the new *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, and the persistence of many community-based mediation programs, courts are being encouraged to consider different approaches for dealing with youth in conflict with the law. Circles or conferences are recommended, as are programs that divert youth from the penal system.

A “restorative” approach is one that favors restoration and reparation, over punishment. Conflict is framed as a response to underlying problems: isolation, severed relationships, misunderstandings, unnamed feelings, and unmet needs. Conflict is viewed as an opportunity for growth and change, rather than a call for punishment. A restorative justice philosophy in the criminal setting seeks a re-conceptualization of crime, not as aberrant behavior which violates rules of social order, but as actions that have “roots in broader and deeper social conflicts, problems and disparities,” and that cause “tangible harm to real people and relationships” (Johnstone, at 8-9). Restorative justice views crime as a violation of people, not of the state – a violation of relationships, not of laws. Rather than focusing on punishment of offenders and their removal from society (incarceration), it focuses on identifying and repairing the harm done by crime.<sup>8</sup> It seeks to restore losses suffered by victims, to restore peace among people and communities and to rehabilitate the offender. It seeks to provide support for victims, giving both victims and communities a direct role in the process, recognizing that their needs should be taken into account.

Restorative justice programs have grown in this province over the course of the last 20 years. The work was pioneered by Saskatoon Community Mediation Services, which opened in 1983, and the John Howard Society, which began handling youth cases in 1984. Restorative justice programs in Saskatchewan now fall across a broad spectrum. Programs include victim-offender mediations (where a mediator meets with the victim and offender, to discuss alternative ways to repair the harm), circle conferencing (similar to a mediation, but including a wider circle of people, such as family members, legal and counselling professionals, community members), and many other models.

Practitioners and theorists have not agreed on what makes a “restorative justice” program.<sup>9</sup> There is, however, broad and general agreement that restorative justice is characterized by certain values, which “tend to cluster around concepts like”: inclusion, democracy, responsibility, reparation, safety, healing and reintegration.<sup>10</sup> Most restorative justice programming has arisen around process values. Van Ness, for example, defines restorative justice as including these elements: encounter, amends, reintegration and inclusion. Refining those and applying them to the development of Saskatchewan restorative justice programs, Barbara Tomporowski

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<sup>8</sup> Zehr, one of the leading writers and theorists in the area of restorative justice, asks three questions: What is the harm that was done? How can that harm be repaired? Who is responsible for this repair? Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Susan Sharpe, “How Large Should The Restorative Justice ‘Tent’ Be?” in Howard Zehr and Barb Toews, *Critical Issues in Restorative Justice* (New York: Criminal Justice Press, 2004). The field of restorative justice has not settled on a precise definition of principles – indeed, Zehr and Toews describe a wide diversity of definitions and understandings of restorative justice, which has contributed to the field’s richness, but also to “definitional differences” which create divides that are sometimes difficult for groups to bridge.

<sup>10</sup> Barb Toews and Jackie Katounas describe restorative justice values as including: empowerment, respect, transformation, interdependence, dialogue and mutuality; “Have Offender Needs and Perspectives Been Adequately Incorporated Into RJ?” in Zehr and Toews, *ibid.*

uses a three-pronged definition: involvement, encounter, and problem-solving. The first, “involvement”, is the idea that offenders, victims and communities ought to be involved in dealing with crime. “Encounter” means interaction and discussion between those who are involved – a form of engagement. “Problem-solving” means the effort given to “make things right” and repair the harm - the restoration of relationships.

Restorative justice is both process and philosophy. For the most part, restorative justice in the literature and in practice is a process-driven, incident-based approach. As a philosophy, a prescription for handling conflict in a preventative, future-oriented way, it is much less developed. Although both dimensions of restorative justice can be helpful in fashioning school programs, it is the philosophical dimension that we have found most valuable.

## OUR EXPERIENCE: SEARCHING FOR A STRONGER FOUNDATION

Restorative justice may offer the potential to enrich conflict resolution education in the schools, in a way that is so far relatively untapped. The arrival of “restorative justice” programs in the school setting is not completely new. Most school programs carrying the “restorative justice” label, however, are focused on the introduction of new ways to deal with behavior problems, wrongdoing, and other discipline issues.<sup>11</sup> In this way (also incident-based), they tend to exclude some of the broader objectives and methods which normally accompany peace education programming.<sup>12</sup>

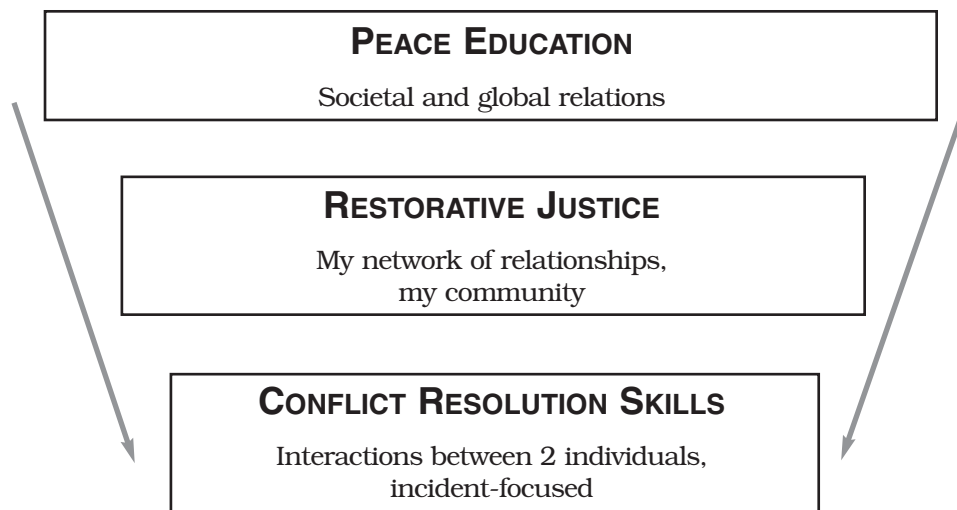
We have identified the tendency in peace education literature, and general programming, to focus on values at a global level: the creation of peaceful societies and a peaceful world. At the level of implementation, many conflict resolution programs focus on the opposite end of the continuum, on the interactions between individuals and the skills that are employed to navigate through particular conflicts. Restorative justice may have the potential to *reconnect* these two polarized elements of conflict resolution programming - to bridge the gap between the implementation of skills-based instruction and the philosophical values which lie at its roots. Restorative justice begins with general values such as empathy, self-control, respect and tolerance, values which are often articulated as goals of conflict resolution. The restorative justice framework goes on to locate these values in the context of *relationships*, relationships between individuals and the web of relationships within communities. These concepts of relationship and community are essential pieces of the restorative justice philosophy – pieces that are often lost in skills-oriented programs.

For one way of conceptualizing the relationship between these different focal levels in conflict resolution programming, consider the diagram on the following page.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, see Alice Ierley and David Claassen-Wilson, “Making Things Right: Restorative Justice for School Communities” in Jones and Compton (2003), which lists three models that can be introduced into schools: victim-offender mediation, community group conferencing, and circle processes.

<sup>12</sup> There are some exceptions: The Fraser Region Community Justice Initiatives Association has been working to implement restorative justice approaches in schools in the Vancouver area, with a much broader mandate that is similar to ours. [www.cjibc.org/programs.htm](http://www.cjibc.org/programs.htm), under the heading, “Educating for Peacebuilding,” p.1. Their program is also called “Restorative Action;” their website explains that “... we are aiming for a systemic effect of changing school culture, but in day-to-day reality, we are encouraged by individual students, parents and educators who are learning skills and changing their worldview one by one;” *ibid*.



**RESTORATIVE VALUES AS A WAY OF  
PRESERVING A MEANING-FILLED APPROACH**

We have already described the challenge to keep values front and center, once a program has shifted to skills development. In the development and design of Vanscoy’s program, we have not been deliberate about articulating values, but, in retrospect, would identify the following as our priorities.<sup>13</sup> This list of values is one that we have generated ourselves – a merger of our own priorities at Vanscoy, with elements that have been identified by writers in the restorative justice area as consistent with that approach. Most of these elements are commonly included in conflict resolution and peace education initiatives, but we do see the focus on relationship and community as being unique.

***NATURE OF CONFLICT: CONFLICT IS NORMAL, AND RELATIONSHIP-BASED***

One of the foundational themes is that conflict is a necessary dimension of human relationships, and probably a necessary experience for the development and growth of children. Conflict itself is not inherently negative or violent; it can be an opportunity for learning and positive outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

Restorative justice views conflict as relationship-based. All of the elements needed to resolve conflict (the need to understand conflict, understand oneself, and understand others, as well as the inclusion of accountability and problem-solving approaches) must be seen within the context of social relationships.

<sup>13</sup> Teachers in the focus group identified the first three as goals for the programming . Also, note that in the development of a similar program, called “Restorative Action,” the Langley School District #35 adopts the following principles, their own version of RJ values applied in the school setting, [www.sd35.bc.ca/links/resaction.htm](http://www.sd35.bc.ca/links/resaction.htm), p.2:

1. Invite full participation and consensus,
2. Seek full and direct accountability,
3. Heal what has been broken,
4. Reintegrate where there has been division, and
5. Strengthen the community to prevent further harms.

<sup>14</sup> For a description and summary of the theory behind this principle, see David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson, “Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in elementary and secondary schools: A review of the research” in 66 (4) *Review of Educational Research* (Washington: Winter, 1996) p. 459.

## ***EMPOWERMENT THROUGH YOUR RESPONSE TO CONFLICT***

Just as conflict is a normal dimension of healthy relationships, so can one's response to conflict determine whether it is a productive or damaging experience. One of the principles driving the conflict resolution field is that the strategy used to resolve a conflict is the best predictor of successful outcome (when compared to other factors).<sup>15</sup>

The restorative justice philosophy involves a move from authoritarian decision-making to shared decision-making. In the justice system, restorative justice means a shift away from the traditional view that conflict can only be resolved with a decision (including punishment imposed) by an authoritarian third party (the judge). In the school system, the philosophy is similar – a shift away from the idea that conflicts need to be resolved and judgments meted out by professionals in positions of authority (teachers or administrators) (Memory, 2004 at 16).<sup>16</sup> One of the key values, then, is the empowerment of children.

## ***EQUALITY, BALANCE AND INCLUSIVENESS***

Another is equality/balance across perspectives: understanding the perspectives of others, valuing difference, giving personal voice in a way that balances and respects the contributions of all. In the criminal justice context, restorative justice processes give victims a key role, a voice which is often lost in the traditional system.

## ***COMMUNITY***

One of the central pieces of restorative justice is the concept of community:

We tend to forget what the simplest societies on earth have long known; namely, that every conflict is actually three-sided. No dispute takes place in a vacuum. There are always others around – relatives, neighbors, allies, friends, or onlookers. Every conflict occurs within a community that constitutes the “third side” of any dispute.<sup>17</sup>

Writers in the restorative justice area identify community as a critical concept, a concept that is sometimes used in two different ways in the literature: in a geographical sense (the community in which you live); and as a description of the network of personal relationships which are important to a person.<sup>18</sup>

What may be unique about the use of a restorative justice framework in a rural school is that these two definitions of “community” tend to merge. Parents, families and community members are especially important to successful restorative justice programming in rural schools.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Johnson and Johnson, *ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> Also see W.J. Kreidler, *Creative Conflict Resolution: More than 200 activities for keeping peace in the classroom K-6* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> Ury, W., *The Third Side: Why We Fight and How We Can Stop* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), p.7.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Tomporowski

<sup>19</sup> Jones and Compton describe the element of community as “actively involving parents and community members in conflict resolution education activities,” suggesting that parents should receive training, model effective skills for their children, and volunteer with program administration (at 25). They also suggest that schools can link up their programs to those going on in the community – for example, student mediators can work with community mediators to handle parent-teen conflicts, or defuse gang conflict. Other writers view family and community as critical elements of conflict resolution programming; see Edyth Wheeler, *Conflict Resolution in Early Childhood* (New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc., 2004). The Fraser Valley project also links restorative action to community – the school division's website describes the program, and its partnership with the FVCJI as “A Community Approach to Conflict in Secondary Schools” [www.sd35.bc.ca/links/resaction.htm](http://www.sd35.bc.ca/links/resaction.htm), p.1.

While the other values enshrined in a restorative justice philosophy are important – accountability and healing, for example – the concepts of relationship and community distinguish this theoretical model from many others. These are especially important as foundational principles, and possibly lead to a different conception of peace education from many other frameworks.

## SCHOOL<sup>PLUS</sup>: USING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO STRENGTHEN PROGRAM DELIVERY

Since 2002, School<sup>PLUS</sup> has been a province-wide initiative within education in Saskatchewan. This concept and model of schooling came as a result of the Task Force on the Role of the School's extensive research into the ways in which education could better meet the needs of all students in the province. In its final report, the Task Force recognized "that the needs of today's children and youth cannot be met by school alone." Therefore, it provided a new vision for schools, coined School<sup>PLUS</sup>, where the school works with a network of families, communities and human services agencies (the PLUS) – all responsible to create a new kind of institution dedicated to the intellectual, social, spiritual, emotional and physical needs of children. The school itself serves as a hub for the delivery of an array of services and supports to achieve learning excellence and well-being (p.2 *School<sup>PLUS</sup> at a Glance*). The primary functions of the school are:

1. To educate children and youth – nurturing the development of the whole child, intellectually, socially, spiritually, emotionally and physically; and
2. To support service delivery – serving as centres at the community level for the delivery of appropriate social, health, recreation, culture, justice and other services for children and their families.

The overall purpose is to ensure that all children and young people have the supports they need for well-being, learning and life success.

Although School<sup>PLUS</sup> is a new concept, it is strongly rooted in well-established and proven principles of both community schooling and integrated services.

### **COMMUNITY EDUCATION**

School<sup>PLUS</sup> calls for all schools to adopt Community Education philosophy and practices.

Community Education is a philosophy based on community engagement and development. It is founded on a belief that schools alone cannot do all that is needed to help children and youth achieve success in school and in life. Community Education promotes the concept of life long learning and the interrelationship between the school and the family, and the school and community. (*Care & Respectful Schools: Toward School<sup>PLUS</sup>*, p.9)

This process engages the collaboration of educators, families, community members, and various professionals in identifying community strengths, issues and needs. Once these are selected, the school is seen as the primary centre of the learning in the community. Community education schools are open and inclusive, responsive to the unique needs and opportunities of individual communities. They actively engage family and community members, share responsibility and build upon family and community strengths (*School<sup>PLUS</sup> at a Glance*, p.6) Schools and communities, therefore, enter into a reciprocal relationship of sharing and support. Students enter into learning opportunities both outside the classroom, in the community, as well as when the community comes into the classroom. “Community members share expertise and life experiences with students as part of the learning program” (*Community Education Unit*, p.3).

### **INTEGRATED SERVICES**

In addition to its community education roots, School<sup>PLUS</sup> was also grounded in interagency or integrated services. In the School<sup>PLUS</sup> model, schools provide a comprehensive array of integrated services to meet students’ well-being and learning needs. These human services are systematically integrated at the community level, and delivered either within or linked to schools (*School<sup>PLUS</sup> at a Glance*, p.4). There are any number of possible collaborative arrangements and partnerships among schools and community organizations or businesses. Two examples include: integrated school-linked services; and school/business partnerships.

The steps for implementing an integrated school-linked services project are to:

- Establish a Planning Team
- Conduct a Strengths-Based Needs Identification
- Identify Potential Partnerships
- Make a Plan
- Create an Inventory of Services and Resources
- Do a Service Analysis
- Implement the Plan
- Evaluate

*(Building Collaboration and Partnerships, p.II, 17-18)*

### **COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT**

With School<sup>PLUS</sup> taking on the philosophy and practices of community education and integrated services, cooperative and collaborative efforts are essential for its success. Throughout School<sup>PLUS</sup> literature, collaboration is seen as key to successful partnerships.

Simply put, collaboration is a process that brings two or more people together to identify issues and cooperatively problem-solve and action-plan. It involves working together in a supportive and mutually beneficial relationship to support students and families. Collaboration in schools requires strong leadership and depends

on cooperation, effective interpersonal communication, joint decision-making and consensus building.

*(Caring and Respectful Schools: Toward School<sup>PLUS</sup>, p.10)*

Collaboration is a process for “transforming adversarial interactions into a search for solutions that address mutual interests or needs” (*Caring and Respectful Schools: Toward School<sup>PLUS</sup>, p.11*)

Although collaboration is imperative within the School<sup>PLUS</sup> movement, it is important to note that it involves transaction costs, significant time and resources, and is tenuous in nature because relationships are constantly being built and rebuilt. Lawson goes on to say that as the intricate nature of School<sup>PLUS</sup> is revealed over time, and a genuine collaborative process ensues, there will be new meanings to the present systems and challenges to conventional power and authority relations (Lawson, 2002). In fact, sharing power and creating a sense of joint ownership may prove to be one of the greatest challenges to School<sup>PLUS</sup>. (*The Story of School<sup>PLUS</sup>, p.19*)

### **VANSCOY SCHOOL CONFLICT RESOLUTION AS SCHOOL<sup>PLUS</sup>**

Vanscoy School’s implementation of its conflict resolution program fits within the framework of the School<sup>PLUS</sup> approach. It maintains the basic tenets of community education, involves several integrated services as well as being decidedly collaborative in its approach.

The conflict resolution program at Vanscoy School grew from a community vision of providing for a felt need within the school. The program was designed and implemented through a partnership with community-based resources. Initially begun by a handful of interested educators, parents and specialists, the partnership grew and spread in scope to include a non-profit community-based organization, a law professor and parent specializing in mediation and conflict resolution, an instruction associate and parent training in mediation and youth justice, an educator and counsellors specializing in conflict resolution, a registered psychologist, as well as several others. Partners were included as members became aware of various individuals’ particular expertise or interests. In keeping with the need-based approach of School<sup>PLUS</sup>, some of these initial partners began to take more of a background, resource role, while others came to the fore. There was a definite ebb and flow to the process – a constant shifting of responsibility, as different partners took the lead at different times based on need. Since focus groups highlighted the need for the inclusion of material on bullying, for example, counsellors who are familiar with delivery of this content took a key role in the 2005-2006 training. The community-based organization, which had generally played a lead role in the presenting, assumed an important resource role. Parents began to take more interest and ownership of the process, and have increasingly become key partners.

The partners noted that the experience of networking became richer as more layers of partners became involved. With each additional partner, new dimensions and resources were added to the mix. Partners had generally experienced “conflict resolution” through the lens of their particular discipline or context prior to the collaboration. Through combined knowledge, resources, ideas, and contextual understanding, many partners commented on the exponential learning, both professionally and personally, that resulted. Many found a refreshing change going from working in isolation to working in concert. The group became synergistic in nature and in its flow of ideas.

However, with the number of people and agencies involved, we found that the process did become quite cumbersome at times. With each new partner and layer came varying interests, personalities and politics. We struggled, at times, to include as many interests and ideas as possible without losing sight of our original vision. At one point in time, after juggling a number of interests, one member questioned at what point the various interests involved become more of a hindrance than a help. We did eventually come to the conclusion that the inclusion of all members and interests were worth the time and effort – that every individual had something to offer to the collaboration team. We were often called upon to “walk the talk” in sorting out our concerns and issues – using the very conflict resolution tools we were sharing with the students in our own communication with team members. We were constantly seeking to understand one another and look for common interests. However, with so many interests, a collaborative approach and singleness of vision was paramount to the process continuing and not breaking down. When we kept our original vision in mind, as well as the principles of inclusion and collaboration at the forefront of thinking and decision-making, we began to see our goal of seeing a comprehensive, school-wide conflict resolution program come to fruition.

School<sup>PLUS</sup> provided a forum for partners to learn from one another professionally and personally, apart from the express purpose of providing student programming. Partners who may or may not have naturally found themselves working with one another were in a position, because of the “team,” to add to one another’s conceptualization and understanding of conflict resolution, restorative justice, and peace education. Partners were engaged in the action research cycle throughout the process, complete with corporate questioning, reflection and praxis. In some instances, partners began to network with the project partners completely separate from the school conflict resolution project.

# Conclusions

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Observations and analysis of the aforementioned areas will be used to inform planning of future conflict resolution programming in the school. We will use the results and analysis of this study to help us work towards a more informed and effective conflict resolution program in our future implementation. This study has led us to observations and conclusions at three different levels. First, feedback from research participants highlighted the benefits and challenges of conflict resolution programming at Vanscoy School, some of these connected to the whole-school approach. These observations have been explored in more detail above but will be summarized again below. The second set of observations center around the use of a restorative justice framework, and how it has begun to inform the Vanscoy program. Lastly, our analysis includes a review of our experience with the collaborative, School<sup>PLUS</sup> model.

## THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAM

The program's main strength is its scope – there was universal support for the whole-school approach, which may be the best vehicle for sustainable and environmental change.<sup>20</sup> The program has achieved consistency; common language and common skills are evident across all categories of study participants. There is a high level of awareness among adults; teachers have received common training, and parents are generally aware of the school's programming in this area. The conflict resolution program even gained a profile as one of the school's key goals for the 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 academic years.

One of the program's current challenges is to build in layers of material that is tailored to the needs of particular grades and groupings of students. We need to build in ongoing consultation with the participant groups (teachers, students and parents) in order to best identify student needs. We expect to be meeting more formally with teachers to discuss program content for their students. Should their group be divided by gender, or randomly? What topics are especially important to this group? What seem to be the issues they are struggling with?

A second challenge identified through this study is how to integrate the material more fully in the classroom experience. It was pointed out that the three sessions, operating independently, are not enough. Teachers identified the importance of having handouts, posters and other materials for them to use in the "in-between" periods, to help reinforce the use of the concepts and skills, and help make them relevant for students' day-to-day interactions.

The third challenge that we have identified through this study is the need for the program to be embedded in a value-centered approach. This conclusion will be discussed further below.

In terms of the parent component of the program, our conclusions are mixed. There was clear support for the parent information evenings, with a diversity of topics and

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<sup>20</sup> "... schools need to adopt a whole-school approach for effecting long-term and positive influence on their school environment:" Amelia Suckling and Carla Temple, *Bullying: A Whole-School Approach* (Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd., 2001), p.7.

professionals involved in their delivery. Unfortunately, the numbers dropped considerably after the first session. While the advantage was a smaller, more intimate setting (which participants clearly appreciated), the low attendance numbers produced frustration for organizers. Although we tried a number of different techniques for attracting parents, and there continued to be a high level of support for the idea, it is likely that busy schedules and time commitments prevented more from coming.

Parents in the focus group displayed a strong commitment to the program and an interest in contributing to the program. We noticed, after this discussion, that while we had viewed parents as essential partners in the program, we had not been inviting them to provide input – identifying issues on behalf of their children, or suggestions as to content.

## ABOUT THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PHILOSOPHY

Our study has underlined the risk, identified by other authors, that “canned” conflict resolution programming can become void of meaning. For such programming to be successfully integrated into a school, it must stay attached to its value-based roots. Like the broader focus on peace education, restorative justice keeps conflict resolution anchored to a set of goals that extend beyond the management of an individual conflict.

We have identified this need for a philosophical framework at two levels. First, it is important that program designers stay connected with the overall values as the program is developed and re-developed. We have often found ourselves discussing which skills the students need to learn, or which topics to cover in the parent information session. A value-based framework can be an important anchor to such discussions – an essential way of assessing whether we have covered the important bases.

Also, as illustrated by student frustrations with the bare “I feel” statement, it is essential that students themselves view conflict resolution skills as methods for achieving larger goals. Restorative justice presents conflict as occurring within an important network of relationships, within a community (the child’s community, the school community, the local community). It offers one context for answering the “why” question; why is it important that we find a way through this conflict?

In the previous analysis, we have attempted to capture a description of the restorative justice values that may frame Vanscoy’s program. We expect to continue to work with concepts and philosophies of restorative justice as a framework for its future growth and development.

## ABOUT SCHOOL<sup>PLUS</sup>

The role of a collaborative planning team, with participation from outside partnerships, has been key to the development of Vanscoy's program. It has enriched the program in many indescribable ways, and continues to do so. The membership of the planning group flowed and changed, as interested people became involved. Some dropped into the background as the focus changed. We now see a collaborative, multi-partnered planning group as a continuing part of the program, rather than simply a development tool. The committee served as an important forum for articulating various needs, issues and direction of students, parents and teachers. The expertise and collaboration of the partners led to a certain synergistic nature of planning sessions. The group approach also avoided the problem of one-person (or one-agency) burnout that can accompany the development and maintenance of programs such as this. It also builds a sense of group ownership, which relieves the pressure on any one particular participant.

The use of such a model also presents its challenges. It requires a genuine commitment to collaboration among the partners, to circumvent the inevitable differences of opinion and approach that will arise. At times, the difficulties in multi-party problem-solving can make the whole process feel more cumbersome.

In hindsight, we adopted a School<sup>PLUS</sup> model not by deliberate choice, but simply by instinct – as a way of responding to a need for resources. We were not conscious of the possibilities that would be unearthed through the use of such an approach. With the addition of each new partner, our vision grew, and as our vision grew, so did our resources. As a result, the students' needs, the school's needs, and the community's needs were richly met.

# Moving Forward

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It is likely no coincidence that both initiatives, School<sup>PLUS</sup> and restorative justice, have some common elements. Both frameworks (one in the education setting, and the other in the justice setting) encourage agencies and service professions to deal with the “whole child.” Both invite the integration of services, and the use of a non-compartmentalized approach to dealing with children and youth. In order to accomplish this, they both envision a central role for community partnerships. As the Vanscoy program moves forward, we expect to continue to draw on both of these frameworks.

In 2005-2006, we have maintained the majority of the program, and have incorporated some new elements in response to input from students, teachers and parents:

- Grade 4 students received general conflict resolution training separate from grades 5-7. Sessions focused on such topics as conflict type and styles, perception-checking and reflective listening. These were co-taught, with the classroom teacher being directly involved in the instruction.
- Grades 5-7 focused on more complex conflict, involving power differences and bullying.
- Grade 8 completed a unit in the spring on “Dispute Resolution and the Justice System,” where they explored different ways that the justice system responds to criminal behaviour by youth. In these sessions, grade 8 students participated in a simulated court hearing and, later, in a circle mediation process – and had the chance to view the same scenario from different perspectives and with different results. As part of this unit, students also had the chance to work with representatives from the community-based Valley West Community Justice Committee (a local program that offers a mediation service for youth who are charged with some criminal offences).

All of these changes were designed to achieve a more sequential program for older children, one that maintains the common framework introduced to them in their earlier school years but also introduces more complexity in the conflict scenarios to which they are exposed.

Through the focus groups and interviews with students, teachers, parents, through conversations with all of the partners in our Conflict Resolution team and analysis of all the data within this study, we have learned more deeply about the strengths and needs of our program. This research project has helped tremendously with the choice of how to structure the program in the future. We expect to continue these conversations and to forge new partnerships as our program continues to evolve.

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