

Editorial

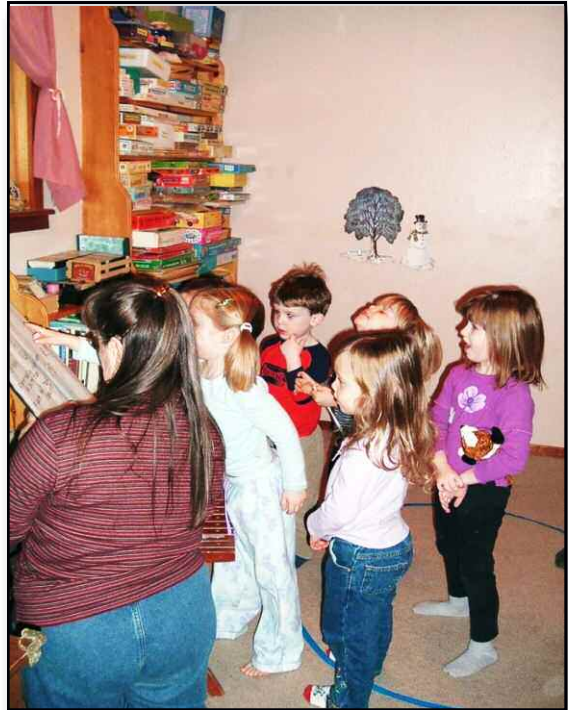
Restorative Justice and Early Education

The humane and hopeful practice of restorative justice is gradually replacing zero-tolerance, and the criminalizing of youth, in schools and justice systems across the nation. When I think about this shift I want to turn back the clock. If only, I wish, the principles of restorative justice had been guiding our society and our education systems all along. Early childhood education done right gives children the skills needed to live together peacefully in community. Sadly there is not enough quality early childhood education for today's children, and their parents and teachers missed out before them.

All the words associated with restorative justice- restitution, reparation, rehabilitation, reconciliation- begin with "re-", meaning "going back," returning to an earlier, maybe, better place. Offender and victim participate together in finding a healing response to the harm done. Sadly again, many, perhaps most, adults and children have been raised in judgmental, punitive circumstances without experience of that better place, and lack faith in the possibility of a non-punitive response to harm. Building belief in restorative justice and educating our citizens in its practice will be a slow but crucial process. In families, schools, police departments and courts there is much work to be done.

Meanwhile, we in early childhood education and care have the opportunity to act for the benefit of the children in our programs, their families and the schools they will attend. Introducing them to the peaceful conflict resolution process will give them skills and experience for community life. This comes when adults and children learn to listen to each other and work together to design safe and nurturing environments. Sharon Davisson and Jen Norris write in this newsletter about their strategies to achieve such peaceful communities. Please enjoy their spirit of optimism.

As teachers and parents we all have work to do. For an example from my experience of learning to use positive language in my preschool teaching, I remember how long it took. The seemingly simple, but difficult, change to



Children developing their class agreement

"please walk" from "no running," and "gentle touch" instead of "no hitting," was slow in coming. Lists to guide behavior in classrooms no longer always start with "No-!" The clear and positive declaration, "Be Safe and Be Kind" sets the new tone. The children participate in deciding how those words will guide their behavior. As Dan Gartrell advises us in The Power of Guidance we can use guidance as opposed to discipline. If we recognize that children's misbehavior is most often mistaken behavior, it becomes the stuff of learning for the child and the community.

As we celebrate the expanding influence of restorative justice, we can, also, celebrate the hope that peace education will come before harm is done, and there will be less need for restoring later on.

Lucy Stroock, Cambridge MA

"Everyone has a role... even if we can't make a discernible impact on world peace in a grand way, we can certainly begin to impact peace in a small way. I define peace very broadly, inclusive of alternative dispute resolution, negotiation and mediation, but also social justice, human rights, equity and empathy, personal wellness, mental and physical health, resilient communities, environmental stewardship as well as what we normally think of, which is disarmament, pacifism and nonviolence."

Peace educator, Maya Soetoro-Ng, President Obama's sister, speaking in an interview for the Sacramento Bee before presenting at Sacramento State in February, 2016.