

THE PEACE POWER STRATEGY

Throughout the year at Crow Island School, we continue to look for ways to use Peace Power in our daily routines. Peace Power is a strategy, or way of being, that supports maintaining a healthy, peaceful environment for learning and growing. Each year, we begin with an art project that depicts many different ways to 'live Peace Power,' which is followed by an all-school assembly and group display of the drawings. Faculty members and students alike design their own ways to identify, celebrate and engage with the four Peace Power principals – 'Recognize', 'Stop putdowns', 'Work together' and 'Make peace'. We all share in our commitment to learning, working and growing in a healthy, vibrant school community.

Peace Power is NOT a series of lesson plans that we add onto our already full curriculum. Just like we, as educators and human beings, make hundreds of small decisions all day long that help to sustain and forward our work, Peace Power breaks down our behavior into four categories that can help us better organize our efforts to build community in positive ways. Peace Power is designed to be incorporated, organically, into the working and relating we already do at Crow Island School. Additionally, Peace Power is meant to complement and enhance (not replace or hinder) any community building curriculum or ideas, such as Open Circle, Progressive Education, Responsive Classroom and the Mel Levine work among others, currently being utilized by our faculty.

Dr. Mark Mattaini, primary researcher and founder of Peace Power, is a professor at Jane Addams College of Social Work at University of Illinois in Chicago. He, with the help of the Peace Power working group, designed the strategy after years of researching what works and what does not work to decrease bullying and create a peaceful culture. In Dr. Mattaini's words, the main emphasis of Peace Power is on "providing alternative ways for young people to influence their world versus simply suppressing antisocial behavior by providing and implementing long lists of what not to do." The four core practices, or principles, that form the foundation of Peace Power are briefly outlined below. (Please refer to <http://www.bfsr.org/PEACEPOWER.html> for a more comprehensive description of Peace Power.) There are hundreds of ways to put these practices into action throughout the school year. Please see below for a brief overview and some examples.

"RECOGNIZE!" (Recognize contributions and successes)

Recognition and reinforcement of contributions to the community are at the heart of the Peace Power strategy. This principle can be very effective so long as the focus remains on recognizing specific actions a person has taken (i.e. "I recognize _____ for choosing a game that includes everyone.") versus attributes over which we largely have no control. Thousands of studies support the power of such recognition. In fact, cultures of recognition change brain chemistry in ways that are consistent with achievement/cooperation and inconsistent with aggression and threats.

"STOP PUT DOWNS!" (Act with respect)

Having 'critical dialogue' with children about what respect means to us is really important at Crow Island. Often, it is best to start with small groups. The students will usually emulate the seriousness with which an adult approaches this discussion.

"WORK TOGETHER!" (Share power to build community)

The idea here is to teach both young people and adults the skills of sharing power to enhance what Dr. Mattaini refers to as "the collective web" or the community as a whole. Working together produces positive outcomes at both the individual as well as the community level. It is important to note that in this context we are defining 'power' as: 1) what one does to contribute to the group, 2) an action and NOT an attribute and 3) each individual's power is unique in some way.

"MAKE PEACE" (Make peace)

Because no matter how hard we try to avoid it, there will inevitably be some conflicts. This practice emphasizes the importance to 'make peace' after this occurs. The primary goal here is not to find a solution to the immediate problem, but rather to heal the relationships that have been damaged by the behavior of one or more people involved.