

# The No Fault Classroom

## Introduction

If educators are serious about reducing the conflict and emotional stress that limit the amount and quality of learning taking place in classrooms, then it is time to provide teachers and students with the skills they need to create safe, co-operative learning environments.

Increased self-knowledge and improved communication skills result in fewer conflicts, more co-operation, and a dramatic increase in the time students spend in engaged learning. *The No-Fault Classroom: Tools to Resolve Conflict & Foster Relationship Intelligence* provides teachers and students with these skills.

### **The No-Fault Classroom Approach to Conflict Prevention & Resolution**

Whether you want a respectful, peaceful classroom and school and see the classroom microcosm as a model and training ground for a peaceful and sustainable world, or you want a classroom and school where students feel safe enough to give their attention and the full stretch of their minds and hearts to learning and discovery, or you want all of the above, this curriculum provides the tools.

The link between engaged learning and students' needs for physical and emotional safety in classrooms has been clearly established. The work of Maria Montessori, Paul MacLean, William Glasser, John Holt, Joseph Chilton Pearce, Nel Noddings, Daniel Siegel, Allan N. Schore, Alfie Kohn and Daniel Goleman, among many others, has converged in the last decade to contribute to an understanding that emotionally stressful environments threaten children's sense of safety and well-being and are not conducive to learning. While this news from the fields of brain science, psychology, medicine and education continues to come in, the news from distressed teachers is of increases in student discontent, resistance and conflict in the classroom—all symptoms of fear, stress and lack of emotional safety.

Shootings in schools, as well as rising rates of preteen and teen suicide, are poignant and tragic indicators that tell us young people have been under great emotional stress for a long time.

**Establishing lasting peace is the work of education; all politics can do is keep us out of war.**

—Maria Montessori

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A significant cause of the increasing stress in students (and also in teachers) is the decades-long choice of school officials to encourage and fund classroom discipline and management programs rather than communication skills and self-development programs.

Strategies to manage student behavior have repeatedly trumped programs that develop Relationship Intelligence. Instead of focusing on monitoring, punishing and rewarding students, programs designed to foster Relationship Intelligence help teachers develop skills to build relationships with students and to identify students' needs and help them find ways to meet them. Teachers also provide forums where students can voice their concerns and learn how to listen and express themselves clearly.

**We should want more from our educational efforts than adequate academic achievement, and we will not achieve even that meager success unless our children believe that they themselves are cared for and learn to care for others.**

—Nel Noddings

We believe that the high level of anxiety and stress that teachers (and parents) are seeing in young people is a sign that time has run out for managerial discipline programs, and the time for developing the human capacity for Relationship Intelligence has arrived. The high costs of current policies, including truancy, detentions, suspensions, dropout numbers and failure to graduate from high school are becoming more obvious by the day. We have the means to develop students' capacities to take more responsibility for their learning; identify and find ways to meet their own needs; identify and help others fulfill their needs; communicate honestly and effectively; and have a constructive voice in policies, practices and decisions that affect them. What we need now is the will and commitment to bring these capacities to reality. It is our belief that when developing Relationship Intelligence replaces managing behavior in classrooms across the country, and is complemented by various differentiated instruction practices, we will see a drop in student discontent, resistance and conflict in classrooms and an unprecedented increase in engaged, eager learning.

Experiments in creating relationship-based classrooms and schools that address the needs of all members of a learning community have been under way for several decades; in the last few years they have dramatically increased in numbers, as stresses in the traditional system reach a breaking point. We are encouraged to see more educators insist on tending to the real needs of their students instead of spending their time teaching to standardized tests and enforcing policies that are clearly failing to create the safe, respectful, high-quality schools everyone wants. Physical safety, emotional safety and a sense of well-being are foundational needs that, when met, allow students to turn their attention to and fully engage their minds in the pursuit of learning—which is after all, under supportive conditions, what humans naturally love to do.

Our earlier book *The Compassionate Classroom: Relationship Based Teaching and Learning* was written to introduce teachers to the Nonviolent Communication process originally developed by Marshall Rosenberg, PhD,

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It also lays a foundation for applying the premises of Nonviolent Communication to the classroom. We began writing *The No-Fault Classroom* in response to teachers' subsequent requests for day-by-day and step-by-step lesson plans that develop the premises and valuable communication skills introduced in *The Compassionate Classroom*.

This present book is designed as a guide and manual for your do-it-together construction of a No-Fault Classroom. *This curriculum goes well beyond simply teaching students a conflict resolution process.* Its objective is to create the conditions in your classroom that will result in students' genuine interest and ability to care for the well-being of everyone, and a learning community built on mutual respect and willing co-operation. At the same time, students will develop powerful skills for effective problem solving and conflict resolving—skills which will result in a dramatic decrease in the number of conflicts.

If a vision of the substantive and far-reaching results of fostering Relationship Intelligence by constructing a No-Fault Classroom inspires you, we hope you will also appreciate that this curriculum requires a commitment on the teacher's part: to carefully prepare the ground, lay the foundation and guide the construction efforts of your class. We hope the brief introduction to the curriculum that follows (as well as a look through the introductory sections, materials list and classroom modules) will serve to inform you of what is involved.

## ***The No-Fault Classroom Curriculum***

**The *No-Fault Classroom* curriculum is organized into three sections:**

Section I – Prepare the Ground & Lay the Foundation

Section II – Construction Materials

Section III – Construct Your No-Fault Classroom

### **Section I – Prepare the Ground & Lay the Foundation**

**Prepare the Ground: Teacher Exploration.** We invite teachers to prepare themselves to work with the primary themes of the curriculum by doing several exercises. The Teacher Explorations in Section I include explorations of conflict, its causes and its effects on learning; how teachers use their power and engage co-operation in the classroom; and the underlying intention that motivates teachers' actions in the classroom.

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**Lay the Foundation: Class Meetings.** Teachers are asked to call two class meetings to lay a firm foundation of safety and trust prior to the introduction of the *No-Fault Classroom* curriculum. In the first Class Meeting, teachers are asked to share with students the kind of classroom they would like to create and find out from students the kind of classroom they would like to participate in and contribute to. Together teacher and students come up with a group Vision that is inclusive, inspiring and motivating.

In the second Class Meeting, teachers facilitate a discussion about what makes a community physically and emotionally safe so that learning can take place. Out of this discussion, the class generates Group Agreements that meet everyone's needs for safety, trust, respect and learning. The Group Agreements are not a static set of rules, but a living contract that is referred to, discussed and revised as needed throughout the year.

## Section II – Construction Materials

*The No-Fault Classroom* is a material-rich curriculum. During the 18 modules, students will create a set of materials that they will use throughout the school year. An overview of the templates, blueprints and directions for making materials is found in Section II.

The primary materials are the Internal Operating System (IOS) Power Panel and three Card Decks. The IOS Power Panel provides visual clarity for a complex internal realm. The Card Decks familiarize students with the many needs and feelings that exist in their IOS and acquaint them with the choices they have in every situation. By working with the Power Panel and Card Decks, students, in conflict and non-conflict situations, determine which area of their IOS needs attention, what choices they have and what choice they want to make.

All members of the classroom can get a visual picture of others' IOSs also, by changing places with each other and looking at the Cards each has placed on their Power Panels. This is a powerful way to see the needs at the root of conflicts. The topic of conversation then turns to finding ways to meet needs, rather than to who is right and who is wrong.

Altogether, these tools will support and maintain your No-Fault Classroom for the entire school year, so we suggest you consider carefully how you want to set up and conduct material construction for the most ease and enjoyment.

Please look at Section II for a more detailed outline of this important aspect of the *No-Fault Classroom* curriculum and a list of secondary materials to be used for construction and for classroom signs and messages.

## Section III – Construct Your No-Fault Classroom

The *No-Fault Classroom* curriculum comprises twenty-one class sessions of approximately one hour each. The first two sessions are the Class Meetings discussed in Section I, in which you and your students will develop a Classroom Vision and Group Agreements for establishing safety and trust. An Introduction to the No-Fault Zone directs students to construct one of the primary tools for the curriculum, the IOS Power Panel. The remaining 18 classroom modules are organized in pairs to explore 9 human Powers (discussed in more detail below).

We developed this curriculum with the idea that it would be presented over approximately eleven weeks at the beginning of the school year, with the two Class Meetings and Introduction to the No-Fault Zone held during the first two weeks, and the 18 modules following at a rate of approximately two modules per week. When a class has completed the *No-Fault Classroom* curriculum, students and teacher alike will have gained skills they can practice and use during the remainder of the year and beyond—skills to communicate effectively, avert conflict and resolve conflict peacefully.

### Introduction to the No-Fault Zone

The Introduction to the No-Fault Zone is a one-hour, hands-on activity during which students make one of the primary tools they will be using: their Internal Operating System Power Panel. They are also introduced to their guides for this inward-bound journey, Nao and Michi—sixteen-year-old twin brother and sister who reside in a dimension called the No-Fault Zone.

In this session and in each of the 18 modules of the curriculum that follow, the Twins share information about the No-Fault Zone. They also provide step-by-step activities in which students explore and learn to navigate the dynamic depths of the human Internal Operating System (IOS)—a network of subtle, often unexamined and undeveloped capacities that we call the 9 Powers. These Powers relate to thoughts, feelings, needs, observations and decision-making. The goal and challenge of the curriculum is to activate these capacities and expand the range of choices teachers and students have to communicate effectively, to avert conflict and to resolve conflict peacefully. As teacher and students work through the curriculum together, they are empowered to make choices that contribute to their own well-being as well as the well-being of others.

These are the human capacities, or Powers, developed in this curriculum:

1. The Power to Get to Calm Alert
2. The Power to Know What You Need

**We can't change the whole world alone, but if I can teach people that if you put your hand in mine and little by little we join more hands ... maybe we can construct a new world.**

—Farliz Calle, at 15, a leader in the Children's Peace Movement in Colombia nominated for the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize

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3. The Power to Find Ways to Meet Needs
4. The Power to Read Feelings
5. The Power to Observe
6. The Power to Listen
7. The Power to Navigate the Fault Zone
8. The Power to Co-operate to Solve Problems & Conflicts
9. The Power to Create a No-Fault Zone Wherever You Are

## Explorations: The 9 Powers in 18 Modules

Each of the 18 modules takes approximately 60 minutes to complete. In each module, the Twins provide a Narrative (Notes from the No-Fault Zone), a list of Facts and a Message. This information introduces the concept for the module and establishes a context for it. Students volunteer to take turns reading the Narratives, Facts and Messages. The step-by-step guidance the Twins provide shows teacher and students how to access, understand and develop the 9 basic human Powers.

In addition to the Twins' Narratives, Facts and Messages, each module includes activities in which teacher and students together explore the Powers of their Internal Operating System (IOS) and practice the skills that develop the Powers. The activities involve reading, writing, discussing, drawing, role-playing and constructing materials.

The activities for each module include the following:

**Explorations:** Students and teacher are given directions for conducting an exploration of each concept and practicing the skills introduced in the module.

**Supporting Activities:** These are short activities to support skill development for the current module and review and practice skills introduced in previous modules. The supporting activities can be introduced throughout the week.

**Follow-on Explorations:** In some modules, optional activities that support additional skill development and learning are provided, and teachers may choose to make time for these during the week.

**Curricular Tie-ins:** These are suggestions for ways to apply the specific concepts and skills introduced in each module to other subject areas.

*This curriculum supports your literature, history and social studies curricula.* As students activate and practice each of the Powers, they can start

When we understand the needs that motivate our own and others' behavior, we have no enemies.

—Marshall B. Rosenberg

applying their new awareness to other classroom studies. They will develop insight into the feelings, needs, thoughts and motivations of characters in literature as well as figures in history. Their eyes will be opened to the causes of interpersonal conflicts that provide dramatic focus in most literature as well as for historical and current conflicts between groups and between nations. As a result, these subjects will come alive in new and engaging ways.

*This curriculum contributes to your science curriculum.* The Twins invite teachers and students, as they embark on this inward-bound journey, to set aside preconceived ideas and take part in a laboratory-like exploration. Students and teachers are asked to experiment, wonder, observe, record results and critically evaluate what they experience and learn.

*This curriculum supports your reading program.* Each module provides students with scripts to read that introduce new concepts. Additionally, student volunteers take turns acting out the Twins' Narratives for each module. (Teachers are invited to read the teacher's scripts as they are written or to put them in their own language if that is more meaningful and fun.)

Above all, the Twins hope the journey is enjoyable for everyone and they encourage teachers to facilitate the Explorations in a way that optimizes fun along with learning that reaches across all subject areas.

## What It Takes to Explore Inner Space

This curriculum is designed for teacher and students to explore together the inner dimensions of the Internal Operating System, with support from the Twins, the guided Explorations and the materials. Teachers are asked to be co-explorers, not experts. Teachers do not need to have prior knowledge of the 9 Powers—the communication skills and strategies taught in the curriculum. However, we expect the best results when teachers have the following in mind:

- willingness to suspend preconceived ideas
- desire to check things out for oneself (and not simply dismiss or believe what the Twins say)
- observation skills (which will be developed throughout the modules, and especially in Power 5: The Power to Observe)
- curiosity (which we also expect to develop and grow as the modules progress)

Constructing a No-Fault Classroom, similar to other worthwhile endeavors, requires commitment, careful preparation, and enthused and sustained effort. We predict that if you choose to commit to this curriculum, you will be overjoyed with the classroom environment you and your students co-create.

**Conflict skills can be powerful tools for positive liberty, with which students become more able to solve their own problems and to express their interests in ways that can be effectively heard.**

—Kathy Bickmore

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We also expect and hope that you will find lots of fun and learning as you and your students explore the 9 Powers of the human Internal Operating System (IOS). We believe that the dimensions of Inner Space exploration are as fathomless as those of Outer Space. And we feel confident that those who are willing to embark on this inward-bound journey will discover or renew many capacities that will contribute not only to a thriving classroom but also to a more peaceful and sustainable world.

We hope you will neither simply dismiss this claim nor simply believe it, but that you will, along with your students, explore with eyes, heart and mind wide open.

Enjoy the journey!

## Charting Progress

For teachers who are interested in determining the effects of the curriculum on student interactions, co-operation and participation, an **Observation Survey** is provided in **Appendix 1**. This survey can be used to establish a baseline of behaviors prior to starting the program and to chart progress at four- to six-week intervals throughout the curriculum.