



Talk About Wellness

Broadening the view of wellness
in education to include spirit



www.talkaboutwellness.org

SEPTEMBER 2008

WORKSHOPS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Self-calming Practices for Elementary School Teachers

WHEN: Tuesdays, September 16 - October 21, 2008
TIME: 3:30 - 6:00 PM
LOCATION: South Burlington School District
INSTRUCTOR: Sonia Cassani
COST & CREDITS: \$250, 1.0 St. Michael's College credit
(Calming Practices only)
\$350, 2 St. Michael's College credits
(includes Linda Lantieri's 2 day workshop and
an additional assignment).
*Costs are reduced by the Talk About Wellness Initiative -
Includes book, "Building Resiliency From the Inside
Out" by Linda Lantieri.*

INFORMATION: worth@champlain.edu
(check required materials)

REGISTRATION: <http://cvedc.champlain.edu>

Linda Lantieri Public Talk

WHEN: Monday, December 8
TIME: 6:30 PM
LOCATION: South Burlington School Auditorium
INSTRUCTOR: Linda Lantieri
COST: FREE

Educator Grants

Talk About Wellness is pleased to offer a mini-grant program for this academic year made possible by a \$50,000 grant from J. Warren and Lois McClure Foundation a supporting foundation of the Vermont Community Foundation, and an \$80,000 grant from the Ferguson Foundation.

Grants range between \$200 and \$500 with rolling deadlines of September 15, 2008, March 15, 2009 and September 15, 2009. Additional information and an application form can be found at www.talkaboutwellness.org or educators may email Marilyn Neagley at mneagley@verizon.net. or call 802-985-3528.

HEARING

Creating Calm and Connection through Ritual

By Meredith Potter

In *The Courage To Teach*, Parker Palmer wrote, “To teach is to create a space.” This great phrase prompted me to reflect on a classroom management problem that had been an ongoing dilemma. At mid-term last spring, I asked my students to evaluate our Global Studies class through a series of in-depth questions. The evaluation prompted many insightful answers. According to my 26 students, our time together each day was “busy”, “fun”, “challenging” and “creative.” There was one answer, however, that remained consistent throughout the responses: Our class was “LOUD.”

I agreed. My curriculum calls for group work, discussion, art, theatre, music and a lot of space that requires students’ voices. But the noise levels often got out of hand because I did not have a practice that worked for this large class of eager, bright, and energetic learners. To solve this problem, I used the singing bowl, a technique brought to me by Professor Jackie Kaufman.

Singing bowls, also known as ‘Himalayan bowls’ or ‘rin’ or suzu gongs in Japan, are a type of bell with a flat surface. They were used traditionally throughout Asia as a part of Buddhist spiritual practice, but they are now used throughout the world for meditation and relaxation. By using the singing bowl, I found that ritual quickly played an important part in bringing my students’ attention into focus. The ringing of the bowl became a calm announcement to begin our work together in peace.

We began using the singing bowl through experimentation. After explaining its traditional uses, I asked students to take turns experimenting with the sound. I asked them to try to allow the sound to last as long as it could. It took them several days of practice just to be able to listen to it

without commenting and giggling, but right away I noticed a change in the overall tone of my classroom. While not instantly quiet, this meditative beginning seemed to be appreciated and accepted by my students and began to affect our time together in a calming way.

I was only able to borrow the singing bowl for a few days, but its brief use opened me up to the idea that I could create a quiet space in my classroom. I very much look forward to using my own singing bowl and ritual as a consistent part of my work this school year.

To hear more about Meredith’s classroom practice, you can contact her at mpotter@bfasta.net.



WISE WORDS

Linda Lantieri



Auriel Gray is a guidance counselor the South Burlington school district. She was instrumental in working with TAW to bring Linda Lantieri to her district last spring.

After reading about the Inner Resilience (IR) program underway in NYC schools, our district guidance team agreed that its

founder Linda Lantieri would be a great resource for our school community.

We noticed an increase in symptoms of anxiety – restlessness, distractibility, irritability – in students over the past eight years or so. Linda’s IR work, supported by a 9-11 Red Cross grant, is specifically designed to address stress in adults as well as children, and is therefore timely and applicable.

Our hope was to generate increased interest and skills in staff, parents and students around these basic wellness practices, so that they may be consistently taught, imple-

mented, and generalized to those situations where they are most needed, such as home and school relationships, and self-care under stress.

Staff feedback from the spring training indicated that they were inspired by Linda's focus on the importance of adult self-care as a first step in transmitting the wellness practices to students. They expressed enthusiasm for the simplicity of the practices and how easily they could be integrated into their daily routine. The fact that Linda has a program that is already being embraced by a large public school district was encouraging to participants and increased their interest in learning how to bring those important skills further into their teaching.

We now have 40 teachers from all five schools in our district who have expressed interest in participating in the pilot implementation Linda will introduce this year.

We are looking forward to continuing our work with Linda and the Inner Resilience Program. We are evaluating program outcomes, and as the work evolves, we look forward to sharing our information and further training opportunities with other districts.

Contact Auriel Gray at agray@bschools.net



I caught up with Linda in Manhattan via phone and email while she was engaged in a teacher retreat and preparing for a brief vacation in England. Here is our conversation.

- Jacqueline

Question: What are the common threads of your work with NYC teachers and Vermont teachers?

Linda Lantieri: As the modern stresses of today's childhood accumulate for children and teachers, the common thread is that we all need to balance our inner lives and our outer lives of action and service.

We are living in a time of profound uncertainty and unknowing. We need to equip children and adults with

the inner strength they need to meet both the intense challenges and great opportunities that come their way.

Question: Please briefly describe your goals for the next South Burlington workshops.

Linda: Our goals for the South Burlington workshops are to develop a pilot of the work of the Inner Resilience Program in a site other than where it began in NYC. We want to adopt and adapt what we have learned in NYC to a select group of teachers in South Burlington. The work includes helping teachers to balance and nurture their own inner lives as well as preparing them to teach these skills and ways of being to their students using the curriculum "Building Resilience From the Inside Out". This curriculum prepares teachers to teach a few contemplative practices to children in an age appropriate way and also equips teachers to create classrooms that welcome children's inner lives.

Question: What in this moment, is your definition of "the spiritual dimension of learning"?

Linda: The spiritual dimension of learning is the dimension of our lives that helps us place our actions in a wider, richer context by nurturing a broader, deeper vision of learning that takes us beyond our own minds or emotions and makes our actions have a sense of purpose in the context of community.

It is when we have a conscious recognition of a connection that goes beyond ourselves that sometimes leaves us without words to describe it.

In my own case, walking in the woods in Alaska and turning the corner and coming face to face with a moose and her calf, and instinctively communicating that I wasn't going to harm them was a "spiritual experience" for me.

Question: Do you believe that you are still "rocking the boat" as you wrote in 2001, or are you finding that your work articulates a yearning many educators have for a deeper and more meaningful way to learn and grow with their students?

Linda: I feel like the waters have become calmer and much more receptive to realizing that we have an inner life and it needs to be nurtured in order to make our life worth living. The whole movement of social and emotional learning in education has helped to welcome the sacred in our classrooms as well.

We are beginning to realize that children need a whole lot more than intellectual capacities to be loving, caring and successful adults - and we now have adequate research to prove that.

Question: How can your mission to uncover, evoke, find and recover students' and teachers' spiritual experiences meet the overriding priority of administrators to raise test scores?

Linda: When we start to bring in what the new brain science is teaching us, and then we will realize that the two go together. Children's brain's function best when they are not anxious or frightened or angry. The best zone for learning is one that is nurtured in the ways we have been talking about. When children are taught to better manage their anxiety and can more keenly focus their attention, then better learning takes place.

Question: What are your intentions and aspirations for your second Burlington visit?

Linda: On the second visit we will be actually experiencing the training required for teachers to feel comfortable using the curriculum. I also will be visiting the schools in the pilot and doing demonstration lessons so teachers can see first hand what the work is about. I also will be learning if there is anything we need to adapt to the particular needs of this new student population.

Question: How can this Vermont work become sustainable and grow?

Linda: We know a lot about what makes initiatives in schools grow and sustain themselves. It requires planning and long term thinking – in years. It needs good staff development so teachers feel confident to bring it into the classroom and we need local leaders who hold the vision of this work both at the school level and the funding level. We seem to have all of these in place right now in South Burlington.

Question: Kindly distill your work in Vermont into a single message to teachers that you would like them to hear in their hearts and minds.

Linda: I would say that by learning to nurture one's own inner life and spiritual development as a teacher, you are giving your students one of the best gifts they could have - a teacher who is fully present to their needs and growth.

Learn more about Linda's work at www.innerresilience-tidescenter.org.



GOING DEEPER

How can compassion for yourself allow you to let go of yourself in your classroom?

- Don Tinney, BFA St. Albans

To have compassion for oneself helps you recognize that you are only human, allowing for self forgiveness, therefore recognizing everyone you come into contact with deserves to be treated as humans, capable of human errors and forgiveness. This can only deepen my being completely present with all of my students, better insuring successful relationships.

- Sue Lord

"If I am compassionate with myself, I can give myself a bit of a break – not be so hard on myself. That seems to translate to relaxing into my teaching and relaxing with my students. We have more fun in the classroom, which makes it a much nicer place to be. Compassion allows me to be more forgiving with my students. I can accept them as

imperfect human beings – like me – not people who need to be/act a certain way all the time. I can be more compassionate with them if I am compassionate with myself. I can hear them... sometimes without sound... on a whole new level."

- Joyce Kemp

"I have developed a new mantra for myself that I find myself thinking about many, many times throughout the day. It is simply, 'Be compassionate, contemplative and caring for both myself and others around me' (Hill, 2008). By thinking this way and incorporating the numerous techniques I have learned from Jacqueline, my guide, and the other members of our class last term, I'll carry this new way of thinking with me into the all of my interactions,

GOING DEEPER

personal, professional and spiritual. I feel that I have been transformed, my life altered in ways I never could have dreamed before this class.”
-Jennifer Hill

For the last several years, I have been focused on curriculum and instruction. Through my inner practices, I began to realize that what I was teaching was the curriculum and instruction, not the students I now make it a point to make eye contact with every student as they enter the classroom. I use their name when I address them and pay attention to their nonverbal communication. I have started to ask my students how I can help them, and I do not try to insert my agenda into their time with me. I let them know when they have stretched beyond their perceived capabilities. My tone has softened and lightened. I talk slower, and I talk less.
- Mary Grant

A response from Don Tinney....

I appreciate what my colleagues have said about compassion allowing them to accept, listen to, and understand their students in a new way. I think compassion leads us away from the temptation to hold our students to “the standards” before we know who they are. Knowing our students leads us away from trying to make them fit a particular template and leads us to understand the standards they have for themselves.

Compassion allows me to be forgiving of myself and others. Without forgiveness, I remain a victim, a mere composite of complaints. Victims make lousy teachers, but they can be effective taskmasters.

Compassion allows me to see my students as children struggling to become adults—a source of distress in its own right—and to not expect them to behave in the same way that I behave.

Despite knowing what I know about the power of compassion, I don’t think that I am alone in my need for a daily, if not hourly, reminder to be gentle and kind with myself. That reminder has become part of my inner practice.

Connect with Don Tinney for a deeper conversation about compassion at dtinney@bfasta.net



For November:

“How has nurturing your own spirit impacted the way you relate to your students?”, asks Aostre N. Johnson, Professor of Education, St. Michael’s College.