

# Monthly Restorative Justice in Education DIALOGUE

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A new calendar year always brings with it new resolutions for doing things differently, for improving how we live in some small way. It reminds me of the saying, “Be patient, God isn’t finished with me yet,” a saying that is as much spoken to ourselves as it is to others who we feel don’t accept us. The beginning of a new year provides us with a space to consider again how to live out God’s intention for us. For most of us who have been introduced to rj in the past few years, one way to do this is to remember the fundamental principles of rj and remind ourselves of our desire to find ways to create space in our classrooms so relationships can be nurtured and harm can be repaired. We trust that this issue of the RJ DIALOGUE will remind you of the potential rj holds for your classroom, school and personal life and encourage you to continue in your commitment to take small (or large) steps for living it out. Thanks to all who contributed to this issue. Your contributions remind us that there is such incredible work being done daily. Happy New Year!

## Focussed Lenses

*So when the shoe fits, the foot is forgotten;  
When the belt fits the belly is forgotten;  
When the heart is right, ‘for’ and ‘against’ are forgotten.*  
Thomas Merton

Restorative justice practice brings the hearts of people to a place where ‘for’ and ‘against’ can be forgotten. It creates environments where people are acknowledged, respected and heard. Key to participating in this is how we CARE for each other--and for educators caring is central to our roles. Recently I was made aware of 2 kinds of caring\*\* that can help to assess how we practice rj—*dependent care* and *authentic care*.

In our caring do we “leap in and take over” for the other? This kind of care promotes dependency and allows us as the caregiver to stay in control. We think we do it in the best interest of the one needing care but the one we care for experiences tension because their understanding of the situation is ignored. To provide authentic care, we must be willing to “provide while being led” by the one in need. The first step for doing this is to move barriers that separate and prevent us from listening to and learning from each other. Restorative justice is all about creating this barrier-free living.

How often do you forget ‘for’ and ‘against’?

\*\*Slocum, A. (1995). “Taking care” in the family studies classroom. *Canadian Home Economics Journal*, 45(4), p. 133-138.

*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)

## Bullfrogs and Butterflies

### Math meets Restorative Justice

It was the beginning of the school year and I was teaching grade 4 for the first time in 10 years. I gave my class a survey on the first day of school to see what my students were excited about as well as what subjects they found most difficult and most interesting etc.

The survey's results showed that 76% of the class listed Math as their hardest subject. I was taken aback since I was their Math teacher last year! I thought about it for a while and realized that something needed to be done in order for Math to be successful for the rest of the year. I held a class circle about 3 weeks after the survey to discuss the matter. This gave the students time to get to know each other within the setting of a new grade. (Timing is crucial!) At the beginning of circle time I explained what I found out on the survey. Each student gave voice to their thoughts and it came out that most of them had a fear that Math would be "hard" in grade 4. They were afraid that they wouldn't "get it". The big numbers scared them as well as the new Math book. I had the opportunity to listen and then we went around the circle again. I asked the students how Math could be better for them and how they could feel more confident and able to learn Math. It was an incredible moment in the class. We were working together trying to figure out how to make Math an enriching, growing class.

Jeannette Hickey

### From adversaries to friends

Julian and Spencer are in a Grade 1 /2 combination grade. Julian is the older (though shorter) and Spencer, his mother told me, is afraid of him. In the morning when they arrive at school, Julian dares Spencer to go down the slide, which has water at the bottom, saying if Spencer does it, he will follow. Spencer goes, gets wet and Julian

laughs at him saying, “I got you!” Spencer is very upset, but because he’s afraid of Julian does not go for help.

Another classmate sees this and reports to me. In class, we hold a circle to discuss what happened. I use the rj questions, and allow any student holding the talking piece to speak. What happens ‘blows my mind’!

Classmates talk about Spencer’s feelings with respect (remember Julian is the popular kid in class!). They acknowledge that what Julian did was very hurtful. After 15 minutes of discussion, as facilitator, I ask, “What does Spencer need?” Julian asks for the talking piece. He apologizes and promises to help Spencer. I then ask, “What does Julian need?” Various students vow to help him remember in order to make sure Spencer feels safe.

At recess, I ask to speak with Julian and we talk about how Spencer is afraid of him, and how his mom is concerned. Julian did not know that and was immediately ready to make things well. We discussed what Spencer’s mom needed, and Julian suggested he write her a note (He could not agree to my suggestion to speak directly with her). I enlisted the help of Julian’s parents telling him that he needed all the support he could get in this. (Julian was worried about that, but his parents were very supportive.)

What an amazing time this was, and the relationship between Spencer and Julian improved dramatically. A few months later, I asked Spencer if he was still afraid of Julian and he looked at me with wondering eyes, “Me afraid of Julian? We are friends!”

## RJ, Curriculum and Pedagogy

As J. Hickey’s story illustrates beautifully how rj can help educators remove barriers between them and their students, making room for listening and learning from each other, consider too how you can bring rj principles into picture book, novel, media studies, or history. Regardless of the event or story being studied, ask students to journal or role play character perspectives.

### **Example:**

Event: Jacques Cartier’s arrival in North America and his interaction with Chief Donnacona and his sons after he planted the cross on the Gaspé Bay: In role students speak about the encounter by reflecting on and responding to the questions: What happened? What were you thinking or feeling at the time? What was the hardest thing for you? What impact has this had on others? What do you need to move forward?

This can be done in small groups or a more elaborate activity could be to design a full restorative justice conference that brings in people related to each of the participants in the story. Incredible new insights will arise that will motivate students to read and question

more deeply. This is also an excellent way for you to practice facilitation skills removed from an actual situation with students or colleagues.

What historical events, picture books or novels do you teach where you could use this idea?

## You said it!

**Looking back** I thought rj was a response to conflict. **Now** I think it is a way of being.

**In the future** I believe rj will be aligned with the forgiveness and restoration that God offers humankind through Jesus Christ.

*Lesla Racicot*

## Resources

*Heart of Hope Resource Guide: A guide for using peacemaking circles to develop emotional literacy, promote healing and build healthy relationships* by C. Boyes-Watson and K. Pranis: This guide book, written specifically for social workers engaged with at-risk youth, is packed with practical ideas for using circles to develop relationships. Many of the ideas can be used directly or modified slightly to be used in classrooms. Available from: Center for Restorative Justice in Boston: [crj@suffolk.edu](mailto:crj@suffolk.edu) for \$29.95.

*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 to engage community effectively. Available from Living Justice Press [www.livingjusticepress.org/](http://www.livingjusticepress.org/) or [amazon.ca](http://amazon.ca) for \$20.

## You are invited!

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](http://SHALEMNETWORK.ORG)) AND DOROTHY VAANDERING (MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND)\*\***

*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.*