

ROTARY DISTRICT 5440 PEACEBUILDER
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CREATIVITY AND PEACEBUILDING

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and
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In this eighth newsletter of the Rotary District Peacebuilders, we want to continue our invitation for contributors and ideas, suggestions and possibilities for our efforts to promote the foundational skills for promoting peace, i.e., nonviolent conflict resolution, improved communication and cooperation, successful negotiation and mediation as well as the critical and creative thinking that can help communities move through obstacles and difficulties.

These are the same skills and ideas we are nurturing with our Rotary Global Grants in Burundi, East Africa at the University of Ngozi. By sharing more of this project in what follows, we hope to spark new thinking about what can be done locally, on college campuses, elementary and secondary schools, in churches, other organizations as well as in communities of all sized, formally and informally—wherever people are looking for new and constructive ways through conflicts

William M. Timpson

NOTE: Bill Timpson has been on the faculty at Colorado State University in its School of Education for many years and a member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club where his focus on sustainable peacebuilding in Burundi, East Africa, has been supported by two Global Grants.

CREATIVITY AND PEACEBUILDING

Adapted from William M. Timpson's (2002) *Teaching and Learning Peace* (Madison, WI: Atwood.

Mairead Corrigan Maguire (2000) was the winner of the 1977 Nobel Peace Prize for her work in Northern Ireland involving ordinary people in the effort to end the historic violence there and build a culture of peace. When addressing these kinds of complex issues, with all their systemic reasons and historic roots, she notes Gandhi's insistence that "nonviolence does not mean passivity. It is the most daring, creative, and courageous way of living, and it is the only hope for the world. Nonviolence demands creativity (p. 161)."

To help people consider the importance of nonviolent alternatives at every level, we can encourage them to explore the creative process. Most have some intuitive feel for what's creative. We can think about it as innovation or insight, new ideas or possibilities,

“thinking outside the box” or “pushing the envelope.” Although we may be able to see creativity in others, we may not know much about cultivating our own creative potential.

If you believe people like Maguire, creativity becomes especially important for promoting peace in the midst of conflict. If you believe the futurists, creativity will become increasingly valuable as computers and technology continue to expand into every aspect of our work and personal lives, freeing us up to explore, design and create new possibilities for old problems.

The question is, how do we best use our creativity? As a nation we can, for example, continue to put vast resources and creative energies into research on new weapons systems and our capacity for war generally or we can begin to insist on new mechanisms for peace. We have a cabinet level Department of Defense as well as three military academies. When do we get a Department of Peace and at least one “peace academy?” The U.S. currently spends \$100 million dollars a day just maintaining its nuclear arsenal. According to a *Forbes* article in 2017, our annual military expenditures are more than the sum of the annual military expenditures for the next fifteen countries combined. (See <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2017/04/24/the-top-15-countries-for-military-expenditure-in-2016-infographic/#1539981943f3>).

Paradoxically, the ability to think in new ways can become increasingly difficult for young people as they move through their formal schooling. Despite their natural curiosity and drive for independence, students spend many years in formal classroom settings where they are taught to follow certain rules, master particular skills, regurgitate known “facts” and hypothesize about various theories. How much of their innate inquisitiveness and spontaneity, for example, gets stifled or lost because of this kind of prescribed learning? If you become very proficient at jumping over educational hurdles, do you run the risk of losing sight of the journey your inner self—or the world for that matter—wants you to make or needs you to make if we are to learn how to deal with our differences and disagreements in less violent ways?

Remember the famous Robert Frost poem about the “path less taken” and how “that made all the difference”? Addressing these kinds of questions is at the heart of the creative process.

But what defines creativity? What do we know about it? Can we recognize it? Can we teach it and how? Patrick’s (1955, *What is Creative Thinking*, New York: Philosophica Library) identification of the stages of creativity has proven useful as a starting point over these many years.

The first stage is *preparation*, where you collect data and resources. If you really do want a fresh look at an old problem, rethink the data you examine and the resources you collect? When you take on some project for peacemaking, for example, you will need enough time to talk about your ideas and get lots of input, to read widely, to explore resources in the library, on the Web or in the community, to consult with others, etc.

Early in this process, you will want to be active and organized but consciously uncommitted to any specific outcome, open to different perspectives and new insights.

According to Patrick, the second stage involves *incubation*, where you dwell on various ideas and possibilities, some of which may seem quite far-fetched, without a focused (or even conscious) attention to any one particular solution. You have to let ideas percolate, and then be alert to what bubbles up. Know that this process can take considerable time and cause frustration. However, just knowing about the role of incubation can help you better plan and manage this aspect of the creative process.

The third stage involves *illumination*, or what has been called the “*Ah-ha!* Phenomenon”, when a solution may suddenly spring to mind. Whenever you feel stuck with nothing new coming to mind, you have to trust this stage in the creative process and wait. You never know when a flash of insight will happen. Useful ideas often arise when people are doing something else.

A fourth and final stage requires *verification*, when you assess the implications of your insights and conduct any additional experiments as tests of your ideas. Not all creative insights will be useful. Some might be absurd. Use this stage to assess whatever surfaces.

Now return to the challenges set out by Maguire. How can Patrick’s stages help us think about teaching nonviolence or ridding our own psyches of its influence, about changing the focus of our media and celebrating peacemakers, about addressing poverty and racism as fundamental sources of conflict? Understanding more about creativity can provide much needed patience and wisdom.

Lindsey Pointer

NOTE: Lindsey Pointer has been working on the use of restorative principles in the criminal justice system. She defines herself as a restorative practices facilitator, trainer and researcher and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Restorative Justice at Victoria University in New Zealand with support from a Rotary Global Grant Scholarship and the Fulbright Program from the U.S. State Department.

CREATIVITY, RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, AND “UNGGOGLEABLE” LEARNING

While working for Longmont Community Justice Partnership, a Restorative Justice non-profit in Colorado, I did a lot of work with the High School Student Restorative Justice Team. As part of this role, I was responsible for leading a facilitator training for the students to learn how to participate in restorative justice processes for student misconduct cases in their own school. During the training, we played a game called “Out of the Box.” The game is designed to help students think of creative contract items that use the responsibly party’s (the student who caused harm) strengths and assets to repair harms and make things right.

As we were setting up for the game, the students started joking around.

“You never said we couldn’t Google it!” one student joked.

I laughed along with the students, and then realized that we had struck on a great illustration.

“Well, let’s just think about that for a moment. If I Google ‘How-can-Jordan-who-likes-to-draw-cartoons-and-make-silly-videos-repair-the-harm-from-stealing-Alex’s-longboard,’ what will come up?” I joked back, referencing the people and circumstance from the scenario we had been using for training.

The students laughed and agreed that a Google search like that wouldn’t come back with anything helpful.

“So what if I Google ‘Colorado-penalties-for-misdemeanor-theft?’”

We all agreed that Google would have a clear answer for that search.

“So if Google can give us answers for the traditional justice system so easily, why isn’t Google helpful in restorative justice?”

This started a great conversation that outlined some of the main points that differentiate restorative justice from the punitive system.

The students talked about how restorative justice considers the individuals involved, and takes into account the unique harms that have resulted to the victim, community, and offender. They also talked about how the best restorative justice agreements are creative and unique to the case. It is the collective brainpower of the people in the circle, considering the individuals involved, their strengths and assets, and the specific harms from the incident that allows those factors to be synthesized into creative ideas to repair harm. Being truly restorative involves understanding the complicated world of individuals, the range of harms (physical, financial, emotional, spiritual), and practicing creative problem solving. This is a uniquely human ability.

With smartphones in their pockets giving them access to an almost infinite source of information, students today are being educated in a world very different from the world I attended school in not too long ago. When you can look up the date of the Declaration of Independence or the numerical value of Pi wherever you are in just a few seconds, what is the point of memorizing it for a test? Why invest the mental energy when you can just Google it?

This new reality calls for a radical shift in public education, especially at the Middle and High School levels. This shift is a liberating one! The time previously devoted to memorizing events, facts, and dates can now be applied to creativity, invention, and problem-solving. We can begin to adopt educational paradigms that capitalize on our uniquely human abilities. This era allows us to spend less time memorizing the correct

answer and more time looking at questions with many possible correct answers. The growth of technology is a catalyst for us to begin coaching students in the valuable skills of creative thinking and problem solving.

Restorative justice compliments this shift. Rather than a student knowing that getting in trouble in class results in detention, we can now coach students to think critically about the impact of their actions in class on the teacher, peers, school, and themselves and then brainstorm ways to make things right and repair relationships with those individuals. This builds important skills like empathy that will help young people be equipped to handle conflict constructively throughout their lives. This is meaningful learning because it is responsive to the world around us, actively shaping the communities we live in, and absolutely ungoogleable!

Robert N. Meroney

NOTE: Bob Meroney is an Emeritus Professor of Fluid Mechanics and Wind Engineering with a long career at Colorado State University. He has been an active member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club and regularly researches a range of topics on modern life, issues and politics that serve to spark deeper conversations among friends and colleagues.

CREATING PEACE

Imagine all the people living life in peace,
You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one.

From "Imagine" by John Lennon (1971) ¹

"Peace" seems such a nebulous concept. It is hard to "imagine". Often the idea seems more defined by its absence than its reality. Indeed, there are many situations today where proposing peace directed solutions seems to strain credibility, and the proposer is deemed naïve, unsophisticated, ingenuous, unworldly, or even mad.

Perhaps the problem with conceiving peace is that most of us have not made a study of what peace requires, what peace demands from all parties, and we have not personally practiced the skill of peacemaking. The subject has been studied by many philosophers, saints, and even heroes, but seems out-of-reach to the average person. Some of these remarkable people have suggested ways we can start, ways we can create peace inside and around ourselves. Let's just consider five ways from the many available:

¹ Listen to John Lennon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkgkThdzX-8>

1. Find inner peace –how can you instill peace, create peace, or promote peace if you are mad and angry yourself? *"The only way we can make peace is for each of us to be the peace we want to see."* -- Susan Collin Marks, Search for Common Ground, Peace Ambassador
2. Resolve to be happy –how can you give or pass on something you do not have yourself? Be proactive about happiness, because others will recognize it, and want to share. *"Folks are usually about as happy as they make their minds up to be."* — Abraham Lincoln
3. Forgive yourself and others –Try forgiving at least one person...get on with your life. *"Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies."* –Nelson Mandela, and *"Being obsessed with anger only destroys us."*—Arun Ghandi, grandson of Mahatma Ghandi.
4. Visualize Peace – Imagine cooperation and feel joy in that belief. *"Dream. Dream. Dream. Be idealistic. Dream the world can be a better place."* -- Archbishop Desmond Tutu
5. Perform Acts of Kindness--Give back, make a difference, help someone else. How can you create peace if you do not practice it? Do you ever notice how astonished others are to be recipients of acts of kindness and love? *"Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve."* -- *"You don't need a college degree to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve."* -- Martin Luther King, Jr.

The list of thoughts above are only a tiny fraction of the wisdom peacemakers have shared. If you are looking for a "peacemakers guide" consider some of the following resources:

- Five easy ways you can create peace -- https://www.huffingtonpost.com/mona-shah-joshi/5-easy-ways-you-can-creat_1_b_9233970.html
- 10 Ways to Bring Peace to the World -- <http://www.beliefnet.com/wellness/2008/09/10-ways-to-bring-peace-to-the-world.aspx>
- Twenty Ways to Promote Peace in Our World -- <https://www.mentalhelp.net/blogs/twenty-ways-to-promote-peace-in-our-world/>
- *The Peace Book: 108 Simple Ways to Create a More Peaceful World.* The Peace Company, 2001, 191 pp. Louise Diamond, founder of The Peace Company.
- *The Peace Book*, Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2010, 32 pp by Todd Parr. Book to explain difficult concept of peace for K-2nd grade.