

# STRENGTHENING STAFF SKILLS: ENGAGING WITH MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN SUPERVISED VISITATION CENTERS

Audio Conference Training Series for Supervised Visitation Grantees

DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING A VISITATION CENTER THAT IS FAIR, RESPECTFUL AND PROMOTES SAFETY FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR MOTHERS WHO ARE BATTERED WOMEN IS AN IMPORTANT GOAL, BUT THIS CAN BE EASIER SAID THAN DONE! IT REQUIRES STAFF THAT CAN ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT A PROBLEM-SOLVING, SAFETY-ORIENTED PARTNERSHIP WITH CHILDREN, MOTHERS AND FATHERS. AND EVEN THE MOST EXPERIENCED AMONG US CAN BE CHALLENGED BY THE SKILLS REQUIRED TO BE ENGAGED WITH FAMILIES IN THIS WAY. PLEASE JOIN US FOR THIS AUDIO CONFERENCE TRAINING SERIES TO EXPLORE SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN AREAS THAT COMMONLY PRESENT DILEMMAS FOR CENTER STAFF.

## Part 2: Listening and Engaging in Dialogue in Supervised Visitation Centers

**February 18, 2010 ♦ 4:00-5:15 PM Eastern Time**

**FACILITATOR:**

Part 2: Melissa Scaia

**Melissa Scaia** is the executive director of Advocates for Family Peace, a six-program agency that provides services to families experiencing domestic violence and child abuse in Itasca County, Minnesota. She provides training and technical assistance as a consultant for Praxis International. She currently serves as a faculty member for the Family Violence Department for the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. She wrote her masters thesis on the effects of domestic violence on children. She is currently writing her doctoral degree dissertation on the role of supervised visitation centers in the context of domestic violence. Outside of her work and graduate school life she is a wife, mother of two children under the age of four, and a United States Figure Skating Association instructor.

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# PART 2: LISTENING & DIALOGUE IN SUPERVISED VISITATION CENTERS

## Session Outline

- A. Welcome and introductions
- B. Grounding our work: The work and teachings of Paulo Freire
  - a) Understand mythical structures of thinking (nature vs. culture)
  - b) Understand that to change our world view (entitlements), we need to know our myths (beliefs), be conscious of them, look at the consequences and know we have other choices
  - c) Make the shift away from the banking system and toward a problem posing one
- C. The continuum of dialogue
  - “Banker” of knowledge --- “Engaged” in dialogue
- D. Break for questions
- E. The process of dialogue
  - a) Involves problem posing questions
  - b) Exposes interrelationships and connections between our personal and cultural beliefs
  - c) Exposes the dehumanizing consequences of our world view on ourselves and others
  - d) Creates alternative views of reality – other ways of understanding our world
- F. Four pillars of Paulo Freire’s work
  - a) Be concrete – start with the lives of people

- b) Dialogue is the medium of learning
- c) Education is never neutral – conversations with oppressed people either function to domesticate or liberate
- d) Liberated consciousness is borne out of love, not hatred

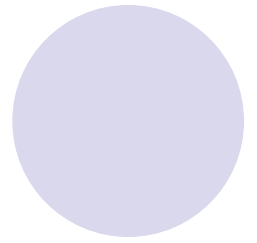
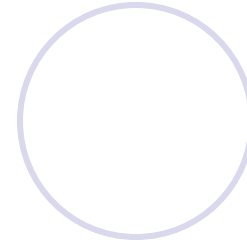
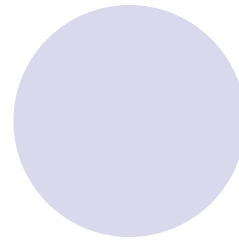
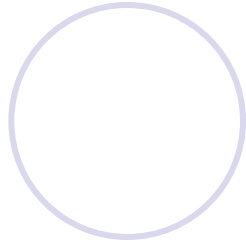
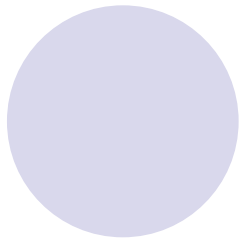
**G.** Break for questions

**H.** Sample exercise: Dialogue on beliefs and respect

**I.** How supervised visitation center staff can create an atmosphere for dialogue

**J.** Wrap-up and closing

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# Listening and Engaging in Dialogue in a Supervised Visitation Center

Praxis International  
Audio Conference Training  
February 18, 2010

Trainer: Melissa Scaia



# Paulo Freire, Brazilian Educator - “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”

Paulo’s teaching helped us:

- Understand **mythical** structures of thinking (nature vs. culture)
- Understand that to **change our world view** (entitlements), we need to know our myths (beliefs), be conscious of them, look at the consequences and know we have other choices
- Make the shift away from the banking system and toward a problem posing one

## Monitor as “Banker of Knowledge”

- Monitor believes s/he is superior to parents using a SVC
- Monitors believes s/he holds all the knowledge that they need to share with the parents
- Monitor does not model caring and nonviolence
- Participants of SVC suppress parts of themselves to conform to the monitor’s imposed ideas of what fathers and mothers should be like
- Believes that abusive parents can not be trusted so creating a relationship with them is pointless and is seen as collusion
- Believes the SVC service needs to be controlled in a rigid manner
- Parents using an SVC aren’t encouraged to directly express themselves
- Monitor tries to force parent behavior in an SVC
- Monitor does not look for the “humanness” in parents using the SVC
- Monitor believes they need to be in total control of how the supervised visit or exchange unfolds
- Fosters defensiveness by parents
- One-way conversation

## Monitor Engaged in Dialogue

- Monitor sees themselves and participants as equals
- Monitor has as much to learn from participants as they have to teach
- Monitor embodies caring and nonviolent qualities
- Parents through interaction with monitor gain insight into what kind of parent they are and want to be
- Belief that abusive parent has the capability to flourish in their life and community despite their overwhelmingly abusive history
- Allows room for organic conversation to be the focal learning moments
- Parents feel motivated to learn
- Monitor works to convey unconditional acceptance-not of the abusive behavior-rather of the person behind the behavior
- Monitor allows organic conversation to happen
- Reduces defensiveness
- Encourages two way conversation deepening the understanding of both parent and monitor
- Experience relationships with caring adults, explore their beliefs, and decrease their use of abusive behaviors.



# Paulo Freire

**Dialogue** is central – conversation where we seek to understand contradictions, seek truth and instill doubt which is the beginning of change.

“The end is the means in process.”



# Paulo Freire

The process of Dialogue:

Involves **Problem Posing** questions

Exposes **Interrelationships and connections**  
between our personal and cultural beliefs

Exposes the dehumanizing **Consequences** of our  
world view on ourselves and others

Creates **alternative views** of reality – other ways  
of understanding our world



# Four Pillars of Paulo Freire's Work

1. Be concrete – start with the lives of people
2. Dialogue is the medium of learning
3. Education is never neutral – conversations with oppressed people either function to domesticate or liberate
4. Liberated consciousness is borne out of love, not hatred

# The Role of the Educator



- Be authentic
- Promote dialogue without collusion
- Work with lived experience rather than theory
- Challenge without judgment
- Make connections and expose contradictions
- Encourage critical thinking
- Simultaneously see the beauty the men bring to the world and the threat they pose

# Examples of Commonly Held Beliefs of Men Who Batter

- My children are my possession that I can do with them whatever I want.
- I know what is best for my children because they are mine.
- I get to tell the mother of my children how to discipline, interact with, and behave towards our children.
- When I pay child support for my children I should get to see them whenever I want.
- My dad disciplined me that way and I turned out just fine.
- You need to yell at kids to get them to listen.
- Children must have some level of fear of their parents in order to respect them.
- I have the right to tell my children what to do and not to do.

# Sample Exercise: Dialogue on one of the beliefs

- Role-play: one person role-play the abusive parent and the other the SVC monitor
- Have the abusive parent state one of the belief statements in “common language”
- Example:

**Belief:** For your children to respect you they must fear you.

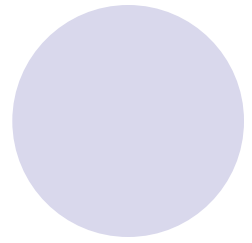
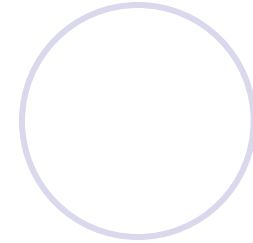
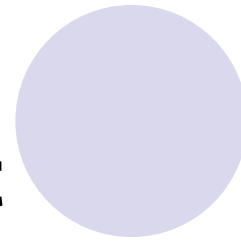
**Common language:** Kids these days don't respect their parents. I want my kids to respect me. If I would have ever talked to my dad like that he would have “whooped” me.



During role play practice dialogue by:

- 1) Gaining a **deeper understanding** of the men's reality and worldview
- 2) Using **problem posing questions**
- 3) **Exposing the connections** between our personal and cultural beliefs
- 4) **Exposing the consequences** of our worldview on ourselves and others
- 5) **Describing another way to view the world**  
– alternative thinking – i.e. equality wheel, nurturing children wheel

# Sample Exercise: Dialogue on Respect



What does it mean to respect your child? Partner?

What does respect look like when disciplining a child?

What beliefs make respect for your partner possible?

Can respect and fear coexist in a relationship between a parent and a child? Between a two adults in an intimate relationship?

# How Supervised Visitation Center Staff Can Create an Atmosphere for Dialogue

- Male and female monitors in the SVC
- Dialogue without judgment
- Exposing contradictions
- Facilitate men 'reading their world'
- Spend 75% of dialogue exploring themes on the Equality Wheel of the DAIP
- Provide culturally specific programs for men

# Wrap-up and Closing

