

The Youth Violence Project

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY & SUPPORTING LITERATURE Addressing need, areas of focus, methodology and curriculum design

INTRODUCTION

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

While a graduate student in the School of Education at Harvard University, Project Director June Mack was trained in experiential pedagogy, specifically constructivist educational theory, which suggests that students should become physically and emotionally involved in their work, in addition to being mentally engaged, for long-lasting learning and personal change to take place. "The object enters into dialog with the learner only after being transformed by him or her. In fact, it is the set of significant units organized by the learner and the relationships that he or she constructs between them that constitutes the cognitive object that, in turn, constitutes knowledge." (A. Henriques, "Experiments in Teaching," from E. Duckworth, J. Easley, D. Hawkins and A. Henriques (1990) *Science Education: A Minds-On Approach to the Elementary Years*. Erlbaum)

Film is very useful as an experiential/constructivist pedagogy because of its ability to draw persons inside the film world, affording emotional, mental, and vicarious social engagement.

AN INNER-ACTIVE APPROACH

To extend this concept in the context of youth violence education, we propose that the experience must be an internal one, that self-reflection and identification must precede a person's decision to change his/her life. Once this step is taken, the odds of long-term rehabilitation are greatly enhanced by external support and encouragement.

There is no guarantee that this "inner work" will result in a changed life, but there seems to be no doubt that self-examination followed by self-determination are the only steps that may succeed in breaking patterns of violence in young people.

THESE CONCEPTS APPLIED TO "THE YOUTH VIOLENCE PROJECT"

It is important that participants in these workshops be encouraged to place themselves in the stories of the characters that are presented in the films. Workshop Leaders and Facilitators should create an environment conducive to allowing participants to:

- See themselves in another person's story
- Identify their own stories
- Re-write their personal stories

NEED

The current need for effective youth violence prevention and intervention is characterized as urgent at this time in the majority of reports. (Dinkes, Rachel, Cataldi, Emily Forrest, Kena, Grace, Baum, Katrina, Snyder, Thomas D. (2006). Report: *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2006*. Washington, DC: U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, Report ID NCES 2007-003/NCJ 214262)

Many of the prevalent youth violence prevention protocols in use today are lacking a substantial record of effectiveness. (Farrell, Albert D., Flannery, Daniel J. (2006). "Youth Violence Prevention: Are We There Yet?" *Journal of Aggression and Violent Behavior* 11(2): 138-150)

JUSTIFICATION FOR CHOSEN AREAS OF FOCUS: COMMON THEMES

Since absolute realism was essential to our creating an authentic subjective experience for viewers, we began our project by interviewing over 50 persons involved in youth violence. We then studied these interviews to isolate basic themes around which to create composite characters and storylines. We distilled the issues into 3 major areas of focus: 1.) violence begets violence, 2.) followers and leaders, 3.) boredom and addiction. These 3 themes provide the unit topics for the curriculum used in our workshops. Current youth violence literature supports our themes as major causes of and contexts for youth violence.

- Violence begets Violence: Sartin, Robert M., Hansen, David J., Huss, Matthew T. (2006). "Domestic Violence Treatment Response and Recidivism: A Review and Implications for the Study of Family Violence." *Journal of Aggression and Violent Behavior* 11(5):425-440.
- Followers and Leaders: Allen, Joseph P., Porter, Maryfrances R., McFarland, F. Christy (2006). "Leaders and Followers in Adolescent Close Friendships: Susceptibility to Peer Influence as a Predictor of Risky Behavior, Friendship Instability, and Depression." *Development and Psychopathology* 18(1):155-172.
- Boredom and Addiction: Snyder, Howard N., Sickmund, Melissa (2006). *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Report ID NCJ 212906.

METHODOLOGY: WORKSHOP CONSTITUENCY AS PEDAGOGICAL TOOL

The constituency of the participants on the 2nd day of our 2-day workshops will represent all related areas of the problem: at-risk youth, parents, teachers, psychologists, law enforcement and government officials, youth and family social workers. This manipulation of the "classroom" constituency effectively creates a life-teaching environment as all of the many persons involved in youth violence become teachers and learners together.

An article published in the March, 2006, edition of *The Journal of Aggression and Violent Behavior* compiles existing research on child sexual abuse, physical abuse, and neglect. The article suggests that "multiple factors within the child's social ecology relate

to the occurrence of abuse and to its mental health impact." (Swenson, Cynthia Cupit, Chaffin, Mark (2006). "Beyond Psychotherapy: Treating Abused Children by Changing Their Social Ecology." *Journal of Aggression and Violent Behavior* 11(2):120-137)

A paper published in the same journal in July of 2006 "urges for the examination of aggression at multiple levels of social complexity particularly in terms of relationships and groups." (Cohen, Robert, Hsueh, Yeh, Russell, Kathryn M., Ray, Glen E.(2006). "Beyond the Individual: A Consideration of Context for the Development of Aggression." *Journal of Aggression and Violent Behavior* 11(4):341-351)

CURRICULUM DESIGN: TEACHING MODELS

We are offering 2 teaching models to communities that we visit. One is a model for a novel educational approach to youth violence (subjective-objective-internalization processing). Another is a model for a community project utilizing local community personnel and resources.

Our proposed teaching model of subjective/objective/internalization reflects a combination of constructivist theory (cited above) and multisystemic therapy, as described in *The Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology* in June of 2006. (Timmons-Mitchell, Jane, Bender, Monica B., Kishna, Maureen A., Mitchell, Clare C.(2006). "An Independent Effectiveness Trial of Multisystemic Therapy With Juvenile Justice Youth." *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology* 35:227-236)

The concept of an arts-related community project has long been a successful exercise in communication among diverse populations. (Diamond, David (2007). *Theatre For Living: The Art and Science of Community-Based Dialogue*, Victoria, B.C., Canada: Trafford Publishing) This type of exercise has direct application to youth violence education as a vehicle for self-expression that can lead to increased self-esteem and tension release through the experience of "being heard". Supportive literature includes:

- Emerson, Elissa, Shelton, Deborah (2001). "Using Creative Arts to Build Coping Skills to Reduce Domestic Violence in the Lives of Female Juvenile Offenders." *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 22(2):181-195.

- Landgarten, Helen, Junge, Maxine, Tasem, Marjorie, Watson, Martha (1978). "Art Therapy as a Modality for Crisis Intervention: Children Express Reactions to Violence in their Community." *Clinical Social Work Journal* 6(3):221-229.

- Long, Janet K., Soble, Laura (1999). "Report: An Art-Based Violence Prevention Project for Sixth Grade Students," *Arts in Psychotherapy* 26(5):329-344.

- Malchiodi, Cathy A. (1990). *Breaking the Silence: Art Therapy with Children from Violent Homes*, New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel, Inc.