
Preface

PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

This book arose out of our mutual interest in specific approaches to conflict resolution in schools. We have both worked at mediation, facilitated restorative conferences, and offered counseling and conflict coaching to individuals. We have developed undercover anti-bullying teams and led groups dedicated to eliminating violence. But all of this work has never, to our knowledge, been brought together in a comprehensive systematic program.

What would a school look like if it were to say to itself, “We are going to manage the conflicts that happen in our school in a respectful way that addresses problems, reduces violence, restores harm when it occurs, and produces a climate of inclusion, without relying on heavy punishments”? We were interested in what kinds of processes would be needed to make relationships between people in a school community a deliberate focus of attention.

We also had a perspective on conflict resolution in mind that we wanted to elaborate. It grows out of what began as “narrative mediation” (Winslade & Monk, 2000, 2008) but has since transformed into a variety of forms of conflict resolution that have stretched way beyond the parameters of what might be called mediation. It draws from a robust set of ideas known in different places as poststructuralism, social constructionism, and postmodernism, although we would caution that we do not endorse every expression of these concepts. The practices of narrative therapy and community work are present in a range of practices represented in this book. We have never before brought all of these practices together in one place. This book is an attempt to do so.

We want to address the needs of school leaders who are interested in designing a school climate in which conflict is effectively managed. By “managed,” we mean addressed and handled in ways that are respectful of all involved, rather than controlled from above. And we also envisage an audience of school counselors and psychologists who are intimately

involved in implementing many of the strategies outlined in the book. The dual professional audience reflects a conviction about the need for partnership between policy and practice, between designing programs and implementing them. In this book, we often take readers into the micro-practice of detailed conversations. We realize that this detail will not always be necessary for school leaders to master, but we want them to understand how these practices work in order to be able to support the school counselors and psychologists who will implement them. We also want the same school counselors and psychologists to play a role in the design and construction of systems of conflict management in a school, rather than leave all such decision making and policy design to school leaders. In the United States, we believe that the ASCA National Model for school counseling and the trend toward “response to intervention” (RTI) modes of practice fit well with the comprehensive approach we are outlining here.

We often refer to the school counselor as the skilled practitioner who will implement these practices. Some school counselors, however, have the expertise to do this work but may choose not to. Often it might be a school psychologist, sometimes a school social worker, and sometimes a youth worker who implements the practices. There are also many teachers who are interested in and capable of taking up some of the practices outlined in this book. In different places, there are various designations of professional roles that can be involved. In the United States, there are “student management specialists,” for example. In New Zealand, there are “resource teachers of learning and behavior.” In parts of Europe, there are “pedagogs.” We are not picky about “who does what.” We have put these ideas together in a comprehensive and theoretically consistent way to encourage school administrators and educational professionals to try something different.

We often hear that school counselors are just involved in class scheduling and are not trained to do real counseling or conflict resolution work. We feel this is an excuse for poor standards of professional work. Our intention is to provide tools to those who aim for high standards of professional practice. School leaders should expect no less from their school counselors.

There is compelling research support for the efficacy of restorative practices in schools, for mediation practice in general across a variety of settings (including schools), for anger management groups, for under-cover anti-bullying teams, and for counseling. But the idea of bringing all these ideas together into a program is still in its infancy, and we are looking for opportunities to work with schools willing to implement them in a serious way. Research confirmation of the worthiness of doing so must follow the further development in practice of these ideas rather than lead it. This is a book about practice.

BACKGROUND TO WRITING THE BOOK



The authors first met when Mike was studying for a Master of Education degree at the University of Waikato (New Zealand) and John was a member of the teaching faculty. John supervised Mike's final dissertation and encouraged him to continue to apply narrative ideas in his work as a school counselor. By chance, it happened that Mike was working at the same school where 10 years earlier John had also been a school counselor.



Mike renewed contact with John as he began to develop the undercover teams approach in his work with bullying. Together they started to articulate this work through writing several articles about it. Conversations and writing efforts began to include a focus on mediation as well, and gradually the idea of writing a book that advocated for a comprehensive program started to emerge. The book has gradually taken

shape through many e-mail exchanges, occasional phone or Skype calls, and annual meetings in New Zealand.

Since 2003, John has been based in California but still makes regular visits back to New Zealand and also to Edgewater College, where Mike still works. At California State University, San Bernardino, John has taught school counseling and has developed a sharper feel for how these practices can take shape in an American context.

The writing of this book is based on a partnership across two countries: New Zealand and the United States. It is also intentionally a partnership between authors who work, respectively, in a high school and a university. The stories of practice that populate and enliven this book nearly all come from Mike's work in a New Zealand high school. There is consequently a New Zealand flavor to many of these stories and a high school bias. We have tried to explain these in a way that will make sense to practitioners in other contexts, but there will still be some work that readers have to do to translate them into their own world.

There are many places in the United States and in other countries where restorative practices are being developed, and there are schools in the United States that are experimenting with undercover anti-bullying teams. Michelle Myers, in San Bernardino, for example, has been successfully implementing this approach in an elementary school. There is a substantial literature on anger management groups, too, but they have seldom been written about from the perspective represented in this book.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN EACH CHAPTER

The first two chapters of this book are designed to set the scene. The first one addresses the nature of conflict and points out how serious the problem of violence in schools really is. It also cites a major review of the well-known policy of “zero tolerance” for violence and shows how its outcomes are not as compelling as its image. We argue that another approach is needed and start to articulate what that approach might look like. We also relate the principles on which our approach is based to the need to prepare young people to become democratic citizens.

Chapter 2 sets out the perspective from which the book is written. It outlines what is distinctive about a narrative approach to conflict resolution and introduces many of the concepts that will be put to specific use in later chapters.

Chapter 3 focuses on the use of counseling in situations where conflict is happening or has happened. Individual conflict coaching from a relational perspective is outlined. There is a section on deconstructing rules with students. Then we deal with those occasions where conflict has led to a traumatic event and counseling needs to be about “postvention” rather than prevention or intervention. Principles and practices for counseling individuals and groups in relation to trauma are outlined and explained.

Chapters 4 and 5 are about mediation. In Chapter 4, we outline and illustrate a narrative process of mediation by a school counselor. In Chapter 5, we discuss the development of peer mediation programs in schools. We include a list of issues for schools to resolve in the establishment of a peer mediation program and outline an initial training program for peer mediators.

Chapters 6 and 7 are about restorative practices in schools. Chapter 6 outlines and illustrates a restorative conferencing process to be used to address serious disciplinary offenses. Chapter 7 expands from the full-scale conference to outline restorative conversations of various levels of intensity.

Chapter 8 takes us into the classroom for the purposes of a circle conversation. It sketches some of the histories of circle conversations and shows how they can be used to address conflicts that have surfaced in the set of relationships in a class, rather than in any particular pair of students.

Chapter 9 targets the relational narratives around bullying and relational aggression. It shows how the bullying relationship can be transformed by the use of undercover anti-bullying teams.

In Chapter 10, we focus on the use of classroom guidance lessons to address social issues that can be the basis of conflict within the school. These lessons are designed to engage students to think about differences between people in ways that reduce violence and destructive conflict.

Chapter 11 is about group counseling. It is about helping some students who are caught up in patterns of violent behavior or loss of temper to make personal changes that will reduce the likelihood of them hurting

other people. We have eschewed the usual title of anger management groups and called them “facing up to violence” groups. The chapter explains why.

In Chapter 12, the threads that run through the previous chapters are tied together. We outline a list of critical questions to be used by school leaders in deciding which of the approaches previously outlined should be implemented. We also address training needs that these methods require.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people who deserve our acknowledgment and gratitude for their contribution to the development of this project. We would like to acknowledge the students and teachers at Edgewater College, because without them this work would never have been written. It is the rich environment of the school that has provided the stories in this book. All are real-life accounts of the struggles that some young people face and overcome. Only the names have been changed. They have been the source and inspiration for the examples of mediation and peer mediation, circle conversations, restorative conferences, and undercover teams. The school principal, Allan Vester, and the Board of Trustees have encouraged Mike to present these findings in many forums.

Gerald Monk has been John’s close colleague for many years in the development of narrative practice in conflict resolution. He has read a draft of this book and has offered encouragement and support, and he is implementing many of these ideas in a project in San Diego.

Wendy Drewery and the Restorative Practices Development Team at the University of Waikato in New Zealand also deserve acknowledgment. At various times, this team has included Angus MacFarlane, Maria Kecskemeti, Kathy Cronin-Lampe, Ron Cronin-Lampe, Donald McMenamin, Helen Adams, and Kerry Jenner. Their work is present in the spirit of many of the processes we have written about.

It was Bill Hubbard who first introduced Mike in 2004 to the idea of undercover teams and coined the term. Bill Hubbard also provided Mike with much of the inspiration for using circle conversations in the classroom. He has also been a pioneer of restorative practices in a number of New Zealand high schools. In his development of undercover teams, Bill drew especially on the “no blame” approach developed originally by Maines and Robinson in the United Kingdom. The translation of this work into a mode that is informed by the narrative metaphor is something that Mike and John are responsible for, but we are grateful for the groundbreaking work that Bill Hubbard did.

Mike would also like to acknowledge the personal support from his friend Roger Moltzen who has offered consistent encouragement for the development of Mike’s work in schools and for his articulation of it in