NARRATIVE ON PEER MEDIATION IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA

ACCORDING TO MY INVOLVEMENT

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At the suggestion of Dr. Stephen Covert, he suggested I put together a brief summary of what I know about Peer Mediation and its’ history since my involvement back in the late 1980’s to present. Part of Doctoral research in 1987 when I graduated from the Union Institute and University in ’87 had been participating in peer mediation programs and professional conferences inspired by the New Mexico and Colorado Centers for Dispute Resolution. It was in 1990 that I received the first published training manual for Peer Mediation in the Schools from the New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution for all grade levels, K-12. I had lived in West Palm Beach and Delray Beach from 1984-to 2007 when I moved to Sarasota.

In 1992 and 1993 I received a large grant with Dr. Alison Adler, the head of the Safe Schools Dept. in Palm Beach County. We had applied for $50,000 grant with the U.S. Dept of Education for me to introduce and coordinate a pilot Peer Mediation Project at Roosevelt Middle School and Forest Hill High School. This program was rolled out into the county and its schools. In 2000, I was asked to help implement a program at the Toussaint L’Ouverture Charter High School in Delray Beach in Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation. As a result of that school’s zero violence policy and all staff/students trained by the Anti Defamation League’s World of Difference program, No Place For Hate in Anti Bullying, our school was the only High School in Palm Beach County to receive the Peaceful Schools International award. I have also been a trainer with the ADL for over two decades training staff, students and parents at many schools in the state of Florida from Miami to Tampa.

As a result of the growing interest in this field, then Governor Lawton Chiles up to our present Governor Scott issues a proclamation every year in honor of Mediation Week in the State of Florida from October 14-20. One paragraph states, “Whereas mediation is taught and practiced in many schools in Florida, not only as means of resolving individual disputes, but also as a means of achieving a more peaceful society…”

To that end, when I relocated to Sarasota, I was invited to provide Study Circles for Healing Racism at Sarasota High School after the school shooting at the Regal Hollywood Cinemas downtown. This turned into a several semester program for not just at risk youth for young males, but then for co-ed courses and those who were challenged. Several grants were procured by school staff for me to be there as a consultant for these programs.

I was then introduced to Dr. Nat Colletta, former World Bank Executive who teaches a course as an Adjunct Professor at New College on War to Peace Transitions. We were introduced by a mutual friend and colleague in Washington, former Ambassador, John MacDonald who runs the Institute for Multi Track Diplomacy where college students do internships. This alliance led to my being asked to be the part time Consulting Trainer and Coordinator of the Sarasota World Affairs Council Peer Mediation program over the past four years training New College students in Peer Mediation who then accompany me and co train the High School Students in the program to be implemented at their individual schools.
To date, the following schools have received the training; Venice High School, Sarasota High School, Sarasota Military Academy and Riverview High School with Booker scheduled for January 2016.

Funding for the training has come from many different sources; The Quakers, the SW Florida Coalition for Peace and Justice, Florida Learn and Serve; School Foundations, private donations and funding by the Sarasota World Affairs Council since it became a nonprofit.

We see this as a win win program for all schools, eventually to be adopted by all grade levels as an adjunct to current disciplinary procedures. This program is very effective in providing common every day tools for students to help diffuse conflicts before they get out of hand. Students become allies vs. combatants. In keeping with the mandate to “achieve a more peace society,” as phrased by every Governor since Lawton Chiles, we believe that it is eventually incumbent upon the School Board to approve of curricula that could be introduced in an interdisciplinary process since it relates to World History, Sociology, Psychology, Political Science and even in English.

A simple way to begin is to have a course in Leadership and or Conflict Resolution, where students learn about Peer Mediation, the Citizens Dispute Program along with Teen Court at the Sarasota County Court house. There are many ways this program can filter down to younger students taught by their High School and Middle School peers in on campus clubs. High School students receive community service hours for participation in this program, they relate well to co trainers of college age students, and judging from the feedback we keep receiving, believe this program can make a difference in the lives of our future leaders for years to come.

I had also lived and taught in the Bahamas and Belize. In Belize it was through Rotary International’s grant program for University Professors, 2006 –’07. I taught courses in Conflict Resolution under Industrial Psychology and Sociology at Galen University. While serving there under the auspices of Rotary, I also acted as a Goodwill Ambassador providing training in Mediation and Conflict Resolution to several non profits along with the local town government of San Ignacio, and organizing a community wide garbage clean up with students and staff from local schools and the university which was adopted by their Mayor to have garbage pickups at local sports parks and stadiums every week.

When I lived and taught at the Hotel Training College in the Bahamas for five years, I was invited back to provide training for their Ministry of Education in Peer Mediation, the Bahamian Bar Association in Family Mediation, and other groups for training in their organizations. I have been a U.S. Postal Redress Mediator for over two decades providing mediation for postal employees; I’ve been a trainer in EAP programs with United Health Care and Blue Shield/Blue Cross through the Optum Training Division providing seminars in a host of subjects under Conflict Resolution for employees of both large and small corporations. I also co-directed and implemented a domestic violence program in Delray Beach that was called LEAVE; Learning Effective Alternatives to Violent Emotions.

Please be advised that all students trained in Peer Mediation receive a certificate from their school identifying how many hours they participated in training. If there are any further questions, please do not hesitate to ask or look on the websites of
www.sarasotaworldaffairscouncil.org under programs and then peer mediation or www.DrDeri.com.