

TED Talk Title "The Peace Bench & Friendship Circle Protocol: How Art & Humanities Made a Whole School Friends—and Built INNER MOTIVATION for Engaged Learning for a Lifetime"

The Challenge: A School Divided

My husband and I joined an inner-city private school and discovered an environment ruled by punishment, yelling, and isolation. Despite good intentions, the school's strict behaviorist approach was damaging friendships, crushing self-esteem, and stripping students of their motivation.

A Radical Rethink: From Punishment to Participation

We saw firsthand how traditional discipline methods failed to address the roots of conflict. The outer motivation system—using shame, blame, and fame—kept students trapped in cycles of compliance and rebellion. It disconnected them from their innate desire to learn and grow.

The Birth of the Peace Bench & Friendship Circle

In response, I created a Peace Bench and introduced the idea of resolving conflicts through compassionate conversation. I asked the principal to let me develop a class rooted in empathy and creativity, and to her credit, she said yes. What started as an art class evolved into CoCreative Communications, where students explored themes of friendship, trust, and responsibility. The Friendship Circle was born out of the need for deeper transformation—where students gave and received feedback from their peers in a safe space, and true behavioral growth could take root.

The Power of Inner Motivation & Emotional Intelligence

In time, students who had once fought for attention began seeking connection. They shifted from asking “What do I get if I’m good?” to realizing, “It feels good to be kind.” Art, storytelling, and peer dialogue helped them reconnect with their inner compass. Inner discipline began to replace the need for outer control. Peer tutoring and peer counseling emerged organically, and we saw students lead with kindness instead of competition.

Transforming a School Culture: A Case Study

We saw a real shift in culture. Bullying declined. Students began encouraging each other. The ones who had been labeled “troublemakers” became some of the most thoughtful leaders. The school became a place of cooperation, not control. A place where being a good friend became more valued than being the “best” student. And surprisingly—or not—students became better learners, too.

Scaling the Impact: A Call for CoCreative Arts & Communication Training

Now my vision is to train other educators in this method. CoCreative Arts & Communications is a certified program that brings together Art, English, and Communication teachers to integrate emotional intelligence into academics. Through www.cocreativeconnections.com, we aim to train teachers to help their students build classrooms of connection, creativity, and care.

A Bigger Vision: CoCreating a Future of Collaboration

This work is about more than one school. It's about creating a new culture of learning based on empathy and mutual respect. Through our upcoming documentary project at www.cocreating.us, we will show how these methods work and invite educators, communities, and businesses to join in this CoCreative model. Because collaboration—not competition—is what will heal our divided world.

Why This TED Talk Is Timely and Needed

Education needs to change. Twenty years ago, this work was considered “idealistic.” Today, after the isolation and disconnection many students experienced during the pandemic, it's clear: emotional intelligence isn't extra—it's essential.

This TED Talk will resonate deeply. Everyone remembers a time in school when they felt unseen or unfairly punished. Everyone wishes someone had taught them how to be a better friend, listener, or leader.

This is a talk that offers a solution—one rooted in real stories, real results, and real love.

New Online Presentation Format: CoCreative Quest: An Interactive Learning Odyssey

CoCreative Quest is a new model of conference and education that allows participants to learn by doing. Rather than passive panels, attendees engage in a collaborative, immersive journey. Every session is a “Quest” framed around a real-world challenge.

Each segment includes:

- Live storytelling based on true classroom experiences
- Creative, challenge-based learning activities
- Small learning pods that collaborate and present discoveries
- Optional AR/AI tools for deeper exploration
- A dynamic knowledge map to track collective growth

Example: A session titled “Rebuilding the Village” begins with a narrative of a school conflict, then breaks into pods where participants create new models for conflict resolution, empathy-building activities, or alternatives to rewards systems. Final presentations are shared, reflected upon, and mapped in a shared digital space.

How Students Can Learn and Demonstrate Mastery with This Format

Instead of writing static essays, students can create interactive quests to teach others what they've learned. They can build digital storytelling projects, role-play scenarios, or map their learning visually. AI journaling tools can help them reflect and see patterns of growth.

Why This Works

Because learners don't just absorb—they create, reflect, and share. This format supports self-direction, collaboration, and joy. It aligns with the neuroscience of retention, engagement, and emotional connection.

Final Thought

What if instead of just watching a TED Talk, you stepped inside it? What if you could co-create the world you want to see, beginning with how we treat each other in schools? That's the heart of this vision.

It's time to bring the humanity back into education. Let's build Peace Benches, not punishment systems. Let's form Friendship Circles, not behavior charts. Let's raise emotionally intelligent learners who lead with love.

Thank you.

TED Talk Title

The Peace Bench & Friendship Circle Protocol: How Art & Humanities Made a Whole School Friends—and Built INNER MOTIVATION for Engaged Learning for a Lifetime

Main Sections of the Talk

From Punishment to Purpose: The Real Problem in School Discipline Your first day at the school and the culture of yelling, time-outs, and shame-based discipline. How traditional Outer Motivation—shame, blame, and fame ("You're so much better at that than everyone else")—was disconnecting kids from their own inner compass.

The Spark of Change: Art as the Gateway to Friendship How art class became a sanctuary for kindness, self-expression, and peer reflection. The organic emergence of peer tutoring, collaborative play, and emotional honesty.

Building Trust, One Circle at a Time The creation of the Peace Bench and the powerful evolution into the Friendship Circle. Stories of students transforming from isolated or aggressive to connected and cooperative.

The Real Reward: Inner Motivation & Emotional Intelligence Why being “a good student” doesn’t always mean a happy or self-driven one. How safe environments that prioritize empathy and creativity awaken lifelong learning.

Beyond Behaviorism: A Vision for Humane Education The failure of rewards and punishments in cultivating resilient, self-aware students. Your theory of CoCreative Tools—modeling honesty, compassion, and shared humanity in classrooms. The CoCreative Leadership approach is based on the understanding that everyone is a leader at what they are good at and can teach it to the other students. Leadership means we are authentic and seek to engage everyone with our ideas when the time is right. Adults model this by knowing when it is their time to step up and lead, because what they have to share is needed and wanted for everyone to grow. We support everyone being a leader as well as a contributor to a group that honors all voices. Teaching leadership skills to all students helps them find their passions and share them in ways that help everyone learn and grow.

Scaling the Movement: CoCreative Arts & Communications Introducing a certified program that integrates Art, English, and Communications teachers. Through www.cocreativeconnections.com, the program shares these results and trains educators to implement these concepts in their own classrooms.

A New Education Paradigm: Teaching Friendship as a Life Skill Being a good friend is the foundation for being a good human, student, leader, and citizen. The cultural shift begins when humanity reclaims the humanities as the art of being humane.

The Call to CoCreation: Collaboration as Planetary Healing What if schools taught community building as seriously as math? This is a call to action to co-create loving, just, emotionally intelligent learning spaces that prepare students not just to pass tests, but to lead with compassion.

Unique Online Presentation Format: CoCreative Quest CoCreative Quest is an immersive, interactive, live experience. Participants step into a narrative world inspired by real classroom stories. They engage in dialogue, create solutions for real-life classroom challenges, and simulate the Peace Bench experience. Using art, journaling, and role-play in small learning pods, participants build and demonstrate their insights. It culminates in shared storytelling or multimedia presentations created by the participants.

How Students Can Use This to Learn or Demonstrate Mastery Students can use this format to create interactive quests that teach others what they’ve learned. They build digital storytelling projects, role-play simulations, or visual maps of their learning journey. AI-assisted journaling helps students reflect and recognize their own growth.

Why This Works Rather than passively receiving information, learners actively create, reflect, and share. This process supports self-direction, collaboration, and joy. The format draws on research in neuroscience that shows how immersive, emotionally engaging learning leads to deeper understanding and retention.

Final Thought Imagine if instead of watching a TED Talk, you were inside it—participating, reflecting, and helping to co-create real-world solutions. That's what CoCreative Quest offers: a new paradigm of learning that is active, transformative, and deeply human.

Tips, Strategies, and Tools for Presenting Inner vs. Outer Motivation

To Teach Inner Motivation: Ask students, “Why do YOU care about being kind?” Use reflection tools like the “3 Reasons I Care About Being Good” worksheet. Let students help co-create classroom agreements and shared values.

To Shift Away from Outer Motivation: Avoid praise that compares (“You’re the best in class”) and instead focus on genuine appreciation of effort and growth. Replace public shaming or token-based reward systems with natural consequences and restorative practices. Eliminate sarcasm and mean humor, and instead model emotional maturity and respectful boundaries.

Multimedia Presentation Tips: Open with a compelling visual—perhaps a photo of the Peace Bench or an animation of the Friendship Circle. Include brief videos of student reflections or reenactments. Layer in soft background music during emotional moments to enhance resonance. Use interactive polls, such as “How did your school handle conflict?” Conclude with a clear, empowering call to action and provide links to your film and educator training site.

Why This TED Talk Will Go Viral

Timely and Necessary: Post-pandemic, young people are craving trustworthy leadership and emotionally safe spaces. Emotional intelligence is no longer optional; it's essential. What was once called “idealistic” is now necessary.

Deeply Human: Everyone remembers a moment of feeling unfairly judged or silenced as a student. This talk speaks to those memories—and offers healing and hope.

Activating: This is not just a speech. It's a movement. Viewers will want to bring these ideas into their schools, families, and communities.

A Bold New Education Model: This talk challenges the outdated behaviorist model. It offers a practical, inspiring path to raise self-motivated, emotionally intelligent, and compassionate students.

Inspiring Real-Life Stories: These stories of transformation and unexpected friendship are not theoretical—they are real and relatable. Parents, educators, and students will see themselves in them.

Call to Action and Future Vision: A certification program and a documentary will bring this method to the world. Education needs to change, and more people understand that now than ever before. The experience of teaching friendship and art together 20 years ago—once seen as radical—is now visionary, timely, and urgently needed.