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Too Young, Too New to Mediate

by Donna Bryant Goertz | Montessori Blog

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She's too young, I thought, and too new to the community. What's she doing stepping into the rage between these two older boys? But there she was, Marcy, all wide-eyed and eager to practice the mediation skills the new children were learning and the older children took for granted.

"You both seem red-hot," she said to the two angry older boys, "so first let's just sit down together and take a deep breath."

"Oh, no," I thought, "they're too angry to listen to her. What will they say? What will they do? It's true, we do just sit down together at a time like this and take a deep breath before we try to speak, but they are not going to listen to her."

Fortunately, I had enough years of experience and enough ability to willingly suspend disbelief and open myself to the possibilities. I watched and waited, unseen and in the wings, yet in safe proximity. I prepared my face, body, and voice for light but firm intervention, just in case.



To my glad amazement, the two boys sat down. "Now," she said, "you two have to agree on who will speak first to tell the story from your own point of view." They took a breath. They decided who would tell his perspective first. Step by step the peer-led mediation unfolded, according to our customary practice. They told their story in turn, as passionately as they felt the need, but with respectful demeanor; with strong words, but respectful ones, and without repetition.

Each in turn listened to the other, even if he disagreed, even if he saw it differently, until the other was complete. Then each in turn described to the other how he thought he could better handle a similar situation in the future. Finally each one in turn asked the other for a consideration that would be supportive in a similar situation in the future.

It was a model peer intervention and I was in ecstasy that I had stopped my negative thinking and opened myself to the possibility of this shining moment, while still staying prepared to intervene if necessary. I had been able to allow this young and new child to break the barrier of my doubtfulness, to practice the skills she was learning, and to make a real contribution to her community members.

I had allowed two older and larger boys to remain within the community structure with its refusal to bow to the rankism of the society at large beyond our school, to be true to our community values by practicing the customs regardless of difficulty of the situation or the expertise of the members.

I had modeled for the community, no small number of who were watching from the corners of their eyes, that standing strong in silent knowledge and soulful support to bear witness for non violence in action, to trust passionately and patiently in the very best in each prepared person to act from his prepared environment within. It had been worth the excruciating self discipline, the bated breath, and the skipped heartbeat. One more lesson in values, in the social emotional curriculum, had been given to the community, and, because they had lived it, they had taken it in.



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