

## Overview

This project plan is designed to be used at various times during different courses throughout the Para-Educator Diploma Program at Red River College. Storytelling and community building activities will be used to provide students with the opportunity to make peace with various aspects of themselves so that they will be better communicators and peace makers as they enter into their roles as para-educators. The plan begins during student orientation known as “Right Start to College” and continues throughout the six-month intensive training program.

## Context

- 1) Problem: When the excitement of the first few weeks of college wears off and the “honeymoon” is over, the group goes through a challenging transition phase. “During this stage, [many] members deal with their anxiety, defensiveness, conflict, and ambivalence about participating in the group” (Corey, 2008, p. 84). Moreover, the anxiety of the transition phase may be heightened by previous experiences in education or employment in which they or their family may not have been successful. If a sufficient level of trust is established during the initial stage of a group, participants are usually more willing to express certain feelings, thoughts and reactions that may have been otherwise difficult to articulate (Corey, 2008, p. 84).
- 2) Objectives: Through sharing stories students are invited to make peace with themselves and tolerate various aspects of themselves for the purpose of:
  - achieving success in college
  - achieving success in their careers
  - living peacefully
  - modeling peace in their personal lives, careers and communities.

## Rationale:

In order for educators to model peace and tolerance, they need to learn to live at peace with themselves first. Learning to live with “oneself” is easier when one sees “self” in the “other ” and the “other” in “us.” Sharing stories helps humans to see the *other* in themselves, and to make more sense of the human journey. As humans bond over story, sharing the similarities and differences in life, they develop empathy and build community (Simms, 2003, p. 4). In *Becoming the World*, Laura Simms (2003) states:

What we so often forget is that regardless of trained ideas, belief systems, upbringing, gender, conditions of life, economic status, color of ones skin, language, perspectives and way of dressing, we are all simply human beings attempting to find release from suffering and a way of being together with conditions that provide safety, necessities, and love. Stories bring home the truth in this lesson. (4)

This project plan is significant as para-educator students come with unique resources and individual life experiences which they may not hold to be significant or valid. They hang on to outdated scripts or stories of “self” created in the mind by their “inner self critic and reporter.” The caring and supportive characteristics which have influenced many individuals in choosing the para-educator career path in the first place has also played a part in many who have neglected personal “self care,” and practicing tolerance towards themselves. Through sharing stories students will have the opportunity to develop the capacity to trust their inner resources, to validate their stories, write new scripts, or stories for their lives to replace the old and outdated stories held in the psyche by the negative “inner critic and reporter.” Ultimately, my goal is to create a safe place for healing to occur as students build bonds and share stories.

In *pedagogy of the oppressed*, Paulo Freire (2007) explains how a “word is more than just an instrument which makes dialogue possible” (p. 87). That within words are two dimensions, reflection and action. “Thus to speak a word is to transform the world” (p. 87).

### The Plan

The plan will begin prior to the official first day of classes during “The Right Start to College” co-facilitated by my colleague and myself. Typically the day is comprised of:

- information related to student services
- motivation
- time management
- academic skill building
- relationship building:)

**PREAMBLE:** As students arrive they will use a slip of paper placed on the tables earlier to identify and write down one thing they wish to leave behind – something they do not want to bring into the room with

them today – something they don't want to bring into their college experience with them. Students will fold up the pieces of paper. Either my colleague or myself will collect them to be used for the closing activity (Simms, Laura).

1. My plan will begin with the opening activities we did for our course which were facilitated by Laura Simms. I thought it was unusual and fantastic to begin the course in that manner (as opposed to handing out and discussing the course outline).

**Rational:** Overcome initial shyness, awkwardness, establish *grounding - presence* and build community. The biggest problem in the world is being *present* (Laura Simms). Students will practice being *present* and *feeling* their own awkwardness.

Students will be invited to:

- Make a circle in the center of the room.
- Scan the room from right to left – then left to right - really seeing everything as though it is *really interesting!*
  - Take the time to be *here*
  - Be aware of place
  - Grounding into the earth.
  - Feel your feet - be in your feet
  - *See the room - see someone else*
  - *Feel your own awkwardness – and gain strength*
- Facilitator enters into the center of the circle, stands there, and makes eye contact with someone (a student) in the outer circle. Student from the outer circle enters into the center of the circle joining the facilitator. The facilitator bows - student bows. Both people return to the outer circle trading places. This activity continues.
- When everyone has had a turn. Scan the room from left to right – right to left.
- Take someone back to his or her seat.
- How do you feel different now?

2. When students are all back in their seats, they will be invited to make a name card. Somewhere on the name card they will identify a place they have looked for knowledge. Students will take turns introducing themselves (a brief story) and identify where they have looked for knowledge. One-word answers are all right. My colleague or I will write down responses on the board.
3. When all of the students have introduced themselves, I will tell part of the story from “Giant who had no heart” (Simms, 2003, 16-20) The story will be told in bits and pieces throughout the day.  
**Rational:** Stories are great for evoking laughter - relieving stress and tension. If you are stressed out you can't learn. Through stories, we have:
  - access to peace within ourselves
  - we are re-introduced to our imaginations
  - an opportunity to project inwards as opposed to the constant outward projection of ourselves that we have become so accustomed to
  - an opportunity to awaken the experience of caring for others, even though others may be different, and even when there is no potential for gain.

Following these activities, my colleague will begin to deliver the customary information provided during “Right Start to College.”

### **Afternoon Balloon Activity for “Right Start to College”**

For a break, or perhaps prior to a break in the mid-afternoon after a lot of sitting, students will be invited to make groups of five. In their groups of five, they will be given a balloon to blow up. The group will need to figure out how to keep the balloon in the air without using their hands (Cormier, Gail).

### **Right Start to College Homework: Special Object**

Students will be invited to bring something that is very special to them to share with others. The special object will be shared in small groups like we did during our course. The sharing experience with the special object will function as a segue into a discussion about identity (Senehi, Jessica).

## Right Start to College Closure

Standing in a circle, students will be reminded of the slips of paper they wrote on at the beginning of the day when they identified one thing they did not want to bring into the class/course with them. Each student will draw one of those slips of paper from a hat, read what it says, crumple it up and throw it into a garbage can that has been placed in the center of the room.

## Official Classes Begin

### Communication and Collaborative Partnerships

Communication and Collaborative Partnerships is the first course I will be teaching the para-ed students. It will take place over eighteen two-hour classes. As the primary objective in this course is to improve communication skills for the purpose of collaborating more professionally in careers, I take the concept of improved communication a step further. I believe that students need to be better communicators in their personal lives first, and if they are communicating better in their personal lives, they will communicate better in their professional lives.

**Rational:** There is a great deal of para-educator “turn – over” in schools which may be attributed to an absence of appropriate communication skills in the para’s personal life as well as professional life. Improving personal communication skills and making peace with those aspects of themselves which interfere with appropriate communication skills will enhance the para-educators personal and professional life.

In *Becoming the World*, Laura Simms (2003) states, “Every journey has a preparation and a starting point” (p. 9). The starting point for the para-ed students will be making personal banners, or prayer flags. “In Tibet, prayer flags have stories and blessings that are believed to travel on the wind to bring happiness to everyone, sending radiant thoughts into the world” (Simms, 2003, p. 15). The **rational** for making the prayer flags is to create and share story. Prayer flags are a source of conversation.

## Art Materials:

- ◆ Pieces of cloth or strong paper
- ◆ Pencils, magic markers or crayons
- ◆ Strong rope or ribbon
- ◆ Big needle and thread, glue or tape
- ◆ Scissors

## Directions:

- ◆ Give everyone a piece of paper to design his or her own prayer flag using the prompt: **A place where I communicated well when I was a child. A place with great, happy conversations.**
- ◆ Choose the colors that best feel like your colors.
- ◆ Take a few moments to think and plan.
- ◆ Somewhere on the flag, write down a wish for the world.
- ◆ Students can sew, glue or tape the top of the flag on the rope or ribbon so it can hang down. Students may want to cut fringes on the bottom of their flag.
- ◆ Hang all the flags on the same long rope so they can flutter together. They can be hung in the room or out of the window (Simms, 2003, p. 15).

**Writing Activity to Follow Making Prayer Flags**

1. On a piece of paper, describe the special place where you communicated with someone well- a place where you played. Don't say how you *felt*, just describe the physical attributes, the location.

- ◆ identify your age
- ◆ Identify location
- ◆ Describe the place
- ◆ Use your imagination. Your mind is the biggest room you are

ever going to be in (Laura Simms)

- ◆ Use descriptive words, taste and feel the deliciousness of the words
- ◆ Go back to back with a partner, describe your special place.

Do not say how you felt!

- ◆ Really listen to each other. People/ children go for years without anyone really listening to them
- ◆ Trade places – repeat listening activity

2. Go back to your seats. **Who is *not* in your special place? Why?** Write for 3 minutes.

3. Somewhere, on your pop-up landscape (the place where you played and communicated well) there is a secret door. What is the secret door made of? What shape is the secret door? Where is it?

4. Look at where the door is, and ask a beloved animal from your imagination to go in front of the door and guard it. Go to it now. Pet it. Give it some food and water. Do what you need to do.
5. Thinking back to the special object you shared with your group – if you could change your special object into another shape or form, what would it be and why?
6. Imagine that your special object has a supernatural magical power. How could this super- natural magical power affect the world for the greatest good?
7. How could the object be used for a negative power?
8. Go put your special object in the secret door and tell your animal why they have to guard it.
9. Create and describe your idea of a monster. Be very descriptive.
10. Your monster has a supernatural power – what is it – why? What could your monster accomplish?
11. Where does the monster live?
12. Why does the monster want to steal the special object?
13. What happened to the monster in childhood that made it this way?
14. How did the monster hear about, or know, or learn about or discover where the special object is hidden (the monster grape vine?)?
15. Give the monster a name.

16. What is the one thing that could distract your amazing guardian animal from watching the secret door?
17. How did the monster get the object . . . your precious, precious object behind the secret door?
18. What did the animal do when he/she realized that the precious object was missing?
19. What did you do when you realized that the precious object was missing?
20. Write a monster rant.
21. Go to your animal and tell him/her it was not their fault.
22. Where does the hero/heroine in your story go for tolerance and forgiveness? \* Use the Mari Boine CD for an opening group activity (Simms, Laura).
23. It is now the task of the child to retrieve the missing object. The night before the child learns the object is missing, he/she has a dream - what is the dream? The dream the child had the night before the object was stolen.
24. What capacity does the protector animal have. . . a special quality that can help the heroine (good heart, knows things, can fly, become invisible).
25. On his/her way to find the object, the hero/heroine meets three animal helpers or finds three objects that will be useful in retrieving the missing object. What are they? Chose anything, your mind will always give you just what you need.
26. Now go back to the beginning. The hero/heroine had a wonderful quality all along – maybe loving or caring – that they have overlooked, or taken for granted. This quality was there all along; only the hero/heroine did not always use it. What is the wonderful quality?
27. What has been missing in the hero or heroine's world that they believed they needed the special object? What has been going on?
28. Does the hero/heroine have a quality that needed to be developed? Explain. What would be the opposite of that quality that needed to be developed?
29. The hero/heroine's quality begins to flourish with great consciousness? What happens? (learns to trust her heart, listen to the inner voice, accept the knowing, not questioning the knowing, stop pushing the knowing aside – you can't go to the special place to make the knowing happen, it just does).
30. Going back to the great precious object that can be used for good or evil ... the object so precious that a protector animal is watching it – why is the object buried in that part of the landscape?



31. The hero/heroine is a child with incredible qualities that can flower. Something arrives in the child's life to greet the child – to tap the child on the shoulder, what the child does with the incredible quality(ies) is their own business.
32. What has been missing in the universe, or out of order in the universe for this precious object to be hidden? What is lacking? What might be needed? Tolerance? Tolerance of self?
33. How does the story end? Is it a happy ending?

### Identity in Name

Students will have opportunities to share their “name story” with members of a small group. Later as the whole class reconvenes, students will be asked to reflect:

- ◆ How did it feel to share your name? Why?

Name sharing is an excellent segue into the idea of identity on storytelling.

- ◆ Every culture has stories about where they are from.
- ◆ Stories are a code in identity
- ◆ Stories facilitate the process of socialization
- ◆ Identity is complex - some aspects are fluid while other aspects are fixed
- ◆ Our identities are socially constructed
  - Name change
  - Jobs
  - Cultural norms
  - Which cultural group we belong to
- ◆ Can we change our identity?
- ◆ Are identities fixed?
- ◆ Class identities
- ◆ Nationalities
- ◆ Identities are complicated. Stories are one way to get at this
- ◆ Where do identity conflicts play out in schools?

Short Stories Related to "Identity" ~~



[A & P](#) by John Updike

[Eveline](#) by James Joyce

[The Lesson](#) by Toni Cade Bambara

[A Sorrowful Woman](#) by Gail Godwin

[Girl](#) by Jamaica Kincaid

Journal or Discussion Questions to Explore

**Question:** Why are stories important?

**Question:** What is your ghost story?

**Question:** Where do you go when something “triggers” you?

**Question:** What stories do you tell yourself all the time?

**Question: Agree or disagree? Explain:** Story is not an addition to real learning . . .it is the essence of real learning.

**Question:** Have you ever felt silenced? Explain (the idea of voice and loss of voice).

**Question:** You have been printing the same newspaper in your mind for --- years – same story, only a few details change. How would you like to change the newspaper story? Why?

**Question:** Where do identity conflicts play out in schools and communities?

**Question:** How does “peace education” look at recess?

**Question:** What has happened in your life that has affected your play? What do you do to play?

**Question:** What do you think is meant by the following statement: “Stories people tell themselves to keep themselves safe”?

**Question:** What would peace look like? What would peace sound like?

**Question:** What are the problems in your life? What are the issues you are facing? Where do you go when there is a problem?

**Question:** Why do you want to be a para-educator?

**Question:** Is peace quiet or loud?

**Question/ journal response:** Everyone encounters suffering and has the capacity for resilience.

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**A Lesson on the Importance of Play: Why is it Important to Play?**

When we discussed the importance of play I thought of a lesson that I teach in a course called “Characteristics of Learners.” In that course we look at the importance of play, and study the theorist Lev Vygotsky. Yesterday I went to the MCC Self help store in Steinbach where I picked up a dozen packages filled with little toys for fifty cents each. As we study the importance of play this year, I will have my students “play” in groups with the toys I have purchased. I think this will be a lot of fun since many of us grown-ups have forgotten about the importance of play. As students “play” with the toys for twenty minute sessions over a period of three day, they will be invited to journal their experience and later participate in a discussion about play with the whole class. I am really interested in the reaction and responses of the students. I am also interested and curious if the adult “players” are going to make rules and form hierarchies as Vygotsky’s studies have shown. Vygotsky also holds that through play children are able to do what they are unable do otherwise – for example, hold still for long periods of time.

**A Lesson on Peace: What is peace?**

I really liked the story below about peace and want to incorporate it somewhere into a lesson this coming year – most likely in the course on Communication and Collaborative Partnerships. After reading the story, or telling the story, or working in groups with the story, I will invite students to make small origami boxes out of gold paper into which they will place a grain of wheat. The grain of wheat representing nourishment for the body – peace-representing nourishment for the soul.

**What is Peace?**

**By Arun Gandhi**

**A favorite story that Grandfather liked to tell us** was the story of an ancient Indian King who was obsessed with the desire to find the meaning of peace. What is peace and how can we get it and when we find it what should we do with it were some of the issues that bothered him. Intellectuals in his kingdom were invited to answer the King's questions for a handsome reward. Many tried but none could explain how to find peace and what to do with it. At last someone said the King ought to consult the sage who lived just outside the borders of his Kingdom:

"He is an old man and very wise," the King was told. "If anyone can answer your questions he can."

The King went to the sage and posed the eternal question. Without a word the sage went into the kitchen and brought a grain of wheat to the King.

"In this you will find the answer to your question," the Sage said as he placed the grain of wheat in the King's outstretched palm.

Puzzled but unwilling to admit his ignorance the King clutched the grain of wheat and returned to his palace. He locked the precious grain in a tiny gold box and placed the box in his safe. Each morning, upon waking, the King would open the box and look at the grain to seek an answer but could find nothing.

Weeks later another sage, passing through, stopped to meet the King who eagerly invited him to resolve his dilemma. The King explained how he had asked the eternal question and this sage gave him a grain of wheat instead. "I have been looking for an answer every morning but I find nothing."

The Sage said: "It is quite simple, your honor. Just as this grain represents nourishment for the body, peace represents nourishment for the soul. Now, if you keep this grain locked up in a gold box it will eventually perish without providing nourishment or multiplying. However, if it is allowed to interact with the elements - light, water, air, soil - it will flourish, multiply and soon you would have a whole field of wheat which will nourish not only you but so many others. This is the meaning of peace. It must nourish your soul and the souls of others, it must multiply by interacting with the elements."

[www.shotokai.com/ingles/legends/what\\_is\\_peace.html](http://www.shotokai.com/ingles/legends/what_is_peace.html)

Origami boxes: <http://www.origami-instructions.com/origami-box.html>

#### Topic Extensions:

- **Research *Seeds of Peace***
- **Pillars of Peace**
- **Pillars of Conflict: Identity, power and knowledge.**
- **Sacred Silent Activity (Jami Sieber, *Hidden Sky* music)**
- **Tolerating our Intolerance**
- **Every time an elder dies, a library burns down.**
- **Why are we so uncomfortable with being?**
- **Write a letter to someone who has made a difference in his or her life.**

- **What stands out in your mind from your education?**
- **Storytelling as a respectful way to teach**
- **Changing your mode of being – becoming less reactive – take on our own discomfort – leads to peace.**
- **In order to begin, everyone has to surrender to the situation.**
- **Pay attention to the other and the environment.**
- **Explore the idea of “Little Murders” or little things we do to others that have a devastating effect on how that person feels about himself or herself.**
- **Use python story from *Becoming the World* (Simms)**
- **Make a “Little Facts about me” book.**

### The Importance of Council

I will facilitate a group council activity on a monthly basis.

#### **Rational:**

- To promote inclusiveness
- Deep listening
- Learn to feel discomfort (its o.k. to feel awkward)
- Reflect on tolerance and forgiveness
- Learn to work with the reporters, the ladies and gentlemen in the tower who report . . . the negative self-talk.

#### **Readings**

*A long way gone: memoirs of a boy soldier* (Ishmael Beah, 2007)

Students will engage in reading the book by Beah (2007) to develop a greater understanding of children whose lives have been affected by war. The themes and content of Beah’s memoir also ties into the course material related to the importance of play, and the relationship between peace and play. There will be opportunities for journaling, sharing ideas, thoughts and opinions in both small and large groups. Moreover, students will write a Thought paper on the book.

Students will also consider how Beah had a place to go home to in his stories. Many of the children in our schools do not have a place to return to (Ishmael had roots –many of our students do not).

Excerpts from *A Human Being Died that Night* ( Gobodo-Madikizela)

Students will read excerpts from *A Human Being Died that Night* and explore the topic of forgiveness. Individually, in groups, and as a whole class we will discuss the notion that when you can forgive you are no longer a victim.

We will also explore and discuss the premise that some children don't have the language to describe their experiences (emotional vocabulary).

### **Conclusion**

This project plan is by no means conclusive. Having completed preparing what is presented here is only a beginning, a tip of the iceberg for the infinite possibilities of exploring peace education using the storytelling approach in a program designed to prepare para-educators to function in a helping capacity as a team member within the school setting. It is my sincere hope and desire that as para-educator students work through the various activities individually, in smalls groups and as a whole class, that they find peace within the myriad facets of the *self*, and commit themselves to promoting peace moment by moment in every facet of their lives.

Namaste

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Red River College @ [redrivercollege.mb.ca](http://redrivercollege.mb.ca)

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