Author's Foreword

Public education has for some time been heavily focused on what curricula we believe will be helpful to students. Life-Enriching Education is based on the premise that the relationship between teachers and students, the relationships of students with one another, and the relationships of students to what they are learning are equally important in preparing students for the future.

Children need far more than basic skills in reading, writing, and math, as important as those might be. Children also need to learn how to think for themselves, how to find the meaning in what they learn, and how to work and live together. Teachers, school administrators and parents will come away from Life-Enriching Education with skills in language, communication, and ways of structuring the learning environment that support the development of autonomy and interdependence in the classroom. These skills will help you to prepare students for living in the world they will inherit.

My History in Schools in the United States

I have been consulting with teachers and administrators in public and private schools from the kindergarten to graduate school level for 40 years. During this time I have been helping them integrate this process of education I call Life-Enriching Education into their programs.

I began working with schools while in the private practice of psychology in the early 1960s in St. Louis. Many of the people seeking my services were parents whose children were having problems learning and behaving as school authorities would have liked. Working with the schools in the children's behalf, I began to see that the way schools were structured created suffering for the majority of teachers and students. I saw that the competitiveness

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fostered in the schools prevented the students from relating in a caring way with one another.

I seldom saw school employees as the problem. In the work I've done over the years in schools, I have been impressed with the vast majority of teachers and administrators with whom I've worked. I have been moved by the care I saw they had for their students and the diligence I saw them demonstrate through their continuing efforts to provide learning opportunities that would enrich their students lives. I saw the teachers and administrators as being brutalized by the educational structures just as much as the students.

My growing awareness of how these educational structures did not support values that were in harmony with my own, led me to explore alternative educational structures. Along with Bill Page, a teacher who had been attending my workshops in Nonviolent Communication I was offering around the city, I explored a different approach to teaching, one in which the teachers relate as partners with the students and the program is designed to promote cooperation instead of competition.

The authorities in Bill's school system were reluctant to agree to his conducting a regular class in this manner, but they did permit him to do it with students who were labeled as disruptive and who were not doing schoolwork anyway. We identified sixty such students; thirty of whom were randomly placed in Bills class and the rest were left in regular classrooms. Academic tests given at the end of the year showed that the students in Bill's class learned far more than those in the traditional classrooms. And when they returned to regular classrooms they had far fewer problems over the next four years than the students who had remained in regular classrooms.

My exploration into alternative approaches was also furthered by the opportunity to work with Tom Shaheen, a visionary superintendent of schools in Rockford, Illinois. He and one of his principals,

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JoAnn Anderson, were working to create a school system that fostered respect for diversity, autonomy, and interdependence. I was invited to participate in this venture by contributing to the training of teachers. In the first school developed as part of this project, academic achievement was high, vandalism was significantly reduced, and the program was given a national award for excellence in education.

About this time the War on Poverty was initiated by the Johnson administration. This program provided support for schools in poverty areas to create innovative programs, and I was invited to participate in several of these programs in cities throughout the United States.

Offering Life-Enriching Education Around the World

In the years since, I have regularly continued to assist school systems interested in developing programs supporting respect for diversity and the development of autonomy and interdependence, not only in the United States but in several other countries as well.

Several years ago a principal of a school in Israel, Miri Shapiro, heard of the kinds of school programs I was helping to develop and invited me to support her efforts in creating a similar program in her school. The success of Miri's school led to the European Union financing a program for developing four other schools in Israel and four in the Palestinian Authority. As a result of the success of these additional schools, Miri was appointed as the director of a national commission to prevent violence in the schools. She has now spread the training I offered her to administrators, teachers, parents, and students in more than 400 schools in Israel.

Schools offering Life-Enriching Education, also supported by the European Union, have been established as well in Italy and Serbia.

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In the chapters that follow you will find: The opportunity to develop an awareness of the values Life-Enriching Education is designed to support:

- Skills for expressing oneself in ways that supports Life-Enriching Education.
- Skills for empathically connecting with others in ways that supports Life-Enriching Education.
- Means of creating the Life-Enriching partnerships between students, teachers, administrators and parents.
- Means of creating a Life-Enriching learning community in which people contribute to the learning and well-being of each other.
- Means of maintaining Life-Enriching order and safety in schools.
- My dream of Life-Enriching Schools and how to start the transformation.

Marshall Rosenberg

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