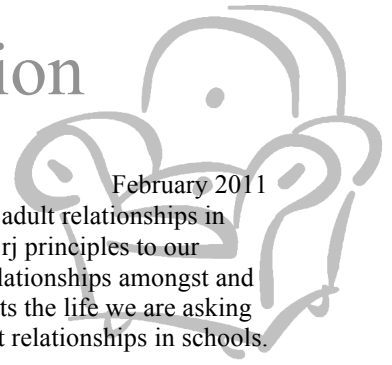


# Monthly Restorative Justice in Education DIALOGUE

Volume 2: Issue 5

February 2011

In the past month several of you have sent emails with questions and concerns relating to rj and adult relationships in schools. This is something to be celebrated as it is a clear indicator that more of us are applying rj principles to our personal lives, rather than thinking about it only in terms of affirming, building and repairing relationships amongst and with students. When this happens, we can be sure that we are beginning to model for our students the life we are asking them to live. Thus this issue of RJ Dialogue is dedicated to highlighting what rj can do for adult relationships in schools.



## Focussed Lenses



In all of our efforts to establish relational school and classroom cultures, we can get side tracked when things don't seem to result in the communities we imagine. When our concerted efforts initially seem to produce rich rewards, we are excited and ready to embrace rj fully. However, relationships are complex. Being consistent in employing rj principles becomes particularly difficult when we get tired of conflicts and attitudes that seem impervious to restorative conversations or when we are called on to participate in a rj conference for something we have been involved in. The temptation at these moments is to become authoritarian and reinstate strict rules and consequences that will apply to all. If we succumb to this temptation, we need to question how committed we were to the original vision. Reflect on the following quotes and consider what they mean for you and your journey with your colleagues and students:

*"He who loves community, destroys community; he who loves the brethren, builds community."*

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1978)*

*The enemy in the community reveals the enemy inside us.*

*Jean Vanier (2003)*

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field. I will meet you there.*

*Rumi (13<sup>th</sup> C)*

## Wondering??

*How can restorative practice be put to use in a workplace setting?*

The response to this question is complex, yet if we have courage, it is also simple. Because rj is rooted in a philosophy that honours the worth of all and believes people are relational beings, rj can guide practice

wherever people gather to work or socialize. To illustrate this, consider the following:

Think about your specific employment situation. Think about your colleagues. How many of them do you wish would simply 'go away'? How many of them do you respect more highly than others? What is happening that makes you feel this way?

What is most important is for you to become conscious of what you are thinking and feeling so that your unconscious discriminating responses become apparent to you, allowing you to make an explicit decision to change if necessary?

Many times people feel they are respecting and honouring their colleagues but in reality their peers are feeling judged or insecure in their presence. This leads to mistrust and the donning of masks. Over time if nothing changes, this lack of trust in a work environment escalates resulting in serious employment issues.

So how do you become conscious of attitudes and perspectives you are conveying that may be causing harm? Though it may sound silly, *facilitate a circle with yourself*, or as our young students might say, have a meeting with three people—me, myself and I. Ask yourself the key rj questions—what happened? What am I thinking and feeling? Who is being impacted? How? What's the hardest thing for me? What do I need (to do) in order to move on? Write out the answers or speak them aloud. In most cases this will provide a beginning insight to lead to a breakthrough of one kind or another. If you still feel stuck, imagine that your colleague is with you and responding to the questions as well. What do you hear them saying?

This process will require courage to be honest on your part. But if you can do it, you will most likely be surprised by what you discover. This will lead to personal change, which will have an impact on your colleagues as well.

So: How can restorative justice practice be put to use in a workplace environment? It may appear that I have 'ducked' the question and placed full responsibility on the individual. This is not the intention; it is simply a way in which to begin to think about rj in the workplace. Until it becomes our personal vision, rj will be derailed by each of us as we revert to our default settings where rules were take precedence over the needs of people. By beginning with ourselves, changing the lenses we wear when we are looking at our colleagues, we will discover that rj will be put to use in all workplace situations. It will affect:





- how staff meetings are structured and conducted;
- your eye contact, body language, tone of voice, words you use when you speak with your colleagues;
- when you have a disagreement with a colleague, you will have a framework to use to go and speak to them directly instead of behind their back;
- your expectations and starting point when it is time for contract negotiations whether you are an employer or employee;
- how you engage with complimentary or disgruntled parents or community members;
- what you place as priorities in your position.
- the physical arrangement of your office, classroom, hallways, etc.

The list could go on. Because rj is a philosophy, a way of being and viewing life, it will impact everything you do. IT WILL NOT BE EASY; in fact it will be very, very difficult. As rj grows, resources are also growing that provide explicit suggestions for how to incorporate rj in workplace environments. However, each workplace is unique, and each workplace committed to rj will ultimately have to decide *how* they are going to live out that vision in their particular setting.

## Resources

*Doing Democracy with Circles* by J. Ball, W. Caldwell, and K. Pranis: A unique resource that outlines clearly how to use circles in community planning. An excellent resource for administrators looking for ways engage community effectively. Available from Living Justice Press [www.livingjusticepress.org/](http://www.livingjusticepress.org/) or amazon.ca for \$20.

*Corporate Circles* by Maureen Fitzgerald. This little practical book outlines a rj approach for addressing specific conflicts in workplaces as well as how build strong teams that empower individuals and enhance accountability. “If you are looking for a long-term solution to conflict and are finding that traditional methods ... are not working, this book is for you. If you think that your group is not communicating openly and could be working much better together, keep reading.” Available from [www.amazon.ca/](http://www.amazon.ca/)

## Bullfrogs and Butterflies

The following story is fictional but composed of real experiences that many struggle with. Read it and consider it for the insights and challenges it provides.

I am a teacher at Lakeside Community School. I work hard to integrate rj principles and practices into my classroom. As a result of the talking circles I use throughout the day, my focus is far less on student behaviour and far more on exploring who we are as people. I am pleased with the openness of my students, their ability to communicate effectively, and the safe

and caring environment that is developing. I can sense that they feel confident in their own abilities and feel safe enough to take risks that lead to new learning and honest relationships with their peers. Things aren't perfect, but we know how to hold each other accountable and what to do when we hurt each other. Recently we have also begun to explore how curriculum content points us to relationship.

I am troubled however. When I walk into the staff room at break times, I am hesitant. I am never sure who will be in there and if certain colleagues are there, I tend to leave quickly. I am tired of talk that diminishes others. It's never really explicit, but it's the little digs that do most damage. What I am most frustrated by is my own response—either I quickly jump in and contribute to the judgements being made, or I leave. Either way I don't feel I am doing anything to restore or build up the well-being of others.

I see this in employer-employee relationships too. The principal keeps her distance except when she needs something from us; the board members rarely communicate except to hand us the next revised policy that needs to be implemented. Staff meetings are draining and few people contribute meaningfully. We are all guarded it seems to me, afraid that what we say or do will be held against us.

Why is it that I am able to nurture a relational culture in my classroom, but can't seem to encourage the same amongst the adults in the school? What's holding me back?

## You are invited!

The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) 14<sup>th</sup> World Conference is coming to Canada in June. Send a delegation from your school or district to Halifax, Nova Scotia and engage in the global dialogue that is growing. You will return amazed and motivated. See [www.iirp.org](http://www.iirp.org) for more information.

Do you have a story to share, a question to ask, a great idea for integrating rj into your curriculum and pedagogy? If you do, email it to: [dvaandering@mun.ca](mailto:dvaandering@mun.ca) Remember this is a 'comfy chair' DIALOGUE. Don't fret too much about format or style ... just get your thoughts down in writing and send it my way.

*\*\*THE RJ MONTHLY DIALOGUE IS BROUGHT TO YOU THROUGH A COLLABORATION BETWEEN SHALEM MENTAL HEALTH NETWORK (SHALEMNETWORK.ORG) AND DOROTHY VAANDERING (MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND)\*\**

*Rj acknowledges justice as honouring the inherent worth of all and is enacted through relationship. When something occurs that undermines the well-being of some, a space is provided for dialogue whereby the dignity of all involved and affected can be restored so that each can once again become a fully contributing member of the community of which they are a part.  
(D. Vaandering, 2009)*

*As the readership of the RJ DIALOGUE grows, for those new to it, a note explaining its origins and original audience is warranted. The first issue of RJ DIALOGUE came out in October 2009 for those who had taken rj training workshops through the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools and Shalem Mental Health Network in Ontario, Canada. Set in the context of a faith-based independent school system, the connection of rj to indigenous and spiritual traditions was made with a particular focus on the Judeo-Christian perspective. This focus is also the context of the RJ DIALOGUE. If you are receiving this e-newsletter, your contact information was provided by yourself or someone who thought you might be interested. **If you wish to be removed from the list, please reply to this email with a subject line stating: Remove me from e-list.** If you are enjoying the newsletter be sure to contribute your questions, stories and resources. And if you know of others who might benefit from it, by all means pass it on and/or send me their email address to add to the mailing list.*