

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE: CITY AT PEACE, A YOUTH-LED ARTS-BASED CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAM IN WASHINGTON, DC [48P]

Sandra L. Holloway, Artistic Director
Elizabeth Youdin Gill, Managing Director
City at Peace

Workshop Summary

Video excerpts from the 2005 original youth performance *Am I There Yet?* will be shown to conference attendees. The presenters will describe and provide examples of the City at Peace process that lead to the development of a performance piece, including issues brainstorm, writing exercises, scene work and scene outline. They will discuss the theoretical underpinning of the program and review evaluation results. If time permits, they will lead the attendees in sample exercises.

At City at Peace, we collaborate with young people. Each year, we gather 50 to 60 people ages 13 to 19 who have elected to participate in our out-of-school-time program. They seek a safe place to confront the issues they face. The participants receive training in singing, acting and dancing to increase their performing arts proficiency. The staff helps them through a process in which they confront the big issues: power, violence, racism, sexism and ageism. They work through exercises that reveal the power structure of our society. They discover that no matter how oppressed they may feel, there exist some circumstance in which they hold power. They build a community of trust in which they tell each other their life stories which, along with their writings and improvisations, are crafted into an outline for a play that reflects their real life experiences. The young people work within their scene groups to develop a performance which powerfully communicates their efforts for a more peaceful world in which people get along and those in power raise up those who are less powerful.

During the 2004 - 2005 program year, the youth in City at Peace identified the unrelenting focus on success on standardized tests in schools as a major problem. As part of their original production *Am I There Yet?* they included a story line about a school principal and her assistants who were so focused on test performance that they ignored other legitimate needs of the students. Programs were cut because they were considered a distraction. The youth were sophisticated enough to recognize that just as they were being forced to perform well on these tests, so too the principal was being judged on the test results of the students. There was no allowance for different learning styles, no allowance for the needs which were not measurable on a Standards of Learning test.

Workshop Goals

The goal of this workshop is to share the work of City at Peace with the mostly academic, research-oriented attendees of the *Persistently Safe Schools* conference. By presenting an hour-long portion of video from the play created by youth, we hope to let people see some of the practical applications of their work. We intend to demonstrate the powerful voice of young people, their yearning and capacity for leadership, their determination not to yield to violence and their ability to effect positive community change. By engaging conference participants in exercises, we will forge an experience they can use as they pursue more theoretical work.

Workshop Objectives

1. Present video selection from *Am I There Yet?*

2. Describe City at Peace process from First Agreements through play development and community change work
3. Lead attendees in selected City at Peace exercises
4. Question & Answer session

Workshop Activities

1. Introductions (2 minutes)
2. Sample exercise from City at Peace (5 minutes)
3. Stand & Declare
4. Background on City at Peace; History/Process (6 minutes)
5. Video selections from *Am I There Yet?* (60 minutes)
 - a. Opening number – “Success, Success”
 - b. Race & racism in the classroom
 - c. Depression – cutting/mutilation
 - d. Slackers – pressure to achieve / at what cost?
 - e. Fantastic Four –engaged when freshmen, but got no support; took until senior year until they forced the issue with the Principal
 - f. Principal – focused on standardized testing; doesn’t understand that lack of support effects how her students perform
6. Question & Answer session (15 minutes)

Assessment

We will provide a response card asking attendees for feedback to the following questions:

- Have they gained an understanding of the City at Peace process?
- Do they have a sense of the way the Stand & Declare exercise leads to conversations around issues of concern to youth?
- Were the presenters effective in explaining the importance of youth involvement at leadership levels of the process?
- Do they have a sense of the importance of the performing arts in contributing to the development of conflict resolution skills?

Handouts

5. One-page City at Peace summary
6. Mission Statement for participants
7. Sample of scene development around one topic
8. Mission statement
 - a. writing prompt
 - b. scene work
 - c. show outline
9. Outcomes Evaluation

Resources

- Carlsson-Paige, Nancy and Levin, Diane E. (1998). *Before Push Comes to Shove: Building Conflict Resolution Skills with Children*. Redleaf Press.
- Carrier, Jim. (1999). *Ten Ways to Fight Hate*. The Southern Poverty Law Center.

- Jones, Tricia and Kmitta, Daniel. (eds.) (n.d.). *Does It Work? The Case for Conflict Resolution Education in our Nation's Schools*. Washington, DC: Association for Conflict Resolution
- Journal of School Health. *Federal Activities Addressing Violence in Schools*. American School Health Association, 2000.
- Katzmann, Gary S. (ed.). (2002). *Securing Our Children's Futures: New Approaches to Juvenile Justice and Youth Violence*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press.
- Kaufman, Gershen, et al. (2000). *Stick Up For Yourself!* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Lasley, James. (1998). *Designing Out, Gang Homicides and Street Assaults*. Research in Brief. U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, Washington, DC. NCJ 173398.
- Sherman, Lawrence W., Denise Gottfredson, Doris MacKenzie, John Eck, Peter Reuter, and Shawn Bushway. *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising*, A Report to the United States Congress. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. NCJ 165366. 1998.
- Starbuck, David, James C. Howell, and Donna J. Lindquist (forthcoming). *Hybrids and Other Modern Gangs*, OJJDP Bulletin, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Spergel, Irving A. (1995). *The Youth Gang Problem: A Community Approach*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tarlington, Carol and Wendy Micheals. (1995). *Building Plays: Simple Playing Building Techniques at Work*, Portsmouth, NH: Heineman.
- Thornton, Timothy N., (2000). *Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

References

- Boal, Augusto. (1985). *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Theater Communications Group.
- Boal, Augusto. (1992). *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Breunlin, Bryant-Edwards, Cimmarusti, Hetherington. (2002). Conflict Resolution training as an alternative to suspension for violent behavior. *The Journal of Educational Research, Vol. 95*.
- Brunson, Conte and Masar. (2002). *The Art in Peacemaking*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Creighton, Allan with Paul Kivel. (1992). *Helping Teens Stop Violence*. Hunter House Inc. Publishers.
- Heath, Shirley Brice. Living the Arts through Language and Learning: A Report on Community-Based Youth Organizations. *Americans for the Arts Monographs*. Washington, DC: Americans For The Arts 2.7:1-20 (November).
- Klink and Crawford. (1998). *Conflict Resolution and the Arts*. OJJDP Fact sheet.
- Sternberg, Patricia. (1996). *Theatre for Conflict Resolution: In the Classroom and Beyond*. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman.
- Rohd, Michael. (1998). *Theater for Community, Conflict and Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Manual*. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman.

[This page is blank.]