



Validus Preparatory
Academy
Bronx, NY



VALIDUS PREP

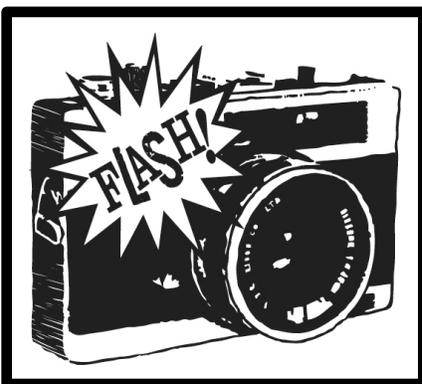
An Expeditionary Learning School

[Snapshot]

School: Validus Prep

Borough: Bronx, NY

Author: Jamie Munkatchy, teacher, 2014



Name of School: Validus Preparatory Academy

Grade Levels: 9-12

District: 09

Number of Students: 360

Impact School: no

Scanning: No.

Number of SSAs in school: 4

Number of students or % Title 1: Yes. 80%

Closing Status: no

Demographics of your school staff & students: 25% IEP and or ELL. 80% below poverty.

Name of point person: Jamie Munkatchy

Contact of point person: munkatchy@validusprep.org

[Testimonial]

Author: Jamie Munkatchy, teacher, 2014



Validus Preparatory Academy, An Expeditionary Learning School, is a small high school located in the Bathgate Educational Campus in the Bronx. The Fairness program at Validus began in the fall of 2010 as way to get our community members talking to one another. Our Fairness Committee is one of a number of options available to youth and adults for talking about violations of our character traits: Responsibility, Collaboration, Compassion, and Commitment. A restorative justice option, fairness brings together someone who has violated school norms with community members and a resolution is agreed upon, whereby the tear in the community is healed.

I started teaching five years ago knowing that schools could be repressive places. Our former principal convened a team of teachers and students, influenced by Maria Hantzopoulos' article in *Rethinking Schools* called "Deepening Democracy" to talk about restorative justice. The team looked like a study group in the beginning, and eventually we wrote up a protocol.

A lot of the school community wanted to change how discipline was handled. Teachers were upset about suspensions not working. We were trying to hold students accountable through suspension, but the norm a student broke would always be broken again. Teachers wanted something else. Was it going to be something more punitive, a longer suspension? Or something else altogether? This conversation came out of a time when faculty in particular were frustrated with the rates of suspension, and the fact that this tactic of punishment clearly wasn't helping the behavioral issues. There had been some big staff meetings where people were up in arms and upset with the deans. This was put forward as a new thing to do. Restorative justice garnered attention among the staff, and it satisfied the need that we felt.

This got me thinking that we needed to get fairness going as a practice in our

school. In the first half of the 2010-2011 school year, our team of staff, students, and the principal planned the fairness structure and implementation, and in the spring semester, we held four fairness forums.

With logistics and facilitation handled by students themselves—even the copying of forms and scheduling—fairness forums can be initiated by anyone in the community by writing a petition. The forum includes no fewer than three young people and two adults, and follows a particular protocol. The petitioner and the participant each get time to say their piece, and the remaining members of the forum ask clarifying questions and then probing questions, and finally a resolution is agreed upon by all. The process, which tends to take about thirty minutes, helps us build a culture of compassion, collaboration and caring.

Fairness is a space where any member of the community can bring anyone else. Typically it is a student bringing another student, or an adult bringing a student. We've had a couple of youth bringing adults, but we've had no adults bringing other adults.

In the 2011-2012 school year, we had thirty-five forums.

Additionally, Mass Transit Safety with Dignity trained nine of our students in peer mediation. Students mediated several conflicts in the Spring 2013 semester. In the coming school year, students will continue their promotion campaign to encourage more of the school community to get involved and handle conflict in a positive way.

In addition to fairness and peer mediation, Validus is fostering youth leadership through student government with support from community-based organization Sistas and Brothas United. Sistas and Brothas is supporting the initial stages of creating a leadership council for all three schools on campus. Validus also held a Youth Summit at the end of the 2013 school year which had youth leading sessions on issues like the School-to-Prison Pipeline, school uniforms, Stop and Frisk, and community violence.

As there was only one superintendent suspension in the 2012-2013 school year, I feel hopeful thinking about the year ahead. In the 2013-2014 year, school staff will go through an intensive circles training from Mass Transit Safety with Dignity so that restorative approaches are infused more into everyday classroom culture. And with the Discipline and Restorative Justice Team meetings having recently been combined, I envision restorative justice becoming more and more a part of the school culture, not just a program for a few staff and students.

The next step in this process is trying to collect good data that shows the effectiveness of restorative justice. Luckily, we have higher-ups who know that overly punitive discipline measures don't work. In fact, punitive measures and restorative justice practices are converging. We're doing work to move that converging along.

Part of our restorative efforts will be making sure that kids do fairness when

returning to school from being suspended. We also want to similarly integrate those coming back from incarceration upstate—although there is no reentry process for them as it stands now. What keeps them here is their parole officer, but we want to provide a better support system for staying in school than that.

A strong group of adults committed to the work have met successfully every Monday about this process. The idea of the “Talk it Out” campaign—which combines peer mediation and fairness—came out of those Monday meetings. We already have thousands of “Talk it Out” buttons. In addition, we came up with the idea of pledge cards, which state: “I agree that if I am in conflict with any community member, I will use peer mediation or fairness.” We’ll return to expanding this campaign next year.

We especially want to work on collecting more data on alternatives to punitive suspension in the coming year.

The main struggle I see currently is getting kids to turn out to these meetings. The solution, to be honest, is some good old grassroots organizing. We have to call kids on the phone the night before and say: “the meeting is here, can you make it?” Right now we don’t have the capacity to do that for all our kids. We can send emails, but not enough kids check them for that to be effective.

A lot of the peer mentors we chose were underclassmen, which we thought was the best choice because fairness has always had the problem of having seniors involved. I teach seniors, so I recruit students from my class to be a part of it, but they graduate every year, and then we have to start the training process over. For peer mediation, then, we decided to do the opposite. But we quickly realized that the student leaders needed to include a mix of students from all grades, because when students are too young, they’re just adjusting to the school culture. I’ve heard feedback from peer mediators that they’re too nervous to do mediations with older students.

As a teacher, I would like some relief of teaching duties so that I have more energy to concentrate on building restorative justice. Alternatively, I’d like to be paid per session. And at the moment, neither of those things is happening. I think teachers need a great deal more training in how to be grassroots organizers and how to build relationships. That would be a valuable addition to our professional development.

[Tools]



FAIRNESS PROTOCOLS

Fairness Sample Scenarios and Questions

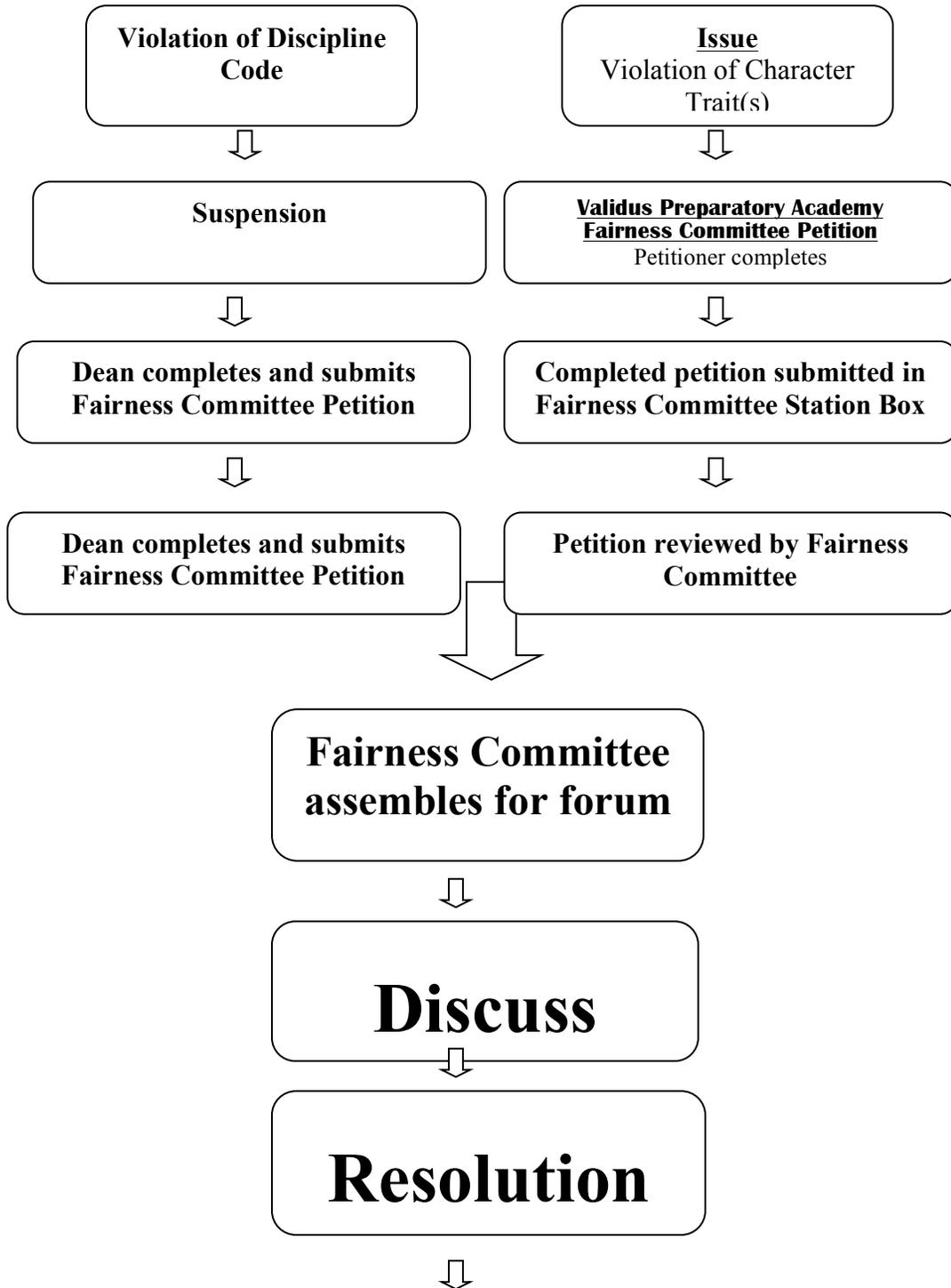
Validus Prep Fairness Committee Sample Scenarios

- When a student is asked to hand over a cell phone that disrupted class, she refuses and engages the teacher in a power struggle. Ultimately, the student is asked to leave the class and go to the Wellness Center. There the student turns the cell phone over to Mr. Ninos, completes a WOW Form, and is returned to her next class. Over the next two weeks, this process repeats several times.
- Two students are commonly in the hallways during class. They miss a significant amount of class time because they are in the bathroom, or locker room, or going to the nurse, all without permission. Their grades are suffering and when teachers or Crew Advisors try to talk to them about it, they act like they don't care. They also ignore Deans and administrators while in the hallway or hide when they see them. This has been going on for most of the term.
- During a class discussion, a student gets frustrated because he is not getting called on. He has his hand raised, but the teacher keeps calling on someone else. Finally, he stands up and shouts "Why don't you ever call on me?" The teacher tells him not to shout and he says "I'll be loud if I want to be loud." The teacher tells him to report to the Wellness Center.
- As students are leaving the school at dismissal, one student attacks another. The School Safety Agent breaks it up, and then school staff arrive and take the two students upstairs. Both claim it started with verbal threats and texting. The video cameras reveal that one student came up from behind and punched the second student, then the second student landed a punch before the SSA broke it up.

Questions to consider:

1. Who might write a petition to bring this to Fairness Committee?
2. What VPA Character Traits have been broken in the scenario?
3. What additional information do you need before responding appropriately?
4. Should this be resolved by the Fairness Committee **or** the Deans/Administrators **or** the Social Worker **or** the Crew Advisor? Explain your choice.
5. If you decide the scenario is best resolved by the Fairness Committee, what are some possible steps that the Fairness Committee can suggest to resolve this issue

Fairness Committee Flowchart



Inform and follow up with Validus Preparatory Academy stakeholders of resolution

Validus Ladder of Consequence / Discipline

This is our best thinking, thus far, about how to integrate restorative practices into what was previously a punitive ladder.

Student: _____ **Norm Violated:** _____

Prevention Teacher with class		Regular circles and restorative questions: appreciations, norming, announcements, whip arounds, group juggles, initiatives, vibe checks, highs and lows, discussions, socratic seminars, group problem solving, check ins + check outs		
		Actions Taken		
# of violations	Ladder of Referral - Who talks to who and in what order	Conversations	Restorative Measure	Punitive Measure
1	Teacher or Staff Person	private conversation with student or with several students or with student and class	use restorative questions use an informal conference use a responsive circle (once you are comfortable)	-
2	Crew Advisor	conversation between crew adviser and student using restorative questions	use restorative questions or informal conference crew adviser submits FC petition includes student, teacher or staff person, and crew adviser.	-
	Parent Coordinator	conversation between PC and parent(s) / guardians about electronic + uniform violations	use modified restorative questions	
3	Social Work + Guidance	conversation between student, parent(s) / guardians, and social work / guidance using restorative questions	use restorative questions or informal conference social work / guidance submits FC petition includes student + teacher / staff person	-
4	AP / Principal	conversation between student, parent(s) / guardians, AP and principal	AP submits FC petition includes all parties and adds parent(s) / guardians	Detention
			conduct sheet	Principal Suspension
				Superintendent Suspension
5	AP / Principal	conversation with AP explaining to student and parent(s) / guardians that another violation of the norms will result in "voluntary transfer" counseling	when returning from suspension: use responsive circle with all parties "putting right the wrong" or AP submits re-entry FC petition includes crew adviser, student, teacher, guidance, and parent(s) / guardians	Student and parent(s)/ guardians are counseled about "voluntary transfer" / alternative schools

Student:

Norm Violated:

Prevention Teacher with class
 Regular circles and restorative questions: appreciations, norming, announcements, whip arounds, group juggles, initiatives, vibe checks, highs and lows, discussions, socratic seminars, group problem solving, check ins + check outs

		Actions Taken					
#	Ladder	Conversations	Restorative Measure	Restorative Measure	Punitive Measure		
1	Teacher or Staff Person	private conversation with student or with several students or with student and class	<input type="checkbox"/> conversation(s) <input type="checkbox"/> JumpRope	use restorative questions use an informal conference use a responsive circle (once you are comfortable)	<input type="checkbox"/> restorative questions <input type="checkbox"/> informal conference <input type="checkbox"/> JumpRope	-	
2	Crew Advisor	conversation between crew adviser and student using restorative questions	<input type="checkbox"/> conversation(s) <input type="checkbox"/> JumpRope	use restorative questions or informal conference crew adviser submits FC petition includes student, teacher or staff person, and crew adviser.	<input type="checkbox"/> FC submitted <input type="checkbox"/> JumpRope	-	
		conversation between PC and parent(s) / guardians about electronic + uniform violations	<input type="checkbox"/> conversation(s) <input type="checkbox"/> JumpRope	use modified restorative questions	<input type="checkbox"/> restorative questions	-	
3	Social Work + Guidance	conversation between student, parent(s) / guardians, and social work / guidance using restorative questions	<input type="checkbox"/> conversation (parent + student + social work / guidance) <input type="checkbox"/> JumpRope	use restorative questions or informal conference social work / guidance submits FC petition includes student + teacher or staff person	<input type="checkbox"/> restorative questions <input type="checkbox"/> FC submitted <input type="checkbox"/> JumpRope	-	
4	AP / Principal	conversation between student, parent(s) / guardians, AP and principal	<input type="checkbox"/> conversation (parent + student + AP) <input type="checkbox"/> JumpRope <input type="checkbox"/> OORS	AP submits FC petition includes all parties and adds parent(s) / guardians conduct sheet	<input type="checkbox"/> FC submitted (all parties) <input type="checkbox"/> conduct sheet <input type="checkbox"/> OORS	Detention <input type="checkbox"/> suspension hearing Principal Suspension <input type="checkbox"/> JumpRope Superintendent Suspension <input type="checkbox"/> OORS	
			<input type="checkbox"/> conversation (parent + student + AP) <input type="checkbox"/> OORS	when returning from suspension: use responsive circle with all parties "putting right the wrong" or AP submits re-entry FC petition includes crew adviser, student, teacher, guidance, and parent(s) / guardians	<input type="checkbox"/> responsive circle <input type="checkbox"/> re-entry FC submitted <input type="checkbox"/> JumpRope <input type="checkbox"/> OORS	Student and parent(s) / guardians are counseled about "voluntary transfer" / alternative schools <input type="checkbox"/> JumpRope <input type="checkbox"/> OORS	
			conversation with AP explaining to student and parent(s) / guardians that another violation of the norms will result in "voluntary transfer" counseling				



VALIDUS PREPARATORY ACADEMY

“Strong Mind, Strong Body”

1595 Bathgate Ave., Bronx, NY 10457



Fairness Forum Protocol – (Non Re-entry)

Roles:

- Facilitator
- Recorder
- Panelists
- Participant (person brought to FC)
- Petitioner (person bringing someone to FC)

The facilitator convenes Fairness Committee by introducing everyone and explaining expectations, which include confidentiality, openness to process, and agreement to abide by the Resolution. S/he then explains the process by summarizing the below bullet points:

- Whip around 1: Everyone says their name, grade, and favorite candy.
 - *Facilitator note: Switch the “favorite” up often. Other favorites include: childhood cartoon, favorite city block, favorite YouTube video, favorite ice cream flavor, etc.*
- Whip around 2: What does the perfect Validus look like? What is the ideal behavior, school culture, classroom vibe or hallway vibe that youth and adults are working towards?
 - *Facilitator notes:*
 - " *Tie the question about ideal behaviors or school culture to the violation stated in the petition. For example, “What does the ideal uniform school look like?” or “What does a school without cell phones ideally look like?”*
 - " *Everyone is expected to say something. Allow passing only once you have repeated that openness and talking is what makes Fairness work. Have everyone keep their comments to 1 minute or less.*
- Facilitator reads the petition describing why the participant has been brought to FC.
- Participant brought to FC explains their side of the story without interruption, all others in circle are silent.
- Whip around 3: How do we fall short of the ideal we just described?
 - *Facilitator note: The whip around starts with the participant, but is followed by everyone in the circle talking about they have personally fallen short of the ideal or seen someone close to them fall short.*

- Whip around 4: Who is impacted or what is impacted when we fall short of the ideal behavior, school culture, classroom vibe, or hallway vibe?
- Whip around 5: What is the ideal resolution?
 - *Facilitator note: Allow the participant to suggest resolutions first and then run the whip around to collaboratively come to the final resolution.*
- Facilitator summarizes the resolution(s) aloud and resolution(s) is recorded on the petition.
- Someone from the forum is assigned to follow up at one week and two weeks.
- Everyone signs petition and recorder files the petition in the binder after the “Heard Petitions” tab.
- (Optional) Whip around 6: Debrief the process (everyone including the Participant)

Fairness Petition Form

Petitioner's Name: _____ **Validus Preparatory Academy
Fairness Committee Petition**

Petitioner email: _____ Petitioner phone no: _____

Participant's Name: _____

Petitioner completes the following three prompts

Specifically describe the individual's behavior or actions:

This behavior hurts our community and violates our character traits because:

The steps I and others have already taken to address the situation are:

To be completed by the Fairness Committee (FC) Date Received: _____

Fairness Committee (FC) **will / will not** hear the petition.

If FC will not hear the petition, please explain here:

FC contacted the petitioner (circle one): **in person / via email / via phone**

Date of FC Forum: _____ Time of FC Forum: _____

To be completed by the Fairness Committee

Location: _____

Date of Fairness Committee (FC) Forum: _____ Time of FC: _____

Fairness Committee Forum	Name	Signature
Facilitator:		
Petitioner:		
Participant:		
Recorder:		
Panelist 1:		
Panelist 2 (optional):		

Resolution:

Who (key persons in the resolution):

What (key persons will take what actions):

When (specific dates by which the key persons will have taken action):

To be completed after an FC Forum

Date of 1st follow up: _____ Follow up facilitator: _____

Date of 2nd follow up: _____

Follow up notes / next steps:

Quote from participant:

Quote from petitioner:

Ticket to Fairness Templates

Ticket to Fairness

Location:

Date of Fairness Committee (FC) Forum:

Time of FC:

Fairness Committee Forum	Name
Facilitator:	
Petitioner:	
Participant:	
Recorder:	
Panelist 1:	
Panelist 2:	
Panelist 3:	

Ticket to Fairness

Location:

Date of Fairness Committee (FC) Forum:

Time of FC:

Fairness Committee Forum	Name
Facilitator:	
Petitioner:	
Participant:	
Recorder:	
Panelist 1:	
Panelist 2:	
Panelist 3:	

FIG Protocol

“FIGS” is an Academic Intervention Circle - This is a modified fairness protocol that puts two on-graduation-track students with one student who is not on track to graduate. This circle meets two to three times a semester; they run the protocol, and craft goals. They do this without the supervision or interference from adults. This is the sort of restorative practice that builds positive culture and positive intervention.

Roles:

- Facilitator (FIG 1)
- Recorder (FIG 2)
- Panelists (optional)
- Student

Protocol:

The facilitator convenes the circle by introducing everyone and explaining expectations, which include confidentiality, openness to process, and agreement to abide by the Resolution.

Facilitator Reads → *You have been asked to this circle because are not demonstrating commitment to your academics. Your graduation is in doubt because you have not passed one or more Regents exams and / or you are missing credits. We put together this circle to put you on track and keep you on track to graduation. This circle is not a punishment; instead, it is an opportunity to provide you with the support you want and need to be successful.*

One at a time, each member of the circle asks clarifying questions. Do not go deep at this point. Instead you are just getting picture of academic progress by looking at one or all of these documents.

- Transcript review (what is missing?)
- Progress report review (what is weak, what is strong?)
- Class by class review (what is weak, what is strong?)
- Regents by Regents review (what are they doing for prep?)

One at a time each member of the circle asks probing questions. Possible questions include:

- What are you thinking when you decide when you don't come to school?
- What are you thinking when you stop paying attention in class?
- What are you thinking when you don't do school work at home?
- What are you thinking when...

Student and panelists suggest resolutions and collaboratively devise resolutions. There must be a resolution in each of the categories in the resolution table. Work hard as a group to find specific resolutions. It may help to form the resolutions as goals. For example, "I will motivate myself." is not as helpful / specific as saying, "I will motivate myself by looking toward and imitating student leaders and mentors. I will motivate myself by remembering that my academic achievement is related to how much money I will earn in my lifetime." Not all seniors have to have the same resolution.

Resolution:

Attendance / Lateness	Motivation	Urgency	Study Habits	Engagement in class

Signatures:

Role	Name	Signature
Facilitator (FIG 1)		
Recorder (FIG 2)		
Student		
Panelist (optional)		

Resolution(s) are recorded and kept in the FIG Binder. FIG binder lives in room 233.

FIGS Academic Intervention Circle/Fairness Invitation Ticket

Name _____

You are invited to a circle to talk about academic commitments and graduation requirements.

Your circle is at _____ **on April** _____

The circle will be in the Teachers' Room – Room 245. Please hang on to this slip and show it to your teacher as a pass out of class. You will still be held responsible for the work in the class you miss.

Name _____

You are invited to a circle to talk about academic commitments and graduation requirements.

Your circle is at _____ **on April** _____

The circle will be in the Teachers' Room – Room 245. Please hang on to this slip and show it to your teacher as a pass out of class. You will still be held responsible for the work in the class you miss.

Name _____

You are invited to a circle to talk about academic commitments and graduation requirements.

Your circle is at _____ **on April** _____

The circle will be in the Teachers' Room – Room 245. Please hang on to this slip and show it to your teacher as a pass out of class. You will still be held responsible for the work in the class you miss.

SCHOOL CULTURE/ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

“Reading” Advisory Lesson and Questions

Excerpted From: [Hantzopoulos, Maria](#). “Deepening Democracy.” Rethinking Schools. 21.1 (Fall 2006).

On any given day at Humanities Prep, a small public high school in Manhattan, it is not uncommon to see the hallways teeming with students long after school hours. While many are catching up on schoolwork, others might be playing chess or ping-pong, listening to music, or just lounging on the couches of what everyone calls Prep Central, our communal work and social space for students and teachers. It is usually a welcoming and friendly scene, free from the typical confines of the regular school day.

But one late afternoon I came down the stairs from the second floor to discover broken glass scattered all over the floor. Feeling a breeze from behind, I realized that someone had smashed the stairwell window, and I suspected it was an intentional act. I immediately went to report it so it could be cleaned up, though I felt overwhelmed by sadness. Acts of vandalism were rare in the school and usually represented some rupture in our attempt to build a community of trust. When I went into Prep Central, I casually shared with the remaining students and teachers what I had discovered. All of the students seemed shocked at what had happened, and no one seemed to know who did it or why it happened.

About 45 minutes later, Luther approached me as I was hanging some artwork on the bulletin board. He was in the group of students I had discussed the incident with earlier. Usually his booming voice {could be heard throughout} the hallway, but now he barely mustered a whisper, "Maria, I was the one that broke the window." I sighed, not sure what to say, and asked, "Well, what do you think we should do?" "I think I should take myself to Fairness Committee," he said without hesitation. As I reflect upon this now, I realize that Luther had sat on the fairness committee before, so he probably knew it was a space he could feel safe talking about what he had done.

Questions for Crew Discussion:

1. What ruptures have there been to the Validus community?
2. What does it feel like to “own” one’s actions like Luther did?
3. Why does it take a safe space in order for someone to talk about their behavior?
4. What consequences do you think Luther or the fairness committee proposed to repair the rupture in their community?

Cover Page for School-Wide Community Survey

Fairness Committee Survey - March 28, 2011

Crew Advisors:

The Fairness Committee is asking that all students complete the attached survey. This survey is part of our rollout of Fairness Committee and complements the Crew Chunk / Newsletter that you will receive this week.

The results of the surveys will be distributed to crews after spring break.

Please have your crew students fill out the survey and return completed surveys to my box.

Many thanks,

Jamie Munkatchy
Fairness Committee Member

Community Survey

The intent of this survey is to get a sense of the community culture we are creating here at VPA. The survey is anonymous; please answer the questions honestly. There are no right or wrong answers. The results of the survey will be shared with Crews in the coming weeks. In addition, the Fairness Committee will use the results to continue to build a restorative justice model for growing and healing our school's culture.

Students know and understand each other better than adults do.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

I want my school to have a strong culture of responsibility, collaboration, commitment and compassion.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

The VPA character traits help me to be a better person.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

The behavior in the hallways and atrium is usually respectful and appropriate for our school culture.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Students at VPA often ignore and/or disrespect other students in class.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Students at VPA often ignore and/or disrespect their teachers in class.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

I find it hard to participate in class because of other students' behavior\

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

I feel more comfortable talking to another student about my behavior than an adult.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

I have the ability to strengthen VPA's community culture with my actions.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

My actions or behaviors affect other people and our school's culture.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Alternate Version of the Survey

The intent of this survey is to get a sense of the community culture we are creating here at VPA. The survey is anonymous; please answer the questions honestly. There are no right or wrong answers. The results of the survey will be shared with Crews in the coming weeks.

Students know and understand each other better than adults do.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

I want my school to have a strong culture of responsibility, collaboration, commitment and compassion.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

My actions or behaviors affect other people and our school's culture.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

The VPA character traits help guide my actions.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

I have the ability to strengthen VPA's community culture with my actions.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

I feel more comfortable talking to another student about my behavior than an adult.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

The behavior in the hallways and atrium is respectful and appropriate for our school culture.

Always Often Not Often Never

Students at VPA ignore and/or disrespect other students in class.

Always Often Not Often Never

Students at VPA often ignore and/or disrespect their teachers in class.

Always Often Not Often Never

I find it hard to participate in class because of other students' behavior.

Always Often Not Often Never

Professional Development Resource: Restorative Justice in Oakland Schools

We use this article at adult Professional Development to frame our use of Restorative Practices.

“Restorative Justice Takes On West Oakland Schools” from *New America Media*

URL with video and article: bit.ly/Uou2PU

“From 2005 to 2009, the city of Oakland backed a restorative justice pilot project at Cole Middle School, in West Oakland, which was already slated to be shut down for low test scores. It was among the first attempts to implement restorative justice circles at a U.S. school.

By the final year, standardized test scores had risen by 74 points. The school, which had suffered from a high turnover of teachers, retained all of its faculty. And delinquency plummeted; suspensions fell 87 percent and expulsions dropped to zero.

Those staggering achievements prompted researchers at the Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice, part of the University of California, Berkeley's Boalt School of Law, to analyze the results. They declared the program at Cole -- a school where the entire student body was eligible for free lunch -- a national role model.

The program provided a successful alternative to zero tolerance policies, which have led to a doubling of suspension rates since the 1970s and have disproportionately affected low-income men of color.

The restorative justice model is now being applied in a second pilot project at nearby Castlemont School, which recently received a \$1 million grant from the California Endowment.

But Oakland Unified School District, which passed a resolution making restorative justice its official district policy, has been unable to find money in its own budget, from the state or federal government, to sustain the project in its schools.”