

Letter from the Editor

TIM NATION, GUEST EDITOR

We are pleased to present you with this issue of *ENGAGE!* focused on peace in the midst of turmoil. We begin by asking: What is peace and how do we increase it?

For me, peace is the ability to stay calm and focused amid conflict, to work for collaboration between people creating win-win situations instead of competition that creates winners and losers. Peace is to build community where everyone feels safe, valued, and loved. Peace requires work and does not magically appear.

Throughout our lives, we must realize a lack of peace hurts us all. The United States of America's terrible homicide epidemic takes around 20,000 lives each year while even more tragically, 48,000 end their own lives annually, demonstrating conflict within ourselves is even a larger problem than conflict with others.

Peacemaking involves working for peace through peaceful means. This includes forming stable legitimate governments, equitable practices for all, a transparent free flow of information, acceptance and appreciation of others, social and emotional skills, and social justice.

To help people build peace in our community and world, this issue of *ENGAGE!* focuses on three main educational components of peacemaking: Equity, Social Emotional Learning, and Restorative Practices.

Equity education includes antiracism, implicit bias, and equity literacy. Achievement gaps between students are actually opportunity gaps. Problems that persist in low income communities are not because of individual deficits, rather they are the result of injustice. Racism is the worst problem facing our culture and all of us must learn and confront our own biases, a root cause of current tragedies.

Equity education is important to learning why we need change in our current educational systems. Too many students do not connect with the curriculum as presented and too often achievement scores are directly linked to family income and privilege. When people of color are two to even six times more likely to be suspended, expelled, have their children taken away by child protective services, imprisoned, and denied health care, we recognize our systems fail them and need to be fundamentally changed.

“Enacting Truth and Reconciliation Through Community-University Partnerships: A Grassroots Approach” in this edition of *ENGAGE!* explores the use of a grassroots model for engaging truth and reconciliation (T&R) for racial terror lynching. It examines two lynchings that occurred in Oxford, OH, demonstrating a model for racial reconciliation.

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Restorative Practices offer a more equitable way to change our systems of discipline, criminal justice, and even trauma. Restorative Practices, the model, is based on the concept that when someone harms another or experiences trauma, existing relationships are damaged and these relationships need to be “restored.” If a student gets in a fight, instead of giving them a three-day Xbox vacation called a “suspension,” the student needs to be part of a formal conference that brings together a Restorative Practices leader, school staff, parents, and other youth involved. The person doing the harm needs to hear from others how the relationships were damaged and how the harm can be addressed. An action plan is created that holds the person accountable and lets them stay engaged in school.

The article “Using circles to Cope with the Eruption of Volcan de Fuego en Guatemala,” presents an innovative way to use restorative circles to help victims of natural disasters process and address trauma caused by the tragedy. It also presents insightful research outlining how verbalizing and listening with others brings light to dark situations helping to start the healing process.

Social Emotional Learning is the third component that builds peace. This include self-awareness, self-regulation, the ability to maintain positive relationships, conflict resolution and problem-solving skills. We must all learn ways to deal with our emotions and work for peace in our lives.

“Creating a Complete Learning Community: A New Chapter for the Peace Learning Center and the Tribes Learning Community” presents a series of informative and inspirational stories that demonstrate how civically engaged, democratic classrooms empower students to take control of their learning by building peace with their classmates and succeeding in personal and academic development.

We hope you gain a deeper appreciation and base of knowledge about peace through this issue of *ENGAGE!* from people who have devoted their lives to making our world a better place. Know that it only takes one person to begin the peacemaking process. You do not have to wait for a peacemaker. Become a peacemaker, creating a better world for everyone.

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