

P A U L K I V E L ' S N E W S L E T T E R



Getting Together

for social justice

W I N T E R 2 0 0 9

This newsletter focuses on adultism, reminding us what it is and why it is essential for us to address adultism in our work for social justice. For copies of previous newsletters, please go to the [newsletter archives](#).

Videos of Paul Kivel's Work Now Available Online

In order to make the work more accessible, Paul has been turning sections of his talks and trainings into video clips posted on his website, on Youtube, and as a podcast. You can find them on Paul's [Videos page](#). Please feel free to view them, use them, and pass them on to anyone you think might find them useful.

Adultism

In the United States today millions of young people live in poverty, lack health care, experience physical, emotional, and sexual abuse from adults, and experience inadequate educational opportunities and a lack of living wage job opportunities. Many live in toxic environments. Young people lack political representation. Their efforts to survive, sustain their relationships, nurture their opportunities, work for justice, and express their creativity are routinely belittled, interrupted, or criminalized by adults.

How are young people socialized into adults who accept hierarchy, exploitation, and violence in our society? Adultism. Educating adults and young people about adultism helps them understand this process and, at the same time, an introduction to adultism gives people a sense of our common ground in taking responsibility for fighting oppression and building community. What is adultism?

Adultism is the everyday, systematic, and institutionalized oppression that young people face at the hands of adults. It is the training ground for conditioning people to live in and accept a society based exploitation, violence and hierarchies of race, class, and gender and other identities. Adultism is the comprehensive process our society uses to teach babies and young children that the way to survive in the world is to put up shields of protection around their loving, spontaneous, curious, connected and creative selves and, in self-defense, to pass on their pain, anger, and frustration in abuse towards other people or towards themselves. The training is directed at all young people, but since it happens in silence and isolation, each child feels that there is something wrong with her or himself. Each child is taught that they are to blame for being teased, harassed, bullied, marginalized, excluded, put down, abused, assaulted, or otherwise attacked.

This process trains young people to think of themselves as separate, isolated, and in competition with others and to think that this separation is natural and inevitable. As a result, young people learn to accept exploitation and violence in our society and to participate in work, family and community roles which maintain the

hierarchies of wealth and power.

Sometimes training in adultism is accompanied by physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. Many times it is more subtle, although no less effective. It is reinforced by parents, teachers, TV, movies, videogames, and advertising. The basic message is that as a young person you are weak, inferior, lazy, stupid, inadequate, and that there is something wrong with your body, your feelings, your attitude, your ideas, your skin color. Because you are inadequate you deserve whatever abuse you receive.

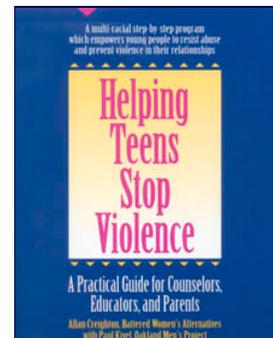
Most young people, even with adult support, find it difficult to resist these messages because they are reinforced by adults, the media, and by peer pressure.

In my years of experience as an educator and activist, I have found that before people are able to look at systems of oppression like racism and sexism that divide us, they need to understand the common socialization that we all endure and the common ground that we share. Part of our common ground is the socialization that adultism produces and the recognition of our common concerns, needs, loving nature, and yearning for connection, inclusion, participation, and for a safe and healthy community. Part of our commonality is also our shared conditioning to internalize the messages of adultism and to look for others less powerful than we are and hurt them, or to direct the pain inward and hurt ourselves. This pain and tendency to pass on abuse is also our common ground. Most of us were not only bullied but also the bully, not only the teased, but the teaser, not only the one who was put down, but the one who put down others.

There are many tools available for facilitating conversations about adultism. Our Making the Peace curriculum contains several, including Lakota Harden's "Heart exercise" and the "adultism" exercise. Below is a variant of that exercise that I call "Learning Adultism" because it helps both young people and adults see how they have not only been hurt by adultism but how they have also, at an early age, learned to pass on adultism and other systems of oppression to young people around them—particularly to those who they have been taught are legitimate targets of abuse. Most people find it very empowering to understand how this system works to destroy the basis of reciprocity, caring, safety, and justice that we most desire and that is essential to building strong, healthy, and sustainable communities. Our need and desire for connection, safety, healing, and mutuality then becomes the basis for common ground we can build on in our further work to get together for social justice.

U P D A T E O N H E L P I N G T E E N S S T O P V I O L E N C E

Helping Teens Stop Violence was first published as *Teens Need Teens* in 1990. This groundbreaking and very popular book and teaching guide has been out of print for the last couple of years. We anticipate that some copies of the original version will be available this spring. Meanwhile, Allan Creighton and I have started working on a revised and expanded version that should be available for the 20th anniversary of the book in the spring of 2010.



F E A T U R E D A R T I C L E : A D U L T S A S A L L I E S

Why do young people do poorly in school? Why do young people use drugs, or hang out on street corners, or get pregnant? A common answer to these questions is that many teens have low self-esteem, generally defined as a poor sense of one's worth or ability: a lack of confidence. Professional literature about adolescents, social service priorities, and funding trends all emphasize programs which build self-esteem.

Is the problem low self-esteem?

[Read the entire article...](#)

Alliance: What Do Young People Need From Us?**Be an Ally**

Teens need to see us as strong, reliable and completely on their side, knowing that we trust them, respect them, and will tell them the truth.

Tell the Truth About Power

Teens need us to tell them about how power is used and abused in this society—to be informed, clear, and firm about how racism, sexism, adultism, and the other “isms” work. We must be ready to share that information openly and in clear, direct language that does not fault them for lacking information.

Tell the Truth About Violence

We also must help them identify the social violence directed at them because they are women, people of color, gay and lesbian, and/or poor, and young. Confirming this reality for them can help them to begin to take power to stop the violence.

[Read the entire handout...](#)

F E A T U R E D E X E R C I S E : L E A R N I N G A D U L T I S M

Please stand up silently if

1. your dress or appearance was ever criticized or ridiculed by an adult
2. you ever felt that your racial or ethnic group, your gender, your religious or cultural heritage or some other group that you are a part of was not represented, was represented inaccurately, or was put down in the curriculum you were taught
3. you ever received the message from a teacher, a student, or an administrator that people like you were not normal, were lazy, were not intelligent, or were otherwise different or inferior and therefore not deserving of full respect

[Read the entire exercise...](#)

F E A T U R E D R E S O U R C E : H A N D O U T O N A D U L T I S M

Adultism**What it is**

Adultism is the systematic exploitation, mistreatment, and abuse of young people by adults. (Exploitation means to take advantage of or to rob someone or a group of people of their labor,

culture, energy, or possessions. Mistreatment means to treat unfairly or unjustly. Abuse is any form of violence—verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual.)

Who it affects

Everyone, particularly young people.

How it is enforced

Physical and sexual violence; neglect; police harassment; lack of trust and respect from adults; extreme pressure to succeed or harsh criticism of abilities; attacks on self-esteem; being paid less for equal work; lack of safe alternative living arrangements for youth in abusive families; adult stereotypes of young people.

[Read the entire handout...](#)

SPECIAL PRICING: "MAKING THE PEACE"

"Violence is usually dealt with as a question of managing offenders and protecting everyone else from their acts. It is therefore refreshing and wonderful to come upon a curriculum that tackles the root causes of violence while at the same time trying to help violent people come to terms with their actions."

—Herbert Kohl, for RETHINKING SCHOOLS magazine

"Particularly impressive, the authors broaden the issue of violence by presenting underlying causes such as gender roles, societal expectations, economic class, power, race and the self-realization of violence."

—Ariel D. San Pedro, Director of Ethnic Youth Ministry, Diocese of Oakland.

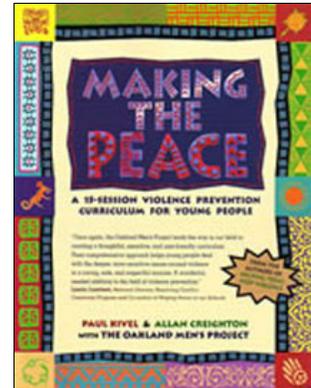
An excerpt from *Making the Peace*:

Violence is a powerful and evocative concept in American life. We may all agree that some things people do to one another, like beating and homicide, are violent. We may strongly disagree about whether other things, like spanking children to discipline them, are forms of violence. For most of us, however, the first response to the issue of violence is fear.

Headlines emphasize the bloody, brutal, random, and senseless aspects of violence. We are inundated with information and advice about who is vulnerable, who does the hurting, how to stay safe, and who is to blame. Young people are in the headlines in both roles: as abducted children and victims of drive-by shootings, and as gun-wielding gang members. We have learned to fear for our children and to be afraid of them.

[Read a section of the book...](#)

NEW VIDEO RELEASED



Over 25% off!!!

Only **\$18.50**
when ordered from
paulkivel.com
before March 31.



Straightlaced

From girls confronting popular messages about culture and body image to boys who are sexually active just to prove they aren't gay, the students in **Straightlaced** illustrate the toll that deeply held stereotypes and rigid gender policing have on all of our lives.

Just released in January 2009 by Groundspark, producers of “It’s Elementary”, “That’s a Family”, and “Let’s Get Real”. <http://groundspark.org/>.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR TEACHING SOCIAL JUSTICE

Books

Derman-Sparks, Louise. *Anti-Bias Curriculum*. National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1989.

Pelo, Ann and Fran Davidson. *That’s Not Fair!: A Teacher’s Guide to Activism with Young Children*. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press, 2002.

Sapon-Shevin, Mara. *Because We Can Change the World: A Practical Guide To Building Cooperative, Inclusive Classroom Communities*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 1998.

Schneidewind, Nancy. *Open Minds to Equality*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984.

Vasquez, Hugh et al. *Making Allies, Making Friends: A Curriculum for Making the Peace in Middle School*. Alameda, CA: Hunter House, 2003.

Kivel, Paul and Allan Creighton. *Making the Peace*. Alameda, CA: Hunter House, 1997.

Creighton, Allan and Paul Kivel. *Helping Teens Stop Violence: A Practical Guide for Counselors, Educators, and Parents*. Alameda, CA: Hunter House, 1993.

Lee, Enid et al. *Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K 12 Anti Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development*. Washington, DC: Teaching for Change, 1998.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. *"Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?": A Psychologist Explains the Development of Racial Identity*. New York: Basic Books, 2003.

Rethinking Schools; Ltd., ed. *New Teacher Book: Finding Purpose, Balance and Hope During Your First Years in the Classroom*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, Ltd., 2004.

Cushman, Kathleen, The Students of "What Kids Can Do", and Lisa Delpit. *Fires in the Bathroom: Advice for Teachers from High School Students*. New York: New Press, 2003.

Cowhey, Mary. *Black Ants And Buddhists: Thinking Critically And Teaching Differently in the Primary Grades*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2006.

Au, Wayne, Bill Bigelow, and Stan Karp, eds. *Rethinking Our Classrooms, Vols I and II*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools Ltd., 1994.

Levin, Diane E. *Teaching Young Children in Violent Times: Building a Peaceable Classroom*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1994.

Christensen, Linda. *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up: Teaching About Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools Ltd., 2000.

Howard, Gary R. *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools (Paper, Multicultural Education Series)*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2006.

Carlsson-Paige, Nancy. *Taking Back childhood: Helping Your Kids Thrive in a Fast-Paced, Media-Saturated, Violence-Filled World*. New York: Hudson Street Press, 2008.

Pelo, Ann, ed. *Rethinking Early Childhood Education*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, Ltd., 2008.

Publishers and Distributors



Teachers College Press — <http://www.teacherscollegepress.com/>.



Red Leaf Press — <http://www.redleafpress.org/>.



Rethinking Schools — <http://www.rethinkingschools.org/>.



Teaching for Change — <http://www.teachingforchange.org/>.

Magazines



Rethinking Schools — <http://www.rethinkingschools.org/>.



Teaching Tolerance — <http://www.tolerance.org/>.

Film distributors



California Newsreel — <http://www.newsreel.org/>.



Groundspark (formerly Women's Educational Media) — <http://groundspark.org/>.



New Day Films — <http://www.newday.com/>.



Bullfrog Films — <http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/>.



Media Education Foundation — <http://www.mediaed.org/>.



Women Make Movies — <http://www.wmm.com/>.

[More links...](#)

R E S O U R C E S O N A D U L T I S M

Web Resources on Adulthood

[The Freechild Project](http://www.freechild.org/SNAYR/adulthood.htm) advocates, informs, and celebrates social change led by and with young people around the world, especially those who have been historically denied the right to participate. Facilitates training and workshops, and offers excellent online database. <http://www.freechild.org/SNAYR/adulthood.htm>

Youth Wisdom Project. (2004) [“Making Space, Making Change: Profiles of Youth-Led and Youth-Driven Organizations.”](#) Movement Strategy Center. *pdf*.

[Youth on Board](http://www.youthonboard.org/) supports young people to be an active force for change in all aspects of their lives; and ensures that policies, practices, and laws reflect young people's role as full and valued members of their communities. <http://www.youthonboard.org/>

[The National Youth Rights Association \(NYRA\)](http://www.youthrights.org/) is a youth-led national non-profit organization dedicated to fighting for the civil rights and liberties of young people through educating people about youth rights, working with public officials and empowering young people to work on their own behalf. <http://www.youthrights.org/>

[Survey of North American Youth Rights](#) The premier Internet information source about current youth rights, advancing youth rights, youth suffrage, youth liberation, and youth rights issues.

Articles

[Understanding Adulthood: A Key to Developing Positive Youth-Adult Relationships](#)—Identifies ageism at all levels of society with examples and analysis.

[Adulthood](#)—An edition of *The School Mediator: Peer Mediation Insights*. Includes definitions and quotes.

Sazama, J. [Get The Word Out!](#) Youth On Board, 2004. *pdf*.

Checkoway, B. [Adults as Allies](#). WK Kellogg Foundation, 1998. *pdf*.

Males, Mike. Hard-hitting, fact-filled books and articles that break down adultist, anti-youth media stereotypes. <http://home.earthlink.net/~mmales/>

[YouthLib.Com](#)—Tools for Youth Liberation Activists articles and blogs on youth liberation

[More links...](#)

T R A I N I N G S I N J A P A N



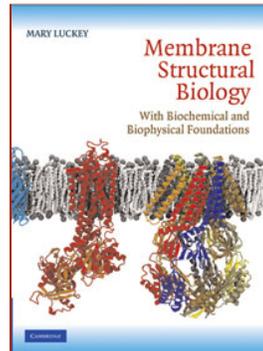
Paul had the privilege of traveling to Japan to give some trainings to Japanese professionals and community members who are working on issues of violence prevention and social justice using our *Making the Peace* curriculum.



M I C K I ' S B O O K : M E M B R A N E S T R U C T U R A L B I O L O G Y



My life partner, Dr. Mary Luckey (Micki to some of you), professor of biochemistry at San Francisco State University, published an upper division textbook on membrane biochemistry this Spring with Cambridge University Press. The book is a comprehensive presentation of a wide-range of exciting developments in this newly emerging scientific specialty.



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