

## **Collaboration That Works**

A Veterans' Day Reflection / Combat to Teaching

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History is tragically loaded with examples of what happens when members of societies fail to learn, teach and practice collaborative skills which work. By “working” I mean skills which let people identify needs and work to meet those needs without hurting one another. Here I am speaking about turning disagreement into opportunity.

Disagreements have the potential to help clarify and refine understanding and points of view as opposed to inflaming and exacerbating differences. Our military and first responders often use their missions to stabilize inflamed situations which enabled less bloody conflict to prevail - this I encourage and honor.

**Defusing and stabilizing hurtful conflict** may sound like logical common sense to some readers. But looking at the chaos and hurtful interactions in both past and present societies worldwide, I suggest this may be a new or forgotten choice for many people. I believe history and present day conflicts present evidence that such hurtful behavior constitutes a long-running planetary epidemic that people see as “inevitable”. Included in the tragic price of this behavior is the list of those who gave their lives and veterans and their loved ones. These who sacrificed so much to protect what we have left of a democracy, where such choices are even possible, deserve special recognition.

Some people, lacking these democratic and collaborative skills, choose disruptive chaos which for some includes obstructing any other points of view and includes even physical violence and outright murder to tear down the existing system and beliefs they argue with. Their belief is that they can rebuild their “new society” from the ashes and tragedy left in the wake of their intentional disruption and even slaughter. Looking at the timeline of history I see evidence of this epidemic behavior.

Swinging back to the academic scene, while disruptions with students, administrators, parents and others are, in most cases, not yet this extreme, the fundamental causes and conflict resolution remedies are similar.

Some readers may find this discussion too farfetched or blunt and unsettling. Spotlighting the urgent need for choosing collaboration that works is my intention.

Choosing this or that ideology with closed minds will only repeat history. Speaking of history, I suggest we do a re-wind to pre-WWII Germany when people objected to or were unwilling to discuss the “ethics” and “morality” of Hitler’s societal cleansing and other dictates. In addition to slash and burn, these are standard strategies used by dictators and conquerors throughout history. Obstruct, deny and convince... divide and conquer the closed minds.

Our planetary history is littered with the corpses left by dictators and other totalitarians, religious and civil, where intolerance sent so many to burn, hang and dismember for refusing to accept dictates rooted in intolerant thinking and behavior. Think about this as elected representatives and others (world wide) intentionally obstruct hearing others’ points of view and choose insurrection in place of our democracy’s collaborative process.

Domination and control results, ideologies become enforced mandates and those who promote and profit from the violent engagements we call war, control economies. This cycle, which I believe is unnecessary, is the machine which generates the veterans we honor on Veterans Day. While unsettling to some, President and 5 Star General Eisenhower was very blunt in warning us about this vicious cycle he referred to as the Military Industrial Complex.

To repeat my opening premise, I believe that such hurtful and tragic choices and behaviors result when we fail to learn, teach and practice collaborative skills which work. Hence, we have an opportunity to make the choice to learn these skills and make a difference -or- continue repeating history. In the education realm this is true from the superintendent’s agendas to the teacher’s classroom procedures.

Of course there will be opposition. As one HR Director told me, we don't have a "fit for that here" or the teachers who tell me, "I'm too busy." What I learned from Dr. Stuart Grauer, founder of The Grauer School in Encinitas, California, and The Small Schools Coalition is that we can give our principle based intentions traction with curriculum that works by just doing it where ever we are. Stay focused on principle, do what works and keep moving forward is the message I interpreted from Dr. Grauer's work and words.

In my case I branded my developing curriculum by calling my class “The Digital Studio.” While this was not embraced as new leadership joined our school or continued when I retired, I am very grateful to the students and adults who helped me fine tune what I share with you. One Oceanside Unified Board of Education

Member, Mrs. Wichmann, 'relinquished' her time to address one of the board meetings to me so I could explain what I was doing with my Digital Studio. For those who want to dig further into this I edited my presentation to 11 minutes on this link: <https://bit.ly/CTE-Ruez>

While hurtful behavior sadly goes back to the beginning of recorded time, I believe its useful to pause on the timeline and observe the history of this epidemic and how it was, and still is, used to dominate and control. Here's just one example. It was over 400 years ago when Giordano Bruno, a respected astronomer and progressive theologian was murdered by extremists. The Church had him burnt to death for refusing to deny his statements about a infinite universe with populated worlds.

Fast forward, and compare this to the official UFO hearings where officials continue to deny authenticated documented history based on valid ET evidence. We find in protecting the status quo, "officials" still deny human ETs and a populated universe while active duty pilots, former military and commercial pilots and crew members share their real in flight "sightings" and are then called liars, confused, unfit to fly and are basically thrown on the grenade.

The domination and control epidemic continues. Given this is my Veteran's Day Reflection I proudly salute those who, without distraction, stand tall and speak the truth about their experiences. Being a veteran, I speak from experience.

My first eye opening experience with this epidemic occurred after I enlisted in the US Army and volunteered for service in America's war in Vietnam where I was a Combat Correspondent Photographer.

In my post-Vietnam days I served as a Veterans' Counselor and also worked as an activist championing the need to recognize and treat PVS or Post Vietnam Syndrome. These post trauma stress reactions were eventually recognized and finally called PTSD. I was honored to co-author the introduction to Dr. Robert. J. Lifton's paper on the post traumatic needs of combat vets.

To this day my life mission is motivated by the main lesson I learned in Vietnam: "We need to find less bloody ways and means of resolving our differences." This mission led me to a teaching career where my conflict resolution and restorative curriculum was developed, tested and approved for State of California A-G Graduation Standards.

Now retired, I pay-it-forward by supporting this mission in all ways possible including direct support of teachers and administrators, media, elected representatives and this article and others published in LinkedIn, Muck Rack, Teachers Making a Difference Magazine and elsewhere.

For those ready to dive in, I made this video to support one of my main **Conflict Resolution Lessons**. This is based on the work of Dr. Marshall Rosenberg who is considered the father of Non-Violent Communication. Modify and or make your own instructional material from mine. <https://bit.ly/4stepConflictRes>

**Step by Step Audio Instructions.** This next link takes you to audio with proven collaborative skills (including roll play) used to defuse and positively connect with students and adults acting out disruptive and hurtful behaviors. <https://bit.ly/NVC4Educators>

**Want examples?** It was toward the end of my 6th period high school class and I was tired as were my students. I noticed a girl with her head on the desk “not doing her work.” I knew I had to engage my responsible self and do something. As I walked over to do something I flashed on my options. Be the “authoritarian” and drop the “hammer” or practice what I preach and use words to empathically connect?

Like in the cartoons where the angel sits on one shoulder and the devil on the other, I engaged with the angel and adjusted my posture by sitting next to her, not standing OVER her in a position of dominance. I kept my mouth shut and took a few relaxing breaths. No response from the student. I volunteered an empathic connection with these words... “Having one of those days?” Immediately she lifted her head partially from her desk and in a low voice said “my pet died last night.”

Connection made! A little later, she was back to working on the assignment at hand.

**Another example:** See my Jabberwocky Lesson Video (link in References) and picture walking up to a student who is “off task.” Keeping in mind that the student has seen the Jabberwocky video, you walk up to the student and ask, “is your Jabberwocky kicking your butt?” You wait for an answer and you hear a

disgruntled “yeah.” You then ask, “are you ready to kick your Jabberwocky’s butt?” Eight times out of ten you hear “Yes.”

**Another example:** A student **or adult** expounds with an emotionally charged authoritative proclamation of condemnation, belittlement, denial, etc. which tries to make you or another target totally wrong.

You may be wondering what Kool-Aid they’ve been drinking but with the intention of connection and bridge building you “lead with empathy” and say something like... “Sounds, like you’re really concerned about that, would you be willing to meet here after class tomorrow at 4:40 and tell me why you feel like that way?” Notice in your request to meet you offered a specific *time, place* and *purpose*. These are essential ingredients for making a workable request.

So far you have kept this relationship out of the “Right-Wrong Arena.” Staying out of that combat zone gives all players the opportunity to OBJECTIVELY identify the non-judgmental needs and feelings behind the persons words and actions. From this launch pad, some degree of understanding and consensus is possible. Get a better idea of how this works by walking through this process in the Conflict Resolution Lesson video and audio links above.

Do what works, document your progress and share it. Please tell me about your results and pass this message along to others who might want to help replace the inhumanities with **love** and **empathy based collaboration**.

### **Essential Resources:**

**Paul Ruez:** Teachers Making a Difference Magazine, LinkedIn, Muck Rack, etc.

**Jabberwocky Lesson:** <https://bit.ly/1St-RespondersEducTools-TMAD>

**Dr. Marshall Rosenberg** (Conflict Resolution): Book, Life Enriching Education

**Dr. Stuart Grauer:** Books, Fearless Teaching and Real Teachers and Independent Schools Magazine

**ETs: G. S. Steckling** (pilot) Book, “The UFO Reality - Can Truth Prevail?”

**VA Vet’s Centers** for PTSD & Support Services: 877-927-8387

**Suicide Hot Line:** 988

**Combat Photo Tribute:** <https://bit.ly/221stSigCo-CameraSpeaks>