In the classroom

This section contains readings and activities suggested as vehicles to enable, but not impose, taking up issues of violence in classrooms. Practitioners are encouraged to read them carefully, consider ways in which they might be useful to their learners and to adapt and change these materials as best meets their needs.

Many practitioners speak of the importance of learner-centered approaches, and of supporting learners in naming their goals, identifying their strengths and working on areas of need. A problem posing approach enables much of this to occur through presenting open-ended 'codes' – texts, images, objects or situations which can be discussed and considered from multiple points of view and/or problems or questions with no one clear 'best' answer.

I've used this process of 'decoding' a text/image/situation, based on Paulo Freire's work as interpreted for ESOL learners and teachers by Nina Wallerstein and Elsa Auerbach.

Components of using a problem-posing approach: *using a code*

What do you see?
(describe the picture/situation/dialogue)

Is there a problem? What is the problem?

Is this your problem?

relate your own experiences to the issue at hand

How do you feel about this situation?

How do your students feel?

Have you or anyone in the group experiened this problem?

How did you handle the situation/ What did you do?

Was the situation resolved effectively? Why? Why not?

Why is there a problem?
discuss and analyze causes and contexts
– social, economic, political conditions causing certain situations to exit

What can you/ we do about it?
[seek alternative approaches; appropriate action]

What other information do you need to address this problem?

What are some alternative ways to address this problem?

What do you think would happen if you tried them?

Using this approach, newspaper articles, flyers or posters from local domestic violence or victims of crimes agencies are all open to analysis and discussion with adult learners. From a most basic approach, with beginning level language learners (Who do you see in the picture? What happened? What can she do? How did this happen?) to more in depth use of language and community research skills, topics can be integrated into ongoing discussions and concerns that learners and teachers regularly bring to classes.

Within the context of workplace, GED or other outcomes-prescribed programs, violence as a topic can be integrated in ways that allow learners to integrate their understandings of the issue within the academic work to be completed. The work can be folded in an analysis of current events or literature; charts and graphs can be created and discussed to identify high crime areas, for example. In all of this work, it is possible that learners may choose to disclose or not disclose their own histories of violence. In the course of pursuing these topics, learners might share accounts of incidents related to themselves or to friends or may in fact disclose their own stories. Disclosure is not the objective; breaking silences that disappear violence is part of an ongoing social change agenda, however for many practitioners. This work holds the possibility of providing access to information that learners might need.

Kim McCaughey, a correctional educator posted the following message on the NIFL's Women and Literacy list serv on September 21, 2000. Kim's message speaks to the possibility of addressing effects of violence through a different approach alltogether, that of assessing what helps and hinders learning with learning itself:

> *Today at work, we held a seminar for the students in our school. The topic was Barriers to Success - It included study skills - including how to use a library, learning styles, and stress reduction techniques. The purpose was to educate students about being mindful of here and now (being as present as can be). Discussion with the students included how if they had violence in their lives, they could be mindful of that yet, still work to the best of their ability. It was amazing to me to see how many women in the group nodded in agreement when that discussion took place. We addressed the issue of violence in our students' lives without really tackling it head on. We kind of took the backdoor into the topic. It sets us up perfectly for our next step, the Needs Assessment to see what issues the students would like to learn more about. We are addressing the issue of violence slowly and cautiously - in order to be respectful of our students' needs. We want to make the students feel safe when addressing the issue of violence. Reprinted with permission*

journal writing

For some of us, fiction, memoir, journalling is a way into understanding our thinking about an issue, or identifying the questions we have and might not have known we were considering.

26 October, 1999

> *last night I was ready not to give the money back, but to be, at the very least, just cynical, angry, discouraged, exhausted.*
>
> *went back from the meeting, walking quickly over the not so scary at 7 o'clock calvert street bridge to the inn.*
>
> *walk back out*
>
> *cutting through the exxon station, hearing a voice on a loud speaker, a woman's voice, two women's voices. One deep, resonant with knowledge from inside blood and bones, another saying things, the same things, in Spanish, "I thank God for the friends that saved me."*
>
> *oh. it's religious I think*
>
> *I look at the triangle of ashpalt in front of the bank. I see the T shirts*
>
> *oh*
>
> *I know now. young women, gay women, black women, a woman who hugs me as I cry, another who greets me as I arrive and later leave*
>
> *this is why*
>
> *I am gladdened at my rudimentary knowledge of the language of clothesline. Saddend by the fact of its need to exist. Isserlis, journal entry*

I wrote this after a day in meetings about the fellowship, the tone of which had left me feeling discouraged, wondering if I could really help anyone do anything with the fellowship. I share it here not for its extraordinary value as a piece of writing, but as an indication of the ways in which journal writing can serve as a useful reminder of something that had been an issue is subsequently resolved, of ongoing chronic problems, of reflections upon progress being made, changes being undertaken, work being done.

Although our group never did sit down and share writing together, we discussed it at length, in response to a woman who had wanted to facilitate writing processes for us; a process the group as a whole chose not to undertake. For many, writing and sharing journal entries is one way towards getting at discussions about the range of issues they're trying to understand. Women in the literacy drop-in at the Women's Center speak to the ways in which journal writing is helpful to them, although after six weeks they have shared very little of that writing. Setting up free writing – writing with prompts, or without – and making it possible for participants to share that writing opens up unexpected topics and can lead to finding other texts – poems, stories, songs, even plays – that also address the same content learners address while providing some safety and distance because these are texts written by authors outside the group.

At the Women's Center a participant unexpectedly came forward with a poem she had written, and with encouragement from the group read it aloud. She gave permission for me to type it up and share with the group as part of a process of developing our own collection of writing, while also reading poems I have found and others that have been recommended to me by Jenny Horsman and the women with whom she has worked. Horsman's work and forthcoming reports on the materials and approaches she used with the Parkdale project hold great promise. In addition to text-based work, Horsman incorporated attention to midn, body, spirit and emotion, both as topics of discussion and as vehicles through which to teach to whole people.

using texts

Before introducing readings to learners, I talk about what the texts are, and give a brief overview of what they're about. (This is a story written by a woman who left an abusive partner; she goes into some detail, do you think you want to read it? This is an article about why women stay in absuive relationships – would you want to write a response to the author? These are some poems a woman wrote about her children – do you want to read them?). Depending on the interests and reading abilities of the learners, I review words that are likely to be difficult before we tackle the piece.

> I had, and will have another, class of Head Start parents I was teaching to read. Since they were having trouble with comprehension, I started reading them poetry. That really opened the floodgates, and before I knew it, we were having regular discussions about what the poet meant, and how that related to their own lives. Abuse and violence seemed to surface naturally and they were very candid about their experiences and seemed to be

comfortable and trusted my comment that all would be confidential... as it has been. I did not try to counsel, refer, advise, or whatever. We talked and discussed and that seemed to meet the need. I am better prepared for the next class and will perhaps learn more from it, but they helped themselves without my intervention. They are still reading the poetry! *Rose Marie Duffy Northwest Ohio Literacy Council, NIFL Women and Literacy list, with permission, Tue, 26 Sep 2000*

articles

I've lately been focussing on finding newspaper, magazine and online articles that relate positive information about young people, part of my promise to the women at the Women's Center to bring articles and poems not only about difficult times, but also about hope and promise. Any number of articles – varying in difficulty and subject matter – is available daily and can provide the catalyst for interesting conversations, and subsequent reading and writing. One such article appears on page 12. Others are cited in the bibliography; as well a number of learner-generated resources are gathered at the Canadian National Adult Literacy Database *(http://www.nald.ca/* and also at LR/RI's writing and literature and learning pages *http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Swearer_Center/Literacy_Resources*).

images, photographs, picture stories

Again, virtually all material is fodder for discussion about any topic; my purpose here is not to imply that violence as a topic is necessarily useful or interesting to learners, but that an acknowledgement of its existence within the many contexts of daily life and academic study can be integrated into ongoing classroom work.

Photos we like of ourselves? Is this a viable exercise? Many learners who have had to leave their countries of origin have lost photos and other valuable and irreplaceable items. Yet others have been able to hold onto them, or have since acquired new photos and experiences accrued in the country of resettlement. We often ask learners to bring in photos of their families, lives, events. It seems only fair that we be willing to do the same. For some, a photo of a child might evoke painful memories. This particular photo, of myself at the age of three with my brother at six, could spark discussions about obesity, child nutrition, child rearing, or what, if anything such a term as "the good old days" might mean.

Or one could simply ask, "Who are these children?" and encourage learners to develop a story about them, maybe focussing on similarities and differences between American-born children and those raised in immigrant households. A language experience story (in which learners dictate to one another or to the teacher their ideas, which subsequently become their written text) could be developed. I include the photo with caution – again, because memories of childhood and/or of children lost in war or political violence can be overwhelming. On the other hand, if we do ask learners to share their experiences and their photos, is it not fair that we be willing to share our own?

My own collection of photos, picture stories and drawings comes from newspapers, magazines, un-citable sources that are difficult to share here, but useful in the classroom and includes images of mothers and children in strollers, a newly wed couple, a war torn landscape, a woman at work, kids playing and photos of immigrant and refugee adults and children from my local paper and calendar photos from a local resettlement agency. These photos, without clear 'stories' are images I always bring with me when starting a new class, never knowing how or if they might be useful in generating conversation. Similarly, I always bring the drawings that comprise the picture, "My wife doesn't work," in Making connections, Literacy and EAL Curriculum from a feminist perspective as a catalyst for discussions about women's work, math skills (what jobs does she do? At how much money per hour for how many hours?), social analysis (Who else does this work) and just plain language development. (I see a woman. She wakes up). I include the photo of myself because I can easily find permission to reproduce it and to challenge readers to look to their own collections of images, photos, articles and ideas as part of the larger project of acknowledging our lives and their connections to our work in building relationships to learners.

The following, excerpted from a digest written for the National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education in July provides an additional glimpse into classroom approaches for adult language learners and, by extension for adult learners in basic literacy and other adult education contexts.

Trauma, Violence and Learning in Adult ESL and literacy classrooms

Adult educators are aware of the fact that adult learners bring rich and varied experiences with them to the adult learning context. These experiences can include events through which adults have utilized skills that may not be valued in academic settings, and may also include challenges and obstacles adults have encountered. ESOL literacy practitioners are familiar with adult learners' stories of disruption, political trauma and mental upheaval (Adkins,

Sample, and Birman, 1999). Acknowledgement of the prevalence of violence generally, and of that experienced by those in the adult ESL and literacy community specifically, is critical to the development of instructional approaches that make classrooms safer places and learning more possible for all learners.

Trauma and Abuse "[W]omen and children make up approximately two-thirds of all legal immigrants in the United States today. Immigrant women suffer a triple burden of discrimination based on their sex, race, and immigration status. Increasing evidence indicates that there are large numbers of immigrant

women trapped and isolated in violent relationships, afraid to turn to anyone for help." [Battered Immigrant Women: *http://www.fvpf.org/immigration/index.html*, retrieved May 8/2000]

Providers of assistance to victims and survivors of domestic violence widely accept that violence against women is rooted in an abuser's need for power and control over his victim (see, for example, Horsman, 1999, Volp, 1995). Volp (1995) delineates specific ways in which abusers exert power and control over immigrant and refugee women. Such control can take the form of emotional, economic, or sexual abuse and can include the batterer's use of coercion, intimidation and threats. Immigration status and custody of children are two of the greatest threats used by batterers. Minimizing violent behavior (e.g. convincing a woman that violence is not criminal unless it occurs in public and that a man is allowed to physically punish her because of male privilege, or blaming the woman for the violence because she did not obey him) is also common amongst batterers both within and beyond immigrant communities. The subsequent isolation resulting from these forms of coercion can be likened to the isolation all batterers strive to inflict upon their victims. For immigrant or refugee women, however, this isolation is greatly exacerbated by the fact that elements of language and culture make finding safe options all the more daunting.

Teaching approaches and activities Judith Herman defines traumatic events as those which "overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning." (1992, p. 33). Her emphasis on control, connection, and meaning is a helpful frame through which ESL workers might view the impacts of trauma on adult learning. Language learning itself has to do with processes of gaining control, connection and meaning; adults experiencing effects of past or current trauma are additionally challenged in finding ways to be present to this learning.

People who have experienced trauma may be affected by symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder, be clinically depressed, have repressed memories of previous abuse, or display visible signs of emotional distress. Practitioners should not make assumptions that all refugee/immigrant learners have experienced trauma, nor is it important for teachers to necessarily know who among their learners has experienced abuse so much as it is critical for educators to understand that certain topics commonly discussed in the adult ESL classroom (e.g. family, health) can cause learners discomfort because of past abuse. Teachers also need to be sensitive to the fact that learners are not alone in having experienced trauma; educators too, are among survivors of trauma and abuse.

Attentive listening to learners' concerns (particularly within classes in which a learner-centered approach enables community to develop among learners) will allow learners' concerns about violence to surface in one form or another. Depending on the situation, one may not introduce directly the subject of violence, but it's always present. Indeed, it is important not to compartmentalize violence, or to frame trauma as a medical issue, but rather to understand its many forms through a broader lens. Learners may raise the topic and wish to pursue it through investigating community resources, reading accounts of others' experiences, or using texts, as described above.

Making classrooms safer Regardless of a student's status (survivor of violence, torture, or abuse), the simple fact of being an adult learner is already scary enough for many students. Offering both content and activities that allow learners to share as much or as little information about themselves as they would like, particularly when just beginning to study together, is important. This can build trust and community and can let learners know that while they're invited to share information about their lives, they are not under obligation to do so. (Isserlis, 1996). Basic good teaching practice that values and validates learners' strengths is critical, especially for adults who have received negative messages about themselves or their learning abilities over time. As well, it is important, where possible, to use the native language of the students to offer content and activities, to share information, and to build trust and community (Klaudia Rivera, personal communication June 19, 2000). Recognizing the violence in learners' lives, and explicitly discussing what they are comfortable and able to hear and to say is part of the work of making classrooms safer, as, for some, it is unlikely that a classroom can ever be completely 'safe.'

Facilitating the development of community among learners For ESL learners who have faced loss of one sort or another (of status, employment, control over the environment, of family members, of homeland) being able to view the classroom as a safe and predictable space is important to building community amongst and safety for all learners and practitioners. While some conversations develop more easily among all-women groups, it is important for immigrants of both sexes to be aware of the legal ramifications of domestic violence and also to recognize the effects of political trauma on themselves and their communities. In one Massachusetts class, students decided to meet together outside of class after they'd realized that many shared histories of abuse, in order to form a support group for one another. They subsequently produced *Together* we Bloom, a video tape and guide to their experiences of and information about domestic violence for others (Hofer, 1998).

Learning about resources in the community Learn what happens when one calls a hotline — what information will be asked for, what language assistance is available, what assurances of confidentiality exist? By so doing teachers can assist learners by being able to let them know what they might expect when they call the hotline. In fact, if sufficient interest exists, the teacher might choose to create a class activity that practices the language and communication skills needed to telephone an information line and ask for assistance. Remembering that many hotlines have been established for victims of crimes (both men and women) can also lessen some of the anxiety present for female victims of domestic abuse by shifting the focus of such an exercise to broader responses to community violence. While teachers are not being encouraged to become counselors, and it is imperative that educators realize their own limitations, it is within reason to expect that language programs increase efforts to be aware of appropriate community resources. Rivera, (personal communication) notes that workers at El Barrio Popular Education Program "created collaborations with other community agencies to deal with the issue of domestic violence. Through these collaborations the agencies provided on-site services to our students that vary from providing written information about their services to providing workshops for students to become peer counselors. On many occasions these collaborations saved lives." She adds that for "many of the students at El Barrio the abuse began after the student enrolled in classes. Their partners (men and women) could not deal with their spouse becoming independent through learning to read and to speak English. In most cases the spouse had not been abusive in the past." This important consequence of the power of learning language and literacy is not to be underestimated.

Victims of torture Learners need to know that it is safe for them to participate in varying degrees in ongoing classroom activities. The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture similarly describe concentration and memory as issues for survivors of torture and suggest a "quiet corner" for learners who feel unable to take part in particular classroom activities (Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, Torture and Second Language Acquisition, *http://www.icomm.ca/cvvt/intro.html* retrieved 5/31/00) The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture has produced a useful set of online materials aimed specifically at ESOL practitioners working with victims of organized political violence *(http://www.icomm.ca/ccvi/intro.html)*. The Centre addresses structural issues such as attendance, setting realistic expectations, and the need for comfortable safe space, and suggests a number of activities (including fieldtrips) that have been useful for learners in their programs.

While I have some questions about some of the activities proposed, the authors of the CCVT materials explain well and clearly the complexities of working exclusively with victims of torture who are coping with challenges of resettlement in Canada, learning new language and culture and also coming to grips with their own processing of the aftermaths of political torture.

singing, dancing, exercise, yoga, snacks and breaks Horsman's forthcoming work with women who gathered to focus on literacy as a piece of a larger process of thinking and learning about their lives and their goals, describes wonderful ideas for incorporating movement, song, healthful snacks and comfortable space into the process of learning generally. I don't wish to reproduce her work here, but to encourage readers to learn about it for themselves, and encourage them to consider ways in which these elements can be incorporated into even the most 'traditional' classrooms. Take a break. Breathe. Remind students and yourself that it's important to get the blood flowing, take some time to recharge and refocus. Encourage students to share food if this doesn't pose a financial hardship – maybe every Friday, taking turns bringing in a snack, or sharing a recipe – even just describing the meal if there's no practical time to prepare it and bring it to the class. Have students teach one another how to do something at which they excel – sew on a button so it stays sewed on, build a picture frame, drive a standard shift car, plant avocado seeds, make gazpacho, divide by 9 – whatever it is. Find ways to incorporate the things that you and your learners can do well into the ongoing challenges of literacy and language learning. Teach to the whole person, remembering/considering mind, body, spirit and emotion, healing, remedies and rituals

readings for learners:

I won't go back~*Cora Ayers*

When my husband and I first got married things were fine. We talked, had fun and went out together.

Things started to change after a month. He started saying that I was sleeping with our landlord who lived in the house also. That went on for a while, and a few weeks later was the first beating. He blackened one eye and fractured my jaw. There were several beathings and they got worse as time went by. He hit me in the back of my head so hard on three searate occasions that I literally saw stars, that's why I wear glasses now, I damaged nerve endings.

The final beating was the worst. He had come home from work very agitated because he hadn't had a drink in a while. He was an alcoholic, but he was a dry drunk by this time, which is more dangerous and violent than a normal drunk. He started accusing me of sleeping with one of my bosses at work to get ahead faster. This was not true.

He started hitting me in the face, finally hitting me in the mouth and punching in my front tooth before he stopped. When I stood up there was blood all over my shirt from my tooth. When I saw this I got angry, kicked him very hard where it would hurt the most. Then I kicked him in the nose and broke it. I had to push my tooth back into place which hurt and made it bleed more.

I called a friend to come pick me up. When I was on the phone I heard a drawer open up behind me. When I turned around he had a sharp knife in his hand. He cut my face near my eye, he started chasing me around the house with the knife.

I was lucky that our landlord came home when he did. He grabbed my husband so I could get out of the house. He could not believe what he saw. The one side of my face was swelling and buising already, the blood still coming out of my mouth and eye area.

I left everything and never went back. He still calls my family and friends to get me to come back, but I won't.

"I have lived in the Lower Mainland of B.C. all my life. I am 24 years old and have been out of school for six years. I started at Invergarry in September 1991./ I have two certificates for math and English. I hope to get my Grade 12 and take a computer course."

Transitions / later writing

From Voices:New reprinted with permission of the publisher

Passion originally published these poems through a community writing project, and has given permission to reproduce them here.

To a Baby Girl

When I look at you I see:
Your big brown eyes

Your light brown hair

I feel baby soft skin

I feel the innocence of your soul

I wish for you to never come upon

Any harm from another

Your laugh is so hilarious

Your smile is so inspirational

I think of all the wonderful things

You will learn

You are the start of a new life

I love you, Maya

The last tear fell
as you kept pushing and pushing
inside my soul.
All the pain I felt
only one tear could fall.
Now I am free of all teras.
Walking througb life
with no feeling;
Ami I in hre somewhere
Or am I lost forever—
Where?

By Passion

Wishing I were Elsewhere

I adjust the temperature.
I feel the coolness against my breast.
The steam fills the room.
I inhale,
exhale, I step in;
I feel warmth and wetness on my feet.
The water hits my face.
I close my eyes. . . . I am
elsewhere,
the water runs down my back and into the bottomless.
Lathered soap rinsing away,
I'm still unclean.
As if I can never be clean of all the evil that has
touched upon me,
my soul.
Water still running,
I wrap myself in a towel.
As I step out, I look to see could it be?
No. I locked it.
Numb to everything,
I lay down and close my eyes.
Could it be my soul gone to his evil or
washing away in the bottomless?
(Wishing I
were elsewhere)

by Passion

Wanted ***by Passion***

Single mother. Lonely. Willing.
Chillin' with my girls. Looking. Feeling. Needing comfort
Of someone else.
Single male. Wanting. Needing.
Chillin' with his homies.
The love of another to fill his
Desires. Eyes meet; we speak.
Sweaty palms. Take a drink.
Wanting not to say the wrong thing.
Touching. Kissing. The passion
Intense.
The need is filled. Our relationship
Growing. Not only within.
Not shown right from wrong.
Domestic violence.
5.0
Separation.
Single mother of two. Lonely.
Willing. Chillin' with my firls.
Looking. Feeling. Needing comfort
of someone else.

Purple ***by Passion***

When you think of the color purple, what do you think of? I think of tears. Do you think of bruises? I do. When you see the color purple, do you see blood? I do. Do you think

of court, police or prison? I do. When you see the color purple, do you see death? I do. When you see a purple colored ribbon, think of all the abuse women that feel the same things I feel when I see the color purple.

Flash Back *by Passion*

Flash – you see his hand coming close to you

Flash – you open your eyes

Flash – you feel a cool breeze, you turn. . . BAM, you're down

Flash – you roll over

Flash – hands around your neck, STOP

Flash – you look at the kids crying

Flash – BAM, you feel no pain as your face bleeds

Flash – he's gone

Flash –police

Flash – Why? Goodnite

The Clothesline Project

I included,with this poem of Passion's, information about the clothesline project, downloaded from http://canes.gsw.peachnet.edu/~gswnow/clothesline.html

I was walking downtown in Iowa City and saw a gathering of people, and fluttering clothes. I crossed the street.

As I walked and looked, I looked and felt, I felt fear, lust, hate, and shame.

I saw hundreds and hundreds of T-shirts, showing this. They were blue and green, yellow and red.

I heard women crying, saw them wiping their eyes, some were hugging each other. I walked closer.

On the shirts were drawings and words. They expressed the pain of their makers, for themselves and for others.

As I walked and looked, I looked and felt, I felt fear, lust, hate, and shame.

Maybe if you looked across next time, you would feel it, too.

I think that this project helps people become aware that rape happens.

It happens to people of all classes, a lot more than you think.

Maybe because of the Clothesline Porject, we don't feel so alone. After looking at all those T-shirts that day, I moved on down the street.

The Clothesline Project *Bearing Witness to Violence against Women*

The Clothesline Project provides an opportunity for women to bear witness to their personal experience of violence, and celebrate their transformation from victim to survivor in a powerful statement of solidarity.

How It Began:

The Clothesline Project began in 1990 when members of the Cape Cod Women's Agenda hung a clothesline across the village green in Hyannis, Massachusetts with 31 shirts designed by survivors of assault, rape and incest. Women viewing the clothesline came forward to create shirts of their own and the line just kept growing.

Since that first display the Project has grown to 300+ local Clothesline Projects nationally and internationally, with an estimated 35,000 shirts. The Clothesline Project has become a distinctive resource for healing from violence and creating social change. Lines have been displayed at schools, universities, State Houses, shopping malls, churches, and women's events. The first National Display took place April 8-9, 1995 in Washington D.C. in conjunction with NOW's Rally For Women's Lives.

Similar to the AIDS quilt, the Clothesline Project puts a human face on the statistics of violence against women. The Project increases awareness of the impact of violence against women, celebrates a woman's strength to survive, and provides an avenue for her to courageously break the silence. Families and friends of women who have died as a result of violence can make a shirt to express their deep loss.

Creating A Shirt:

One of the beauties of this project is its simplicity. Survivors need not be artists to create a moving personal tribute. Whether they choose to use paint, magic markers or elaborate embroidery to create their shirt is up to them. The power is in the personal.

The Clothesline Project is about direct, personal violence against women and shirts are color-coded for different types of violence:

White - for women who were murdered

Yellow or beige - for women who have been battered or assaulted

Red, pink, or orange - for women who have been raped or sexually assaulted

Blue or green - for women who are survivors of incest or child sexual abuse

Purple or lavender - for women attacked because they are or were perceived to be lesbian

Black - racially or religiously motivated violence

(These colors are not mandatory if a different color has special significance.)cl1

Americus Times-Recorder- front page news "Clothesline Project an avenue toward healing"
http://canes.gsw.peachnet.edu/~gswnow/ATR.html

http://www.projo.com/cgi-bin/story.pl/towns/04332091.htm

permission pending

Teenage boys learn abc's of responsibility *SOUTH KINGSTOWN*

Boyz II Men. The name of a popular singing group, right?

Right.

But it also describes the aim of a new program for teenage boys in South County. Called the Male Responsibility Project, the program's goal is to help the teens evolve into thoughtful young men.

"We take a holistic approach," said Wilburn Logan, the project's director.

Responsible sex and parentho od are taught, but the teenagers also learn ways to become better students, better family members and the type of citizens who are willing to give back to their community, Logan said.

About 35 young men between the ages of 13 and 17 belong to the group; most come from South Kingstown. All project members abide by a few rules; they forswear the use of drugs and alcohol, and they promise to dress respectably.

"No baseball caps," Logan said.

Launched 18 months ago by South County Community Action, a local social-service agency, the Male Responsibility Project has become something of a presence in town.

Wearing their trademark T-shirts and visors, project members have volunteered as crossing guards; they have held dances at the town's junior and senior high schools; and last Christmas, they sang carols at the Scallop Shell Nursing Home.

Despite the project's rules, there's now a waiting list to join.

"The main goal is to help these young men realize that if they're trying to be positive and do the right thing, there are people out there who will help them," said Logan.

Do young men today know what the right thing is?

Not always, Logan said.

"That's why dialogue is so important," he said.

The dialogue takes place Sunday nights around a conference table in the Peace Dale offices of South County Community Action. There, the young men discuss everything from drugs and violence to an upcoming ski trip in an atmosphere that encourages honesty and a spirited exchange of ideas.

"There's no right or wrong here," Logan reminded the boys at a recent Sunday night session.

The meetings begin with an "icebreaker." That's the term given to a question or topic raised by one of the boys to get the discussion rolling. "Why is violence getting worse in South Kingstown?" was one recent icebreaker. Another questioned the importance of money in today's society.

"I really don't think it's important, but if you don't have it, people think you're less of a man," said Zachary Ban'Kole.

Why? he was asked.

Because a man is expected to support his family, Ban'Kole said.

"The way you get looked at in society depends on how much money you have," offered Justin Bolton, when it came his turn to speak.

That may not be right, but it's true, Bolton said.

"I think money's very important," said Logan's son, Gavin, a sophomore at South Kingstown High School.

Gavin and Jacob Newman serve as co-chairmen of the project. The group also has a treasurer and secretary.

"In my mind, money is essential; and if I could get more of it, I'd be happy. On the other hand, a lot of people let it ruin their morals," Gavin said.

And so it went around the table, with each young man sharing his thoughts, which were duly recorded by the project's secretary. The minutes of each meeting are sent home to the parents of the young men, who must approve their son's participation in the project before they can join.

"The parent comes in from day one," Logan said.

Over pizza, the young men said they are proud to be members of the Male Responsibility Project. They like the group's diversity; they learn from each other during the Sunday night discussions; they like standing for a drug-free way of life, and they like giving back to the community, they said.

"It gives us a chance to get known for something positive," said Marcus Robinson, the group's secretary.

All too often, young men — especially young black men — are stereotyped, and, maybe, the

Male Responsibility Project will change that, Robinson and others said.

The Male Responsibility Project is financed through a state grant to South County Community Action.

Logan oversees the Sunday night meetings, and he meets with group members individually if the need arises.

But, otherwise, the project is run by the young men, themselves — another reason they like it, they said.

Art

While many of the activities suggested here have not been designed specifically to be used by learners who have experienced trauma, this exercise, facilitated by our colleague Brett Simmons is one which can be developed in layers. ABE and ESOL practitioners have integrated the use of drawing and collage into classroom work for a number of purposes – to help learners focus their thinking, to honor learners' visual ways of knowing and learning, and to provide alternative forms of entry into topics for discussion and writing. This exercise can focus on particular themes, but is not reliant upon any particular one. Brett set these goals for the session:

1. giving the participants an alternative way of getting in touch with their concerns/reactions/ experiences of violence
2. giving the participants a hands -on example of a way to introduce a difficult subject and yet leave it to the participants to titrate their involvement/level of exposure throughout the process
3. using the group experience as a model for how *groups* handle such an experience

The idea is that this is for us to have an experience other than discussion and reading, during which we can explore our understanding of issues of violence that interfere with learning.

She further explained, in response to one participant's questions about the possible intensity of the session: As you'll see it will look very much like something you might do in a classroom, the main difference in my (or our art therapy approach) being an emphasis on feelings rather than information. I will bring in an assortment of small pictures, widely ranging in their relationship to our subject. Some may be graphic as those at the DV conference, many will not. With our subject in mind I will ask people to select one image and then do a timed writing/art exercise without cross talk in the group. At the end of the writing/art I will ask people to pair up to share and discuss how they responded to the exercise and the materials. After about 10- 15 minutes of paired discussion we will sit down as a group and see if we learned anything! If you follow this, you will see that their are important choices at each step of the exercise:

the choice of image to work with

the choice of how to respond to the image through written and or visual expression

the choice of partner and then with partner how much to discuss

the editing and synthesis of the experience for the whole group

Now some of us (myself included) can fall apart in response to the most benign stimulus. We each need to know how to take care of ourselves in any event, and know where to go get help if we can't take care of ourselves.

What follows is a description of the session Brett led, as well as writing that emerged in response to the exercise itself and following reflection upon the activity. Materials required include visual images (magazine or newspaper photos), writing and drawing materials and large sheets of drawing paper.

---

visual imagery, writing, discussion

Images of water from this week

a student describes his family crossing the Mekong River tied together with rope - This in response to the question "Can you swim?" another student tells her teacher her "boyfriend "tried to drown her.

Our students have so much in their heads – How can they go on? 7 months pregnant by a man who raped her - sitting in Math class trying to understand fractions.

Maria - her husband wants to kill himself - but she still comes to class K. - sent away from her parents at age 11 - mother starved to death in Cambodia. – Nancy Fritz, in response to the exercise detailed below.

Nancy's writing resonates with many of us; experiences we've been told about by adult refugee and immigrant learners, by adult learners who have experienced abuse in one form or another. Her writing emerged from her participation in the session described below. Brett helped us work with visual images in a way that was not threatening, that enabled us to reflect upon our own reactions to trauma and learning – or not. In short, she modeled a reflection process for us as practitioners that could also be replicated as part of a larger language learning/literacy development process with learners. We were free to select and interpret

images through any lens we chose and to respond to the images in writing, and/or through the use of visual images of our own making.

the process

Brett set up the table with markers, colored pencils and large sheets of paper. She explained that in her work in the psychiatric hospital patients would choose an image (she had a series of 8 and half by 11" images which she laid out on a table for us after she had explained what we would be doing). As an art therapist, she asks patients to select an image from among those she provides, and to write and/or draw something about why they'd chosen it. She then gives them a period of time in which to complete the task. Giving a finite amount of time for the exercise to be completed enabled people to be as open or not as they chose during our session. We clearly knew when we would begin writing and when we were expected to finish. At the end of the time, we were given the option of asking for more time to write; during this session we all asked for another few minutes to finish our work. Having a defined time for our work as well as a choice in extending that time was another way of making the activity feel safe. No one had to experience that nervous feeling of looking around the room and feeling that if she had finished too quickly, her work might be inferior.

In her work with patients at the hospital Brett places the images on walls and patients choose the ones they want to work with. We laid her images (photos, mostly) on the table around which we were working and each chose one image and then set to work. The work on the task itself was very focussed and soothing (for me) at the end of a long day. After about 20 minutes we moved around the table and looked at the images we'd each chosen and the writing/drawing we'd done in response. We then did a round during which each of us spoke to what we'd written/how we'd felt about the images we'd chosen to respond to. What was wonderful was that this process also enabled some discussion to grow between/among us as we shared our stories (we'd had the choice of sharing in two's or as a group – given that we were only 5 we did it as a group).

While some of us focussed on the effects of trauma on our work/lives, others chose more general themes. (I chose a photo of an elderly woman seated at what looked to be a café in Europe, which led me to think about, among other things, a period of time in my life when I had lived in France. I drew and wrote in response to the thinking and memories this image stirred for me, some of which included thoughts about loneliness, relationships, violence and strength).

More relevant, however, to our group process, is thinking about how such an exercise/process can help us in dealing with topics like violence and other loaded / difficult subjects with learners, and with each other. I found it to be a really good kind of centering, focusing task. Participants were free to respond is as much or little detail as they chose, making this feel like a safe activity.

In response to this writing, posted to participants on the email discussion list, the following reflections were also shared:

Brett: The art therapy process has always been second nature for me and thus I don't present much in the way of theory when I'm explaining it.

Regarding self- disclosure in the therapeutic relationship, strict analytical types do prohibit any self disclosure and also include instructions on how to correctly appoint one's office to maintain an aura that will support this kind of detachment. Feminist counseling theory encourages a more natural approach to the therapeutic relationship with the caveat around self disclosure being that the sharing must be in the service of the clients growth (not the therapist's need). There are many ways to introduce this kind of task oriented learning/healing process into a group. In thinking about Nancy's stories, if I were planning a group experience in her setting, I would use materials that would be familiar to her students - even materials like food - not for cooking demonstrations but as a medium for creative self expression. With people less fragmented than many that I work with mulitmodal experiences are also useful. So I might have read a short short story aloud to begin, put on music that would be soothing or triggering (or both) and ended with something collaborative like a closing thought/sentence written on a chalkboard, one from each participant. That kind of hopping around is way overstimulating for the patients [where I work]. I learned early on to avoid it. Hope this is useful.

Nancy: I was totally absorbed in the process when we were drawing/writing. I couldn't believe it when the 20 minutes were up. I think having a block of time like that to write or draw anything you want can be really valuable. I also think the whole process was very powerful. I had dreams last night about the image that I was working with during the session. Somehow my brain was still working with the ideas that had come up during that time. The process itself during the session seems non-threatening because a person can share as much

or as little as he/she wants to. I think this exercise could be very useful in working with a small group of learners dealing with almost any issue (or a variety of issues). Thanks, Brett.

Brett: Nancy - Your image has stuck with me as well, converting the original stimulus picture into something much more personal. Thanks.

Julie: I, like Nancy, was surprised that as much time had passed as had when we were engaged in drawing/writing. I also valued the time. The process was non threatening. I'm not sure exactly how much of the explanation of the process always accompanies the activity, but knowing what would be done with the work, as well as the options around participation, were helpful. A couple of questions for Brett: Do you every allow participants to bring in an image from home from a pool you haven't selected? You mentioned that sometimes hospitals, etc. keep these drawings on file. You seemed somewhat skeptical about the value of this. Do you consider process much more important than product? Can you see development from drawing to drawing? Is it something you even look for?

Brett: The people who come to my groups often have few internal resources and thus I provide something for them to react to. This can always be rejected. Many people come to groups with something (a thought, an image, idea) they have been waiting to work on. I have one group which is straight group process, where after a looong check-in I create an exercise right then based on some common element/issue that came out of the check-in. It can be intimidating to just plop down art materials or a pile of poetry books and say "do something - get creative". So - yes, people could bring their own image. A high intensity therapy group might have people bring in family photographs to work from. This could be very triggering though and must be done with care.

Re : keeping artworks as part of patient records. Yes, I am skeptical about this. My training stressed heavily the interpretation of the artmaker as part of the process. We do not interpret artwork based on "markers" because this can be culturally and personally insensitive. (e.g. the color "red" means anger.) I also believe that stored artworks must be accompanied by the statements the maker made about the work. Again, to avoid subjective interpretations.

I try and learn a person's visual vocabulary, their personal iconography, before I make judgements about how they are doing emotionally. This involves seeing them make things over a number of sessions. It means listening to their interpretations and self-assessments and then taking it all into account.

For example, someone may spend a lot of time making gory, disturbing pictures. A psychologist might take that at face value as a dominant theme in someone's thoughts. I tend to look for whether or not the process is serving to exacerbate violent feelings or to contain them by displacing the energy/thoughts into the artwork. This can be discerned not just through looking at the product but by listening to the artmaker talk about what they did. Of course, if they won't talk about it, we all err on the side of caution.

Dina: Briefly, I think it was very effective for generating discussion, for reflection, introspection, etc. The facilitator definitely would have to be prepared to handle potential disclosure and other types of revelations which might be intense for the participant group. It was definitely an art therapy exercise. In a setting like my leadership classroom I would have to be a little more directive about what I wanted if I DIDN'T want it to turn into an art therapy session (which I'm not prepared to handle.)

Incorporating visual images, poetry and other forms of expression into adult literacy work is not a new idea. Finding ways of utilizing forms of expression that enable learners and teachers to explore ideas safely and to share those explorations within the larger project of language and literacy development shows great promise towards the ongoing work of validating experience while also providing sufficient structure so that learners can decide how much to tell, and where to focus. Learners can choose to write five sentences that describe the image, or enter entire pages in a journal to process more difficult responses to emotions that image evokes, and, independently, or with assistance from classmates and teachers, can find ways to connect this work to their own learning goals.

To learn more about the intersection of art therapy and adult literacy learning, please see

Creative Arts Therapy Program 1998 - 1999 report and evaluation
http://www.readsociety.bc.ca/Pubs/Arts/page_i.htm

Prepared by: Liza Miles-Husain & Sharen Johnston, Victoria READ Society For the Province Of British Columbia, Ministry of Advanced Education Training & Technology

other resources:

Drawing: A link to literacy by Catherine Baters and Linda Shohet, Montreal: Centre for Literacy. *http://www.nald.ca/province/que/litcent/publication_products/drawing/litcend.htm*

blue ink in my pen: Student writing about art from the Edmonton Art Gallery and Prospect Literacy Association; learners' writings in response to art at the Edmonton Art Gallery, accompanied by reproductions of the images (paintings, sculptures) about which learners wrote.

http://www.nald.ca/clr/blueink/cover.htm

last words, next steps

Jenny Horsman posted this following to the NIFL Women and Literacy List on September 29 toward the end of the two-week period during which she served as its guest moderator:

Subject: [NIFL-WOMENLIT:1026] Re: Teach!

… what teachers should do is teach. I'm not sure what you meant by a safety net - but I certainly think they/we need to be prepared with knowledge about options for counselling/therapy/groups etc. for students and some sort of counselling/therapy support for ourselves as teachers. My argument is that if we don't recognize the impact of violence on learning and support students to understand this impact, learn to believe in themselves, rebuild self-worth and learn to learn, then many students may not succeed in learning what they hoped to learn. Instead they may fail again and judge themselves, believing that they really must be stupid. (And I worry that if we don't have access to some form of supports ourselves as teachers then we are more likely to become exhausted or burnt out.)

Having worked with a group this winter - not trying to invite disclosures or to be a therapist, but naming that violence may have got in the way of learning and helping the women to learn to support themselves, gather the strength of spirit, emotions, body and mind to help them learn - I have seen women improve enormously in their reading and writing as well as making concrete plans and moving them gradually into action, for courses and work, volunteer and paid, they plan to take on. This work I think builds on learners' strength and enhances it. I found it useful to always remind myself that my focus was on learning - and what would help

with learning - but I was fascinated to find that helping women to feel better about themselves, to feel valued, to feel that they did not need to be ashamed of the violence in their lives and gain confidence as learners - helped them to be able to learn. Consulting with a therapist helped me to maintain that focus and be careful about how to do teaching that honoured the experiences learners had been through and didn't ignore my own needs and limits.

As I was writing this message, that student who kicked me into this area of work, happened to call. When I told her the message I was trying to write she said that I should say that learners often don't trust anyone and when they hear from someone they trust that they don't deserve to be hurt, then it can help them make changes in their lives. She said that when women are struggling with present violence or past violence "they've got too much on their mind, it keeps going back to the abuse and they can't learn." She reminded me that it is not easy to just take a referral as people with those "big papers", as she calls educated people, can be very intimidating, so it may take time and support before a student can follow up on a referral.

I think it is important for teachers to explore how to create safer spaces for learning and help learners feel they have worth - this is essential for learning. I think as literacy workers we often fear that if we break the silences about the issues of violence we will open the floodgates and find ourselves in too deep. My experience was that I didn't hear the details of the violence in women's lives, instead I heard more about the difficulties they have with learning, their worries that may be their memories are no good, their fears that those who told them they were worthless and stupid were right - many things that were getting in the way of learning.

Before I end my stint focussing on this issue, I want to ask one last set of questions. My current research looks at what happens when people in literacy programs try to change literacy practice to recognize impacts of violence on literacy. I want to know how you have been thinking about the impact of violence on learning, how you have tried, or wish you could try, to address these issues through changes in your practice. I am curious about what helps and hinders making changes. So far I have been particularly noticing "discourses" (language and practices) that I think hinder recognizing issues of violence in programs I would love to hear from you … I've really appreciated the chance to "talk" with you all and would love to hear more in future as you have further thoughts about the issue.

I wish you all well Jenny

References and resources

Adkins,M.A., Sample, B., & Birman, D.. (1999). Mental health and the adult refugee: The role of the ESL teacher. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: The National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.- *http://www.cal.org/ncle/DIGESTS/mental.htm*

Herman, J.(1992). Trauma and recovery. New York:Basic Books.

Hofer, J., S.Haddock, Mary [project participant], J. Swekla and J. Kocik (Ed.). (1998). Together we bloom: Women speaking out against domestic violence. Video and guide. Greenfield,MA:The Literacy Project, Inc. (available through Laubach Literacy Action).

Horsman, J. (1999). Too scared to learn: Women, violence and education. Toronto: McGilligan Books and (2000), Rahway, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Isserlis, J. (1996). Women at the centre of the curriculum. In K. Nonesuch, (Ed.). Making Connections: Literacy and EAL curriculum from a feminist perspective. Toronto:Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women. [pp. 13-14]

Elliott,A.., & Williams, P. (Eds.).1995. Isolating the barriers and strategies for prevention:A kit about violence and women's education for adult educators and adult learners. Toronto: Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women

Volpp, L., & Marin, L.(1995). Working with battered immigrant women:A handbook to make services accessible. San Francisco, CA : Family Violence Prevention Fund.

online:

Family Violence Prevention Fund - Battered Immigrant Women *http://www.fvpf.org/immigration/index.html*

Family Violence Prevention Fund: Power and Control Tactics Used Against Immigrant Women *http://www.fvpf.org/immigration/powercont.html* [retrieved 8 May/2000]

Jenny Horsman's web site: *http://www.jennyhorsman.com*

Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture 194 Jarvis Street 2nd Floor Toronto, Ontario Canada M5B 2B7 *http://www.icomm.ca/ccvt/index.html*

National Domestic Violence Hotline *http://www.ndvh.org/*
1-800-799-7233 help line for immigrant women