

Vermont Peace Academy

Promoting the Teaching, Learning, and Practice of Peace

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ANNUAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

In 2007–2008 Vermont Peace Academy (VPA) went through significant organizational changes. We celebrated the fourth and final year of the collaborative project between the Vermont Principals' Association and Vermont Peace Academy (VPA²). VPA's first Executive Director and founding member Hong Yue Guo moved away. Concurrently, founding member Clo Pitkin stepped down as Board Chair, though she remains a key member of the board.

With these changes, VPA took the opportunity to strengthen the organization with strategic organizational and programmatic changes. The Board Chair function is now carried out by our Executive Committee, a collaborative leadership team formed in January 2008. The team includes a new Executive Director and a Development Officer. And, we re-envisioned the VPA² school program for its expansion into the Center for Respectful Schools (CRS).

The new CRS has been conducting a series of strategic planning and training sessions. We strengthened the tie between the board and CRS team. At the end of our collaboration with the Principals' Association, we connected with the Vermont Superintendents' Association and provided our promotional packet to all the superintendents in Vermont. We also started collaborations with the Center for Civic Education for teachers' training and with the Vermont Folk Life Center for our Diversity Day celebration.

In the fall of 2007, we conducted a highly successful national peace conference in collaboration collaborating with Norwich University and started planning for the next one with Middlebury College. The International Day of Peace celebration in New York City at the United Nations and in Vermont local communities continued its success as our annual program. We brought the work of accounting books into our own office by installing Quick Books. We hired a new office assistant. The Peace Education Fund became a program of VPA and we are planning to have an open house in September to appreciate and reconnect with our donors and supporters. We received new funding as a multiple year grant and applied for new ones.

With all these major organizational changes, we started to grow our program and organization into a different level in this, its fifth year. By reexamining and clarifying program vision and goals, we realized again our tremendous potential based on the caliber of our board, contractors and volunteers. We have increased the efficiency and effectiveness of the governance structure, decision-making process and management systems. We are recognized as an important player in Vermont

education, and are confident that we will continue to make progress in the coming years.

In this report, I will summarize our work in the areas of A) the Center for Respectful Schools, B) the Center for Peace Studies, C) Organizational Development and D) Finance.

A) Center for Respectful Schools

In 2007–2008, our main program, the Center for Respectful Schools (previously known as VPA2) was offered in five supervisory unions at the following twelve schools: Charleston Elementary (West Charleston, VT), E-Taylor Hatton (Morgan, VT), Holland Elementary School (Derby Line, VT), Jay/Westfield Joint School (Jay, VT), North Country Union Jr. HS (Derby, VT), North Country UHS #22 (Newport, VT), Oak Grove School (Brattleboro, VT), Marlboro Elementary School, Bridport Central School, Shoreham Elementary School, Northfield Middle/High School, and Craftsbury School. Ten schools are now receiving multi-year services. We gave three multiple-school conferences and fifty workshops. Five student-led events were initiated as a result of our programs. Approximately four hundred fifty students, plus one hundred teachers, parents and community members participated in our program, and approximately a thousand people learned about our program's values, principles, and skills from their friends, colleagues and peers who participated in our program.

We tailored our program to each school's need to provide year-long student facilitative leadership training, nonviolent communication training and teachers' training. During this year we successfully developed two curricula, "A Pathway to Friendship" by Dr. Ken Hood and "Creating a Compassionate Climate Wherever You Go, through the Model and Practice of Nonviolent Communication (NVC)" by NVC trainer, Wendy Webber. VPA became a coordinator for the Center for Civic Education's School Violence Prevention program.

A Pathway to Friendship

At Orleans-Essex North Supervisory Union district (OENSU), we ran our third yearlong program. This successful model of starting with a district-wide kick-off conference for the entire community, planned and facilitated by students. Then we gave four consultative trainings to each school based on "A Pathway to Friendship". We concluded with a community celebration of the first Annual Diversity Day, also organized and facilitated by students.

Regional kick-off conference

The first regional conference was held for OENSU at the IROC Center in Derby, with eight schools and over a hundred students, teachers and community members. Students broke into groups and brainstormed and identified issues in three domains: Safety Concerns and Issues, Healthy Schools and Community Relationships, and Environmental Issues. Many ideas were generated and they chose one issue to focus upon in their schools. They worked on the issues throughout the school year. The conference provided the students the opportunity to meet and work with students from other districts as well.

Diversity Day Conference

At the end of the school year the first annual Diversity Day was held at IROC Center for the whole community. Refugees, immigrants and Native Americans were invited

and interviewed by the students. The Vermont Folk Life Center's trainer provided the CRS-trained student facilitators with skills for interviewing and videotaping trainings. The Diversity Day idea arose from students who participated in the trip to the United Nations for VPA's International Day of Peace, and who wanted to explore local cultural diversity. "There is cultural diversity right here in this area and it is important to raise that awareness among students," one explained. They decided to invite an Abanaki Indian, a French Canadian now living in Newport, a refugee from Rwanda who makes his home in Burlington VT, and an educator from Haiti. More than 200 students were interested in finding out about the different cultures' foods, customs and music, as well as what types of discrimination they might have encountered in the United States. Students videotaped the event and Public Access TV made it into a TV program.

At Bridport and Shoreham Schools, a similar Diversity Day was held for the second year. The students hosted and interviewed guests from Bosnia, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Japan to learn more about their lives in those countries and their adjustment to life in a new culture. They practiced interviewing and hosting skills, prepared group activities and public speaking roles, and developed follow up discussion questions to raise awareness of stereotyping, prejudice and the many types of diversity in their communities. Students videotaped the day and worked with Community Television of Middlebury to edit a final video product to make available to area schools. By hosting these events VPA established its collaboration with the Vermont Folk Life Center and we now have a growing list of cultural consultants from different parts of the world.

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and summer teacher training

At Marlboro and Oak Grove Schools, we have been working with students as well as parents using the model/process of Nonviolent Communication. With our support, a third/fourth grade class and a fifth/sixth grade class at Oak Grove Elementary, and a third/fourth grade class at Marlboro Elementary, piloted a new curriculum called "The No Fault Zone Classroom – Tools to Resolve Conflict and Foster Relationship Intelligence" based on the NVC approach. The trainer worked with the teachers and also the students several times throughout the year. Two parenting classes were run, a six week one at Marlboro school, and a 12 week one at Oak Grove School. The coordinator developed a Training Manual for a two day training to train trainers, in order to build capacity, based on the "No Fault Zone" curriculum.

At Craftsbury School, a veteran teacher is working with a team of middle school teachers during the summer to develop an effective team to work together as a middle school team within middle/high school. After several meetings we decided to offer specially tailored trainings to meet the need of the school.

School Violence Prevention Demonstration Program

At OENSU, we started a new collaboration with the Center for Civic Education's School Violence Prevention Demonstration Program, a federally funded national teacher training program. This program approaches violence prevention through the use of quality civic education materials and student engagement in lessons that foster positive attitudes toward their community and one another, respect for authority, and social inclusion. We successfully implemented the pilot program and confirmed that the goals, contents, the skills and attitude sought by both organizations are complementary. We are going to offer the first full year program in the same school district in 2008-2009 and plan to establish VPA as a state coordinator.

Training of Trainers

For the first time we conducted two trainings of trainers using our newly developed curriculum, “A Pathway to Friendship.” We strengthened the capacity of the present coordinator and trainer and trained new potential trainers.

International Day of Peace (IDP)

Many schools also participated at IDP under the Center for Peace Studies (please refer below) though it is a community wide and statewide effort.

Planning and Integration

VPA held a series of full day strategic planning sessions including some board members, our school academic advisors and education contractors. We jointly examined our school programs’ five-year vision, goals and near term objectives. Our purpose was to determine what we need to do to build a sustainable statewide school program. We laid out a new structure and renamed our school programs The Center for Respectful Schools (CRS). We reviewed the needs of students, teachers, partners, schools, coordinators and trainers, our core values and the functional roles of personnel and partners. We moved from our five year goals to define our program target and budgets for the next fiscal year. From this planning, it became clear that we would like to further integrate the above mentioned programs into a tool set to focus on the values and outcome rather than names of particular curriculums. We also would like to bring youth more into the organization as leaders, interns and council members. We will continue our planning during the summer.

For next year, three more schools from OENSU, in addition to eleven current schools.

B) The Center for Peace Studies

The International Day of Peace Celebration (IDP)

The IDP, which was established by a United Nations resolution in 1981 as a day of “global cease fire and non-violence,” was celebrated throughout Vermont by organizing vigils, concerts, workshops and speeches. VPA was part of the central Vermont celebration as well as organizing a delegation of students to attend the official United Nations event in New York City. VPA was the only Vermont organization invited to participate and it was our fourth year of participation. This event is part of a larger program which teaches diversity appreciation and awareness of the global community. Returning students give presentations to their schools and communities.

UN Celebration

Fifty-two students and chaperones from seven Vermont schools participated in the student observance of International Day of Peace. They received messages from Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, his wife, UN Messengers of Peace; Michael Douglas, Jane Goodall, Elie Weisel and Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein of Jordan. Through satellite TV, students communicated with the students in war torn places such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon and Sudan. This was followed by presentations from youth activists who have set up their own NGOs: a campaign to stop child poverty, a college leadership council, and a Peace Jam. There was a former child soldier from Sudan. One of the participating students videotaped the whole event and it was professionally edited for public access TV.

Upon their return, students shared their experiences with students and teachers at their schools and wider communities. One participating school invited several other schools for a community-wide presentation. One of those invited immediately signed up as soon as we opened the invitation for 2008. Another school made a PowerPoint presentation for the school board and received support from the parents' group for their participation fee. Some students started community classes to engage in the current international issues, such as how to prevent exporting armaments.

For the 2008 event, 53 students and chaperones from seven schools are planning to participate.

First Peace Conference: Creating Connections: New Partnerships for Understanding in the Middle East

The Center collaborated with Norwich University and the Vermont Council on World Affairs to host a national conference, "Creating Connections: New Partnerships for Understanding in the Middle East." The conference took place on October 5–7, 2007 at Norwich University, attended by about 200 people. It became clear that the time was right for this collaboration between our nation's oldest private military academy and its youngest peace academy. One of our goals was to create bridges between peoples, institutions governmental and non governmental organizations. We began connecting with Vermont colleges and universities such as Norwich, Middlebury, University of Vermont, and Goddard, and found a great deal of interest in working with us. At the same time we found that their faculties offered nationally recognized expertise in many of the areas we needed for our panel of speakers. The State Dept. Speakers, Ambassador Laurence Pope, and David Marash, Anchor for Al Jazeera English, gave us a well rounded background for the discussions to follow. We had other speakers such as Dr. Gregory Gause, Professor of Political Science and Middle East Studies of UVM, Dr. Febe Armanio, Professor of History of Middlebury College, Dr. Harold Kearsley, Associate Dean of the School of Graduate Studies of Norwich University, David Hamod, President of the National U.S. Arab Chamber of Commerce, Alina Romanowski, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of U.S. State Department and Laura Abrahams Schulz, Office of the Middle East Partnership Initiative of U.S. State Department. All the speakers were available throughout the two days and attended the small group discussions. Small group facilitated discussions provided a time for students, faculty, community members and NGO's to connect, share information and learn what others are doing. The Sunday session was designed to give NGOs and colleges information on funding for projects and events. Action plans for follow-up were generated and gave us much food for thought as we prepare for the next step. Middlebury College has agreed to hold the next conference in spring 2009.

C. Organizational Development.

Board and Staff Development

As of January 2008, an Executive Committee was formed with the co-chair and the chairs of two sub-committees to provide support to the Executive Director in implementing decisions made by the board. The Development/Finance and Program committees were formed to update and prioritize tasks and strategize long-term development. The board has met with the school project team for the first time and all three committees met every other week for the first six months of our new organizational phase and are actively engaged in the operation.

Executive Director and founding member Hong Yue Guo left at the end of December 2007 and I was hired as the new Executive Director on January 1, 2008. Karin McNeill was hired as a development/finance officer. Even though there was turnover, the Board remains very strong, evidenced in their participation in meetings and work outside of meetings.

We are also fortunate to have significant pro bono professional assistance. A lawyer, an accountant, and public relations and program advisors from the community provide their services gratis for VPA in support of our mission.

Increase Funding Diversity

Two foundations have supported us for more than two years and a new foundation has given a multi-year grant. Two supervisory unions have funded multiple year projects and a new supervisory union is considering similar funding. We wrote a grant with a school to fund a joint project. We have collaborated with a federally funded organization for pilot program and will offer full year program next year. We are also applying to new foundations and major donors and hope to build new long term relationships with them. The Peace Education Fund, developed separately several years ago, joined us as a VPA program at the end of the year; we are in the process of improving tracking of funding appeals and contacts to approach a wider variety of individual and cooperate donors.

Financial Management

We moved our accounting books from an outside contractor to our own office by installing and learning to use Quick Books. We have tracked the annual budget against actual income and expenses, and are working towards moving payroll and tax reporting in-house as well. We are also working to price programs based on direct and overhead costs, to carefully construct the contracts, and to determine fair compensation for staff and contractors.

Program Management

As mentioned in the discussion of the Center for Respectful Schools, strategic planning has begun for our school programs. We are planning to do the same for our Center for Peace Studies, and have begun discussions with Goddard College and other institutions. We have also started to build strategic partnerships, to document agreements, and to set effective coordination and communication protocols with contractors and clients.

Marketing

To spread the word about our programs, we are developing relationships with other organizations such as Vermont Superintendents' Associations and the Vermont Department of Education, and with and radio and newspaper media.

In conclusion, the year's focus has been on building strength in our transitions, firming the structure of our organization, developing many new collaborative relationships and projects across the state, expanding our pool of instructors that can provide programs, and finding a broadening base of support.

Michiko Oishi
Executive Director
Vermont Peace Academy