

Report from the Field: Peace Literacy in the High School Classroom

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In 2013, after almost twenty years of working as a special education teacher, I retired. I also attended a five-day Peace Leadership Workshop sponsored by the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation (NAPF) and facilitated by author and former Army Captain, Paul K. Chappell. The workshop had a profound effect on me. Paul's message challenged me to identify my own knee-jerk responses to conflict and develop a new response that was based in respect. It also challenged me find my way to promote peace literacy in our schools. The result was the Waging Peace Curriculum.

In February 2017, 150 students (9-12 graders) in the Communities Program at Oshkosh North High School implemented a version of my Waging Peace Curriculum. I used their insights and suggestions to condense the material into a four-tier version, which focuses primarily on Paul's writings (https://www.peaceliteracy.org/s/PLweb_Becket-HS-Lesson-Plan.pdf). But rather than rely on the "read these pages and answer these questions" study guide format, this curriculum lets students experience a personal response to the readings where they go through their own messy process of confusion, indecision, insights and self-awareness. They identify their own insights. They create their own questions. They begin to realize what they thought they knew and what they now wonder. They also become well versed in the peace skills of respectful listening and sharing insights with each other. There are no right or wrong answers because peace literacy is a "begin where you are" process. In a nation that is full of division and polarization, learning how to implement the skills of listening and speaking with respect and empathy is invaluable. It is waging peace.

Do we need to teach peace literacy? We do. Schools grasp the awareness that if we want to encourage an understanding of science, math, music or football, we need to promote skill development through small individualized steps with regular practice and reinforcement from teachers, parents and peers. This is how we need to think of peace literacy. In order to promote peace in our schools, families, communities and world, it is time to begin the steady practice of teaching peace.

What are some outcomes of peace literacy instruction? Students and staff would collectively grasp the underlying causes of most daily conflicts and have identified strategies to respectfully respond to common misunderstandings. They would share a greater awareness of the underlying causes of aggression and respond to them as

warning signs and not a threat to be feared. Finally, students and staff would be better able to maintain empathy when faced with differences of opinions and increase the likelihood of communication and collaboration rather than allowing differences to create divisions. This is waging peace.

The Waging Peace curriculum can be adapted to different learners and different learning situations. In the Communities Program at Oshkosh North, it was used as a project based learning unit for one month that integrated English, social studies and Leadership standards. It can be teacher facilitated (Oshkosh North) or used as a self-guided learning project for a small group or individual students.

Here are some testimonials from Oshkosh North High School staff and students in February 2017:

*"Peace literacy curriculum moves people to turn their thinking toward themselves and **consider why they react the way they do** in moments of conflict."...teacher*

*Young people studying the texts of Paul K. Chappell **develop a greater sense of self** and the ability to connect with other people; they are **better armed to introspect, build relationships and cultivate empathy**."...teacher*

*It was **easy to connect** the material with **historical events**."...teacher*

*It's greatest selling point: the topic **connects with kids lives** and will **always be meaningful and relatable**."...teacher*

*"We are trying to move from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset. But growing is kind of scary. **Everything you thought isn't what you thought it is**." ...student*

*"If someone is bashing you, you want to talk back to protect yourself. But **you can learn to use respect** to protect yourself and **not bash back** at them."student*

*"This was the most **intriguing** unit in our class. I have **learned so much** in the short time we were learning about peace literacy and waging peace." ...student*

As Einstein said, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." With peace literacy, we create change. We create peace.

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