



The Peace Literacy Initiative for Cleveland Educators

A year-long training & data-gathering project

Progress Report 09.10.2023

In the spring of 2023, fifteen educators from five Cleveland-area schools contracted with PLI to participate in a year-long training and data-gathering initiative. In the words of one of the participants, “We are tired of going to funerals.”

The results of this project have relevance globally and will help provide the foundation needed to develop Peace Literacy programs in school districts around the country.

The program is guided by an Advisory Committee of local Cleveland leaders and supporters of innovative education: Jacqui Miller, and Alan and Barbara Rosskamm. More details covered by local press [here](#), and for readers new to Peace Literacy, [here](#).

On July 3, 2023, the Cleveland cohort started their work with an intensive 5-week online course, accredited through the Professional Development for Educators Program in the



Oregon State University

College of Education at Oregon State University. The course, “Aggression: Its Causes, Anatomy, and Alternatives,” was designed by PLI Executive Director Paul K. Chappell and Board President Dr. Sharyn Clough

to aid educators in the development of their interpersonal and classroom skills managing conflict and cultivating calm.

The educators in this first cohort were drawn primarily from public schools serving urban youth, preK-12. They were interviewed by an educational research team led by Dr. Devlin Montfort, both before and after their participation in the online course. In addition to

the interviews, the educators filled out a qualitative survey when they completed the course.

The Peace Literacy online training “lit my world all the way up. My approach with my students is completely different now,” Tierra Biggers, Dean, Davis Aerospace and Maritime High School.

The online course was followed by a three-day in-person curricular retreat designed to help the cohort teach Peace Literacy skills and frameworks to their students.

The curricular retreat was held at the historical Dunham Tavern Museum and Gardens in downtown Cleveland, August 7-9.



Facilitated by PLI curriculum developer and learning specialist, Stephanie Clapes, MEd, the retreat focused on curriculum provided by PLI on the theme of “Navigating the Human Condition.” The curriculum included lessons and student kits for exploring the Island of Aggression and the Island of Melancholy, where students learn to unlock the Eye of Empathy and the Doorway of Appreciation and Stewardship.

Now the critical work of tracking educator and student success with the curriculum begins. Surveys of educator and student attitudes are planned throughout the school year. In-depth follow-up interviews and an additional curricular workshop are planned for the spring.

Next: Participant feedback



Initiative for Cleveland Educators

Participant feedback

During the online course and in-person curricular retreat, the Cleveland educator cohort brought an inspiring level of compassion, commitment, and considerable years of insight and training to bear on their work. We offer the following highlights from their comments and feedback provided in their interviews and surveys.



From **Allison Lim, Student Care Specialist at Shaker Heights High School (standing far left)**: “I think the sequence of the online course then workshop was smart and important for me. I believe that grappling with and learning the online material and understanding how it informs my life is so useful as a prerequisite to teaching it to others.” In particular she noted that she “really benefitted from breaking down and demystifying aggression under the PLI ‘Anatomy of Aggression.’ This framework helped me both have insight and analytical distance to understand aggression.” Among the many educational contexts where she envisions bringing Peace Literacy to her students, she highlighted how “in one-on-one counseling with students, I can explain PL concepts for student insight into their conflicts, as well as with colleagues when discussing conflict or aggression.”

Leading the team at **Davis Aerospace and Maritime High School, Tierra Biggers, Dean of Student Engagement** (photo right, seated on the left) noted, “I have learned that we have to *unlearn* certain behaviors and utilize the Peace Literacy tools moving forward. [As we] transition I will give myself and others grace, in addition to holding myself and those that are serving children and the public accountable. Instead of having goals to eradicate behaviors that do not support ourselves or those that we serve, we must consistently practice to create the habits of Peace Literacy.” The online course focused on the practice of listening with empathy to detect the distress beneath aggression. **Biggers wrote**: “I would like to use this practice with my students and teachers when we are having one-on-ones amongst the teacher and student when resolving a conflict. I believe this is restorative and allows both parties an opportunity for relational work.” She concluded by offering appreciation for the investment that the Peace Literacy Institute had made in her – it “spoke



volumes and allowed me to even go higher and harder because I was valued as an educator. The Peace Literacy Institute showed me that as an organization they are more than willing to contribute to the development of the Whole Human, Whole Child.”

Shannise Jackson-Ndiaye (standing, right) is a newly appointed Assistant Principal at Tremont Montessori, a public school serving students from pre-K-8th grade. She noted a theme we hear often from educators: “Students are not the only ones who need to be taught Peace Literacy. I believe the adults who serve students even more so need Peace Literacy skills and strategies. We need to learn new ways to work together and resolve conflict.”



In response to an assignment designed to help track awareness of the distress that can lead to aggression, seasoned **high school teacher John Morris from Shaker Heights** wrote: “Having this awareness has helped me be more cognizant of these patterns and more patient with myself and others. It has given me just that much more distance to see situations the way they are instead of the way I see them through the lens of these stressors. I think this is a valuable exercise for me and anyone who works a high stress/intensity job. I also think it would be vital for adolescents who are experiencing the immediacy of their experiences and environment, often without time for reflection. I would like to share this with my own classes, and especially our social emotional support crew group, at the beginning of the year as an activity to track and discuss throughout our time together.” In his summary of the online course, Morris concluded: “Peace Literacy allows educators to understand and practice the interpersonal tools necessary to make a peaceful environment in their classrooms, schools, and beyond.”



From **Davis Aerospace and Maritime High School, teacher Steve Kestel** (photo left, seated second from right): “The Peace Literacy online course has put to words ideas and emotions that I have had or felt in my interactions with others, whether they be joy I have felt at positive interactions or frustration at negative interactions. These words are helping me to build a framework of how both peace and aggression work in society, and to link what is happening on the inside of someone to how it manifests itself on the outside. It has

also given me a tangible way of explaining these ideas to others and how both they and I can develop more peaceful responses to the world.”



Responding to a question about where at **Davis Aerospace and Maritime High School**, she envisioned making use of the Peace Literacy curriculum, **Maureen Vogel** (seated bottom right) wrote: “We have an Advisory model in our school and I am very much looking forward to bringing [Peace Literacy curriculum] to them and using it as a stepping stone in deeper discussions as they become upper classmen and work on becoming citizens.” She concluded: “Peace Literacy provided a framework to discuss and understand the complicated emotions that we all feel at one time or another and creates the opportunity for discussion that removes the emotion and addresses the meaning behind the behavior.”

Reflecting on the elements of the online course that stood out for her the most, **Tremont educator Hannah Boxley** (seated, below right) explained: “Cultivating Calm in Self and Others stood out to me as I believe this is a place that I find as a

growth opportunity in myself. With this knowledge I can begin better practices and help others do the same as we navigate this work.”

Analysis of the educator interviews from before and after their training will continue throughout the fall. Draft transcriptions already make clear the impact of Peace Literacy skills, concepts, and frameworks.

From **Hannah Boxley** again: “The biggest part that I love about Peace Literacy is the language. The language that it gives the children to share and say like, “Ms. Boxley, I’m feeling anxious.” Or, “Ms. Boxley, you know what? I think I’m responding aggressively because of this.” And so, you know, watching all the magic during the classroom teaching Peace Literacy ...I equipped them with some tools of words to use. Like I empowered them. I feel like I gave them muscles to say certain things, to share, to recognize.”

In her follow-up interview, **Dean Tierra Biggers** highlighted the importance of learning that aggression is a state of distress and that our children are doing the best they can with the tools they have or no tools at all. She concluded the Peace Literacy training “lit my world all the way up. My approach with my students is completely different now.”



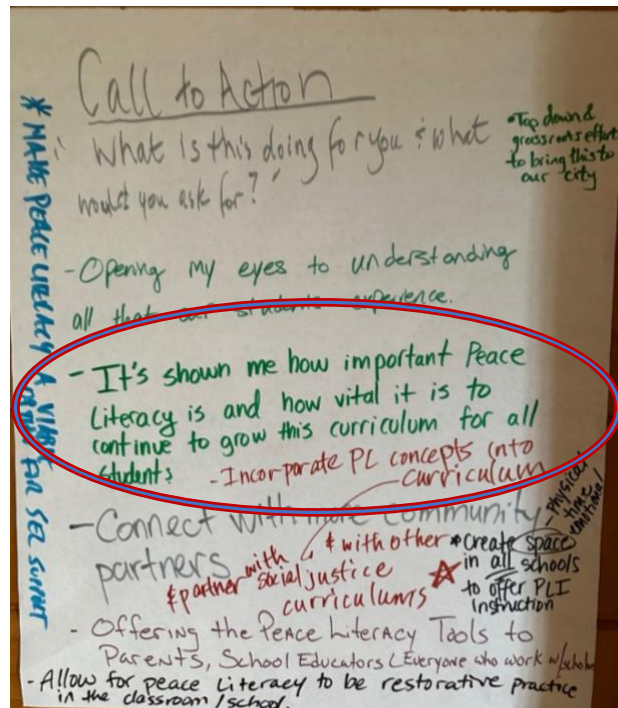


Already **Dean Tierra Biggers** has shared with us her use of the distress beneath aggression framework with a student and their parents – the student successfully identified a number of distress points that caused her aggression. We plan to track whether these kinds of interventions have an effect on the number of students eloping (leaving the class or building without permission); and the number of students being referred (to deans or other administrators), among other metrics.

Over 400 students are set to participate in the Peace Literacy curriculum across the five Cleveland-area schools this fall; this number will grow in the new year.



In addition to the critical impact the Peace Literacy training has had on the educators themselves, we're looking forward to getting data on the impact for their students. Are students able to recognize the distress beneath their aggression? Does that make a difference to the numbers and kinds of conflicts at school?



Continuing the Journey: Our data and assessment team will finish analyzing the interviews; additionally we plan to conduct surveys of educator and student attitudes throughout the school year. In-depth follow-up interviews and another curricular retreat are planned for the spring. This data-gathering is critical for moving the project beyond summer training events and into effective, sustainable curricular practice. **Your support is critical.** Visit peaceliteracy.org/donate.