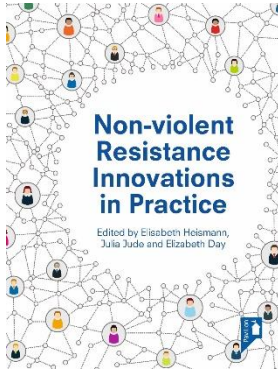


The full chapter: '[New Authority in schools – The P.E.N. programme](#)' is presented here in a PDF format as a contribution from Pavilion Publishing and Media Ltd. to NVR professionals. The chapter is also available to be download at the resources section of the [New Authority Network International \(N.A.N.I.\) website](#).



The new title 'Non-violent Resistance Innovations in Practice' edited by Elisabeth Heismann, Julia Jude and Elizabeth Day, is available to pre-order at the discounted price for NVR professionals. [Book it here](#) from the publisher and don't forget to **enter the code NVR20 in your basket to claim your exclusive 20% discount!**

## Chapter 20: New Authority in schools – the PEN programme

By Idan Amiel and Tal Maimon

### From NVR to a (New) Authority concept

In the year 2000 prof. Omer from Tel Aviv University, published his first book on parenting called: "Parental Presence: Reclaiming a leadership role in bringing up our children". It is important to understand that our work back then focused on aggressive children behaviors. Trying to figure out a unifying concept for parents on how to protect their children from violence and self-risk, we found out that the philosophy of Nonviolent Resistance can be a useful compass in our work with parents. In our view, NVR is more than a theory, it's a state of mind, an attitude or a way of life, set by Gandhi and MLK. NVR served us not only as a compass in our work with parents, in a way it also helped us to find our next working place – Schneider Children's Medical Center of Israel (SCMC).

SCMC, is a comprehensive, highly specialized care hospital of its kind in the Israel and in the Middle East. The hospital is dedicated exclusively to the well-being of children and adolescents and receives patients from the Palestinian Authority, from Jordan and other countries in the Middle East. The Cornerstone Scroll beneath the building's foundations states: "This hospital, dedicated to the inherent right of every child to live a healthy life in a peaceful world, will stand as a "bridge to peace" linking this nation to its many neighbors." (Read more [here](#)). No other place could serve better our team's purpose to create a change with NVR in a violent region like the Middle East and that's were we set in 2004 The Parents' Counseling clinic. The Parents' Counseling clinic is the only outpatient clinic at SCMC of which its sole 'patients' are parents. While the slogan of Schneider Children's is – "It's all about the child" our slogan at the parents' clinic is "It's all about the parent".

In the following years the variety of difficulties confronting parents that asked for our help at SCMC expended dramatically and in many cases were not connected to children's violence. Issues like Anxiety, computer overuse, unsafe driving, school refusal, etc. persuaded us that a broader framework for our work is needed. Preventive parts for helping parents like vigilant care (Shachar-Lavi, 2011) had to be added to our program. But the most drastic change in our working concept was created when we started to implement NVR with teams in residential setting, psychiatric wards and schools.

Just like parents, we found in our work that teams in residential settings and schools feel helpless in front of the variety of extreme children's behaviors (aggression as well as avoidance and anxiety). Our slogan at SCMC changed from 'it's all about the parent' to 'It's all about the caregiver' and the concept of New Authority started to form. A full summary of this process is provided in Idan's introduction to the book *The New Authority: Family, School and Community* (Omer, 2011). In this article we will focus on our work in schools, present some of the New Authority guiding principles for teachers and present a case study to demonstrate those principles and ideas.

### (New) Authority and schools

The traditional authority of the teacher has been severely eroded, yet in today's social climate it is neither desirable nor possible to recapture the authority of the past. In our view, our Western culture is at a crossroads; the more liberal approach to education has proven unsatisfactory and only a partial answer to children's needs, while the authoritarian approach is no longer valid in a world characterized by greater transparency and a more critical relationship to authority. How can teachers build themselves authority that can influence our youth but in a way that is valid in today's culture and society? It is from this crossroad that we have developed the New Authority program for schools.

It is important to note here that unlike the parental counseling at SCMC, which is measured in weeks, the counseling for schools is measured in spans of many months. A change in attitude regarding authority in a multi-participant educational staff is more complex than changing the conceptions of a couple of parents regarding their authority at home. Therefore, the work of our New Authority team is more complicated and challenging in schools.

### **The P.E.N. program for schools – Fundamental Principles**

The point of departure in our work with parents is recognition and understanding of the parents' distress, while challenging the common tendency to almost automatically blame the parents for their children's behavior. A similar process evolved in our work with teachers. We emphasize the overwhelming difficulties facing teachers nowadays, and our P.E.N. program centers on an NVR state of mind for teachers to empower them. The acronym of P.E.N., reflects three significant dimensions in the new authority concept - Presence, Empowerment and Net-support:

**Presence** - Presence is the central motif in the construction of the new authority. In this regard the program emphasizes the importance of the presence of teachers in the student's life - in the classroom, in the hallways and courtyards of the school.

**Empowerment** - A central message in our program is the empowerment of the authority of educational figures in the school. This stance is of great importance and teachers sense it right from the start of the program's implementation. Counselors often arrive at the schools with a basic attitude that says - we are here to help you perform better and improve the students' condition. Our basic position is - we are here to help you improve your situation as teachers and deal with the difficulties you face due to a variety of student's misbehaviors. It is important to realize that this position is not a mere slogan. The rationale behind it is that our "client" is the teacher/principle and not the students. The basic belief that guides us is that empowering parents and teachers will lead to an improvement in the condition of the children and students.

**Net-support** - The best metaphor that describes the difference between the old authority and the concept of the New Authority is authority as a net support instead of rigorous hierarchy pyramid. The power of the new authority figure is measured in her ability to create as many connections as possible which enable the weaving of a network that supports her actions. In this regard we assist teachers in acting so that they may receive backing from colleagues, from parents and from the community in which the school is located alike.

### Basic tools from the P.E.N. program

#### **The bookmark**

There are quite a few means that have been developed to illustrate to teachers how to deal with escalation processes during class. One of the favorites among our staff is "the bookmark". The bookmark is a de-escalation tool for teachers – it's a short sentence which the teacher addresses to the student during an argument or confrontation: "We are both angry right now, we will stop that, and we'll talk about it at the end of the lesson. I ask you to sit down and continue working."

We call this a "bookmark" because a bookmark has two main roles: One is to close the book at this point - in this regard, after the sentence is declared, the teacher "closes" the argument. The student might continue to argue but as long as the teacher doesn't respond, there is no argument, the teacher remains silent and still at this point. But a bookmark has another use - to re-open the book at the exact point later. The phrase "we'll talk about that at the end of the lesson" is designed for that purpose and at the end of the lesson the teacher calls the student over.

The reaction of the teacher at the end of the lesson is solely up to her discretion, but the important point is that the teacher did not respond in the heat of the moment – she delayed her response. The reader who is versed in our approach has probably recognized that this is a simple and effective application of the famous slogan: “Strike the iron while it’s cold!”.

The “team bookmark” is a simple variation of the basic bookmark - under certain conditions, in response to escalating behavior by a student, the teacher may respond with a short sentence: "We do not accept this sort of behavior at our school". The teacher closes the argument but does not invite the student for discussion at the end of class. Instead s/he informs another teacher about the incident. That’s why we call this a team bookmark - one teacher places the bookmark and other re-opens the incident later. The message "We" trickles down to students but mostly grow in strength among the teaching staff. The change from "I" to "We" is a significant milestone in the change of perception from a lone (old) authority to a (new) team authority.

It is important to understand that the isolation and loneliness of teachers is structured in their jobs - the teacher most of the day stands alone in a classroom – the work environment becomes also a state of mind. A central condition to escaping this isolation is to begin thinking and reacting as a team - "We" instead of "I". But acting as a team does not occur easily. Teachers must acquire personal experience in joint responses in order to internalize the stance of "we".

### Mutual Support – The Announcement and the Sit-In

The Announcement and Sit-In are two powerful tools, which allow teachers to demonstrate peaceful, strong, cohesive and determined presence. The use of these tools is intended for cases, where it appears, that the situation in the classroom is not the consequence of the problematic behaviour of a limited number of children (which can be handled individually), but violence and aggression becomes the class norms. The Announcement and a Sit-In allows to resist unwanted behaviours while addressing the class as a community. A community that needs change led by (new) authority figures – the teachers preferably with the support of parents creating together Presence, Empowerment and Net-support.

### **The Announcement**

The Announcement is a statement of intent concerning team position and signifying action for the future. The Announcement makes it clear to the class, which behaviours the team is unwilling to accept. The Announcement represents a turning point, not only for the students but also for the teachers: From now on, everyone is committed to collaboration regarding the issues being announced. The

meaning of the one-sided Announcement is: From now on, staff members will act determinedly to put its content into action, despite probable attempts by students to continue their behaviours.

The Announcement define the unwanted behaviours in a clear and specific way. It is important to note that the Announcement does not mean starting a war; alongside the clear resistance to specific behaviours, a message of care and concern for all students in the class should be stated. The Announcement is written on a paper and should be read in front of the class with several educators who are present there. During the Announcement, only one staff member talks, usually the classroom teacher. The other adult participants in the Announcement should support silently. After everyone is seated, the classroom teacher reads the Announcement to the class. It is recommended, that s/he says it in a not threatening calm and decisive manner. Afterwards s/he hangs the Announcement on the wall, gives a sign and the whole team gets up and leaves the classroom.

After the Announcement, usually we don't expect improvement of the specific behaviours mentioned, but from this moment on the teachers will start working collaboratively, with determination and perseverance against the behaviours defined in it. When a behaviour defined in the Announcement re-occurs, each teacher will use the Team Bookmark and it'll serve for the next act of the Sit-In.

### **The 'Sit-In'**

The Sit-In refers to the re-appearance of behaviours, that were defined in the Announcement. The purpose of the Sit-Ins is, to convey to the class the team's determined decision to resist these behaviours. The team is entering the class at a time pre-determined by staff members, they close the door and sit in front of the class silently on chairs, that are brought in for this purpose. During the Sit-In, only one staff member talks, and the rest supports her/him silently. After everyone has sat down, the teacher who leads the Sit-In describes examples of the behaviours that were Team Bookmarked by the teachers since the Announcement and asks the students to find a way to stop these behaviours. The leading teacher considers the solutions and decides, if they are satisfying. If a proposal was positive and acceptable for the Sit-In host, s/he gives the other teachers a sign, to leave the classroom quietly, preceded by a positive statement that s/he will give the idea suggested an opportunity to work. If no solutions are brought up, the teachers are waiting for fifteen minutes in silence. Before leaving, the leading teacher says: 'We still have not found a proper solution'.

It is important to keep in mind that the Sit-In is not an act of retribution, but a statement. Do not think of it in terms of 'winning' or 'losing'. The initiative of the educational team, the surprise to the class, the duration of the stay in the

classroom and the silence are the elements, which pass on the message: 'We are determined to stop this behaviour'. The initiative, the silence and the determination are the aspects, that rebuild the staff's authority through presence. Furthermore, it must be understood that the Sit-In is not about finding solutions! Students often change their behaviour, without proposing any 'solutions'.

## **The classroom as a community: A case study**

### Background and sketching an intervention plan

The first step in our P.E.N. program is an assessment of the school's needs in a meeting with a steering committee (SC). The steering committee includes 2-3 members from the school, with whom our training team is in constant contact and leads the implementation in school. The first meetings with the SC take place before the onset of the yearly program and enable us to properly define the 'character' of the school and the emphases required in our intervention. The school's 'character' depends on many parameters, including the student's population, the staff room dynamics, the level of parental involvement in the school, etc. Accurate assessment of school characteristics enables us to avoid pitfalls and correctly avail ourselves of the school's strengths & resource.

In one of the elementary schools we were asked to implement the P.E.N. program, it was clear from the beginning that one of the sixth-grade class should be our focus of intervention. Reports about students from this class stated many of them were left unattended in the afternoon, were involved in smoking, thefts and violence. Over the past year, attempts to improve the situation failed mainly due to feelings of despair and fatigue among staff and bad relationship between the parents and the team. Many families were single-parent families, were busy with day-to-day survival and had no time to look after the kids at home. The past school's attempt to involve them, had so far encountered resistance, denial and defensiveness from the parents' side. Even in cases, where there was willingness, to cooperate with the school, the helplessness of the parents prevented progress.

The subject teachers reported that they were fed up and had no desire, to go to the class. The homeroom teacher, who could better handle the class, reported that the subject teachers did not respond with the appropriate disciplinary measures, expecting her to take care of all the problems. She felt alone.

In the next meeting with the school's steering committee, we introduced briefly the content and tools of NVR and the New Authority. We planned that the next meeting will be with all the class teachers and next with the parents. The ideas, that gradually formed for us, were the use of Announcements and Sit-Ins as actions,



that would resist not the behaviour of the whole class. Our aim had three targets: enhancing the teachers' presence in the classroom, increasing the sense of partnership and mutual support among the teachers and helping to build constructive relationship with the parents.

### The Meeting with the teachers and preparing the Announcement

The first meeting with the teachers, which was planned as a 3 hours workshop was very charged, and so was the classroom teacher. She shared feelings of helplessness, that she had felt about the interference in her classroom and her sense of failure. She burst into tears, when her fellow teachers shared similar feelings. Considering that about 15 students in this class were described as having very challenging behaviors and lacking any kind of parental supervision, it was not surprising.

Although it seemed at one point, that the helplessness became contagious among the teachers, the prepared plan with the SC helped to create concrete steps and gave hope. Focus, clarity and cohesion were crucial at this point for the teachers. Through focusing on the students' acts in the classroom, three behaviours were chosen to be on the Announcement: physical and verbal violence against staff and other students, speaking without permission during class and walking around during lessons.

The teachers were instructed, how to set a 'team bookmark' in case the behaviours declared at the Announcement will repeat. After putting a team bookmark, the teachers were asked, to return to their teaching as usual and record it in a class log. The teachers were encouraged, to consult with one another, on how to handle the behavior in accordance with the existing rules of the school and the documented problematic behaviours were to be used in the next Sit-In.

### Joining the parents

The next step was to join in the parents and despite the skeptic mindset of some teachers, who believed, that this task would be almost impossible, the SC set a date for a meeting with the parents. The classroom teacher called all the parents personally, in order to enhance the attendance in the meeting. These private calls were time-consuming but made the upcoming meeting a more 'special class event'.

Despite the initial worries of the teachers this meeting succeeded well. The SC members were able to overcome resistances by highlighting the resemblance of the goals of the parents and the teachers. Some parents agreed to actively



become involved in the process of change and a list of parents who were willing to arrive to school during day time was made. Still, the parents did not know the exact plan (e.g. Announcement & Sit-In) at this stage and were only asked, if they could spare some time and join the teachers in their efforts. Transparency is an important pillar in NA, but in some cases when you lead a way it's better to reveal your plan step by step.

### Acting the Announcement

On one Tuesday morning, the participating teachers met at the teachers' room, grabbed a chair and **moved together** to the classroom. The teachers entered the classroom, put their chairs in front of the students and sat down, without saying a word. The entry was a complete surprise to the students, they were totally shocked. Seeing the school director, the deputy and most of their teachers entering one after the other created an impressive impact.

The classroom teacher who was the only one who stood waited a few seconds in silence and started to read the following announcement:

"Dear students of the sixth grade, we are gathered here, all teachers of this class and the school board, to express our resistance to the current state of the class. Henceforth, we will resist physical violence and verbal abuse against teachers and students. We will also resist walking around and talking without permission during class. We will do, whatever it takes, to stop these behaviours and involve others as necessary. We are not going to give in, nor give up on you as individual students and as a class! We will do, whatever it takes, to stop the verbal violence and disturbances in your classroom. It is our duty as teachers!

Signed, your teachers and the school board.

The students who were still shocked listened quietly. When the classroom teacher finished reading she turned around to the announcement board and stapled the Announcement. On the background of the tense silence in the classroom the sounds of the pins penetrating the board created an unexpected dramatic effect, that symbolized the teachers determination, that a change is required. After a few seconds of silence, the classroom teacher gave a signal, and all the participating teachers left the room, without adding a word.

After leaving the room while arriving to the teacher's room to put back the chairs, the classroom teacher, who had maintained a strong attitude throughout the announcement ritual, burst into tears of saying: 'I don't feel alone anymore'. All the teachers supported her, expressing their appreciation for the way, she handled the

announcement and had represented all of them. A (new) authority state of mind and determination clearly started at this same moment.

The parent's reactions to the announcement came immediately after. When one of the students told his mother about the 'strange' and dramatic entrance of the staff into the class, the mother told him, that the parents already knew something is going to change. They had a meeting about it two days ago. The support net started to be weaved... it was now time to involve the parents in a more direct and active way.

### The 'Sit-Ins'

NVR is a slow and gradual process and support is a crucial element in it. The announcement only signified the beginning of change, it was announced by the teachers but now support is needed. On the day after the Announcement, the parents, who had expressed their willingness to participate, were called by the school counselor (who was one of the SC members) and were invited to the first Sit-In. A Sit-In at school requires complex preparation (replacing teachers in classrooms, making sure parents can arrive to school during work hours etc.), so the first Sit-In was scheduled in advance for the week after the announcement. The SC didn't wait to see if the students will change their behavior, even after a successful announcement our working assumption is that time, patience, presence and several Sit-Ins, are needed for the desired transformation to happen. During the week between the announcement and the first Sit-In, the classroom teacher had gathered the documentation in the class log, which established the text that was to be used in the Sit-In.

Two parents came, to take part in the first Sit-In. A few minutes before they joined the Sit-In, they were instructed, to keep silent and just support the team with their presence. When they entered the classroom, again the students were shocked, as it now became clear to them, that the Announcement was not a one-time event, and this time the staff team was supported by representatives of their parents.

While all the adults sited in front of the class, the classroom teacher stood and began saying: 'We're all here, the school administration, teachers and your parents' representatives, because in the last week there were several problematic behaviours, that we strongly oppose. Indeed, last week, there were also positive behaviours in the classroom (she noted examples), but we are here because of the problematic behaviours, which we had announced as unacceptable (she noted detailed examples here- referring to the day, time and class/break time in which they occurred)'. At this point she sat down and said in a lower voice: 'We will sit

here together and wait for you, to find a solution to those behaviours. What do you suggest?’

The classroom teacher wrote the suggested solutions on the class board and just asked, not to repeat already proposed solutions. At the end of the Sit-In, the classroom teacher announced: ‘The staff will continue to oppose any sign of physical or verbal violence and disruption in the classroom. This is our commitment, and this is what we will do. We will not give in, and we will not give up on you. You are important and dear to us’. Everyone left the room, except of the history teacher, who stayed on to teach the class as if nothing had happened.

It is worth noting here again, that the solutions suggested by the students are not the important part of a Sit-In, after all its more about taking responsibility over your acts and not about creating a dialogue. NVR (especially the Resisting part in it) starts when dialogue ends and the Sit-In procedure is not about suggestions or dialogue, but about protest (in this case the adults protest the students’ behaviors). What was most important from our part was the teachers’ strong team experience acting together, feeling potent and supported by the parents. New and strong ties in the woven net of support were built during this act. A second Sit-In was already scheduled for two weeks later. This time in the presence of even more parents...

#### Together we stand, divided we fall

After the second Sit-In, the SC gathered the staff, to catch up on recent events and decide on the next steps. Teachers reported a significant change, almost dramatic, in class dynamics. It was clear, that they felt, they were no longer alone, they were struggling as a team, which strengthened them significantly. The team effort also led to changes in the students. Almost all the teachers described an improvement in classroom atmosphere, which meant, that for the first time it was possible to teach properly. Only one teacher spoke differently. She almost apologized for being a ‘party-pooper’, saying, that she did not feel any improvement in her class. It was important to emphasize, that the difficulties, that she was experiencing, were not her private problem, but again something that should be approached by the entire staff. Therefore, the NVR intervention in the class would need to continue, until a significant improvement will be also with this teacher. This teacher was chosen to lead the next Sit-In instead of the classroom teacher.

After four more Sit-Ins, the behavioural problems became from widespread to sporadic incidents with 2-3 students. The positive voices of the students began to get louder and the atmosphere totally changed. It was decided that NVR acts concerning the whole class should be stopped and individual treatment plan for 2 students were tailored.

It is noteworthy, that several months into the process, the paper, on which the Announcement was written, was still hanging on the walls of the classroom. The students had endless opportunities, to rip it down, throw it away, or at least draw on it, but they did not.

### Concluding remarks

As we wrote in the opening of this chapter our focus is not on the children but on adults. But, when the teachers and parents change their attitude and their state of mind, the students just followed. In our view NVR is about resisting children's behaviors but at the end what all children needs is to feel that a (new) authority is there, whether it's at home or at their class. The New Authority concept offers a perception of the school environment as a community, where all the authority figures work together, conveying to the children and young people in their care a message of presence and joint action: 'We are here, and we are not alone. We are together, and we are with you'.

The central focus of the P.E.N. program is to empower the authority of the educational staff at the school. Our central message to teachers is - we are here to empower you. If you are not stronger and have more presence, we haven't done our job! We believe that if we don't empower the teachers, and as long as the school staff does not feel sure and confidence, it will be difficult to improve the student's state. Our goal is to build a new authority for teachers and for parents. If we'll need to summaries the New Authority state of mind we would define it like this:

The new authority is about empowerment. Influential figures, like parents or teachers, need not be defined by their ability to control children but rather by their ability to **initiate**, whether it's initiating care, initiating support and yes in some cases initiating resistance through NVR in order to build a safe community to our children.

The P.E.N. program defines tools and procedures for teachers & parents to act that way, feel that way and at the end make the best for our children. After all they are the real reason why we are doing all that...

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<https://www.schneider.org.il/eng>
- "A bridge for peace":  
<https://www.schneider.org.il/?CategoryID=1020&ArticleID=3197>