

## Student Leadership in Restorative Practices: Glencliff High School's Peace Team

“You know how some people listen to talk? Well, we listen to understand because we want to understand other people and we want people to understand us.” Maria A., a senior student at Glencliff High School, used these words in explaining the key values of the Peace Team, a group of twenty-two sophomores, juniors, and seniors who are co-designing and facilitating Restorative Practices at Glencliff High School in Nashville, Tennessee.



**Image 1: Peace Team members conferencing before leading community circles at Antioch Middle School**

do things WITH them, rather than TO them or FOR them” (Ted Wachtel, International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2004). Our implementation of RP at Glencliff has focused on remaining faithful to working *with* students: The Peace Team has been a driving force in working with other students, GHS teachers, and in designing policies and procedures for the upcoming year when we will begin full-school implementation.

Peace Team members not only study Restorative Practices as an alternative to typical disciplinary policies; they also practice what they preach. Throughout the year, Peace Team students have participated in student-created and designed committees, have mentored other students, designed and facilitated Solidarity Circles in response to difficult national events, facilitated circles at a local district Middle School (Image 1), mentored teachers who hope to add community circles into their practice (and have gathered qualitative data through surveys,



**Image 3: Preparations before the Peace Team + GHS Administration Community Circle**

I am the Restorative Practices Coordinator at Glencliff High School, and one of the greatest joys of my work is teaching (read: learning from) the Peace Team.

Restorative Practices represent a paradigm shift in school culture from one that is punitive to one that is restorative by involving stakeholders, repairing harm, and transforming relationships within a community. As Glencliff embarks upon its Restorative journey, we've worked diligently to remain faithful to the fundamental premise of Restorative Practices: “people are happier, more cooperative and productive, and

more likely to make positive changes when those in authority

### Metro Schools students participate in student panel at discipline conference

APR 7 Posted by MetroSchools



**Image 2: Peace Team members present at the U.S. Dept. of Education Conference, “Rethink Discipline Convening 2017”**

observations, and interviews to improve practice), mediated conflicts, helped teachers solve classroom problems, served as panelists at a U.S. Department of Education's discipline conference (Image 2), designed and facilitated a community circle with GHS administration (Image 3), and have most recently provided advice and guidance to administration and teachers at a local district high school who hope to start their very own Peace Team next year (Image 4).



**Image 4: Peace Team students collaborate with administrators and teachers from a local district high school as they plan beginning their own peace team next year.**

I taught English 2 several years before I became the RP coordinator at Glencliff. Throughout my teaching career, I have envisioned my role as a liberatory educator, and I have endeavored to get myself out of the way as much as possible so that students can take ownership over their own learning. Youth Participatory Action Research provides an epistemology that has taken my natural tendencies and transformed them into a guiding force in the design of the Peace Team.

As understood and exemplified by Cammarota and Fine (2008), Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) “provides young people with opportunities to study social problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify these problems” (p. 2). Through a “*radical commitment to inquiry-inspired action*” (Fine, 2008), the YPAR epistemology enables youth to learn skills of critical inquiry and resistance in a variety of contexts – inquiry through and for youth challenging the normalization of oppressive practices in which they live (Cammarota and Fine, 2008, p. 2). As current Glencliff students, Peace Team members have a vested interest in the current and future practices of the school for both their family and community members. Peace Team members not only study social problems affecting their lives, but they also design solutions to those problems that affect their everyday experiences at the school.

Peace Team members have found the experience to be meaningful. Tania N., a Sophomore member, explained: “you actually get stuff done here.” Stephanie A., a junior chimed in: “all the skills we’ve learned in class... you can use them outside of class.” In addition to the remarkable amount of outreach undertaken by this group, members have hopes for further involvement next year: “like if a fight happens and we get called in to help facilitate a conference. That would be pretty cool...” (Tyler, Junior member).

Although an abundance of emerging literature speaks to the effectiveness of RP in promoting positive student behavior, there is a gap in the conversation concerning the experiences and outcomes of student leaders co-designing and implementing RP through a Youth Participatory Action Research framework. The Peace Team aims to fill that void, and to act as ambassadors in the halls of Glencliff High School and beyond. Plans for future collaborations with other MNPS schools is underway for next year, and Peace Team students hope to expand their reach in working with teachers and peers to utilize Restorative Practices in putting MNPS students – and equitable education – first.

The Peace Team has made a remarkable impact on Glencliff this year, and they have big plans for the future. In Stephanie's words, "I just want to take everything I've learned here and take it out into the world." I look forward to learning with the Peace Team as its members make those dreams a reality.