

Restorative Justice in Education

Monthly DIALOGUE

This month our dialogue grapples with living out restorative justice through policy and in personal interaction beyond the school walls. Whether you are new to rj or have been working to implement it for several years already, we trust the conversation will bring you into contact with the essence of rj, and challenge you to put your new ideas into practice.

Welcome Bernice Huinink-Buiter and Sharon Broersma-deVries who join us as co-editors of the Dialogue. We look forward to the contributions they make for this and future issues.

Focused Lenses



Soil, Seeds and Harvest

Take a seed, any seed, and hold it in the palm of your hand (or at least imagine the seed in your palm).

There is a story about a sower who sows seed, some of which falls onto good soil and produces a crop of 30, 60, or 100 fold. Reflecting on the qualities of that good soil, I considered how it is capable of: (a) *embracing the seed*, (b) *giving it time* to germinate without letting other plants crowd it out, (c) *providing nutrients*, and (d) has *space* for the roots to extend into. Understanding this story in terms of my spiritual development, I also recognize how this is an incredible metaphor for what is needed for rj to take root in a school or classroom. Consider the seed to be the heart of rj -- honouring people as 'profoundly relational' (Pranis, 2007) and worthy simply because they are human beings, image bearers of God. To grow, it needs:

1. to be *embraced* by dark moistness. In your engagement with rj have you taken hold of the seed and simply held on to it and reflected on it?
2. to *have time* to germinate, time to emerge without being crowded out by other distractions. Are you giving rj the time it needs to take root and sprout or is it fighting to survive your busyness, fighting to survive amongst one of many "strategies" you are dabbling in?
3. to be *fed* by nutrients. Have you applied your own life circumstances to rj, fed it with actual experiences, fed it with the qualities of who you are to discover how it applies?
4. to *have space* into which it can grow. Do you give rj space in your teaching/life each day? Do you extend its principles and practices into different contexts and experience the results?

Open your hand. Look at the seed. Is the soil you have planted rj into of the quality that will result in a harvest of 30, 60, or 100 times what was sown?



Restorative justice acknowledges justice as honouring the worth of all and enacted through relationship. When something occurs that affects 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 contributing member of the community of which they are a part. (D. Vaandering, 2011)

Bullfrogs and Butterflies

Codes of conduct and discipline policies

As schools engage with rj, one of the most challenging tasks involves policy change especially in regards to codes of conduct and discipline policy. It is not unusual that even with the best of intentions, changing behaviour remains the key focus, rather than building, maintaining and repairing relationships (Hopkins, 2011). One faith-based school's efforts are described below and the resulting code and policy are attached as appendices. After you read these, whether faith-based, public, or independent school context, read your school's documents and ask: "What message are we sending?" If you are brave, ask your students to tell you what message they are receiving. How can you make the core of the document about relationship rather than behaviour?

"Cultivating a restorative justice culture in the school means intentionally building and growing relationships. Teachers and administration walk alongside students, leading and modelling for their students how to live in community, nurturing them to grow in their relationship with God. As teachers, it is our privilege to support students in their relationships with one another, with peers, with support staff, with creation, as well as to their task as students. What does it mean to be a student at JKCS? Our Student Code of Conduct is a guide for how we live and learn together. Our discipline policy is a guide for what we do when we don't keep our commitments. Together they express a structure for living and learning in community." (John Knox Christian School, Woodstock)



Need more support or ideas?
Looking for an idea you read
in last year's
RJ Monthly DIALOGUE?

Back issues of the
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE in
Education Monthly
DIALOGUE are available on-
line at
http://www.shalemnetwork.org/RJ_RP_in_schools.html

Talking Sticks



Are you part of a book club, a Bible study, a committee where a few people dominate the conversation? Take a risk and at your next gathering suggest using a talking piece to ensure that all members have opportunity to express themselves. Introduce it in a non-judgmental manner. Simply say that you've recently come across an approach that you feel would help to organize and deepen discussion, which you'd like to try out. Ask them if that is ok with them and explain that at the end of the night, you will reflect together on how people felt it worked. At the end of the meeting when you do a final round on the topic (How did you feel the talking piece impacted the discussion tonight), you may be surprised that those who tend to dominate will express how it helped them listen more effectively. Give it a try and let us know what happened! (If possible use an object that has meaning for the group ... it doesn't have to be a stick.)

Wondering

What role do suspensions or detentions take when restorative justice is implemented in a school?

This is a common and very important question. Often educators, administrators and parents misunderstand that if a school engages with rj, there will be no more detentions or suspensions. If detentions and suspensions are doled out as punishment, then these practices have no place in schools committed to rj. However, in a rj school, detentions and suspensions are applicable if they are used *not as a punitive measure* but as a means for preparing to address the harm caused. For example, if another person's safety is at stake if the person causing harm remains at the school, the student can be asked to go home till a process is put in place that will result in making the school a safe space for everyone. If the person causing harm is distraught and needs space to calm down and going home is a viable option, they can ask to go home. If the situation is complex and time is required to sort out details before deciding how to proceed in a way to bring about resolution and healing to the situation, the student can be asked to go home.

In any of these situations, students and adults alike must recognize that the time away is a time to work out ways to bring about healing and restoration. In this context, the terms suspension and detention really no longer apply as they carry connotations of punitive measures. Consider renaming this time away. Some suggestions could be: **Time out**, or **Planning time**. As well, the length of the time away for a school engaging with rj will never be standardized ... time will depend on the needs of all involved.

Consider how your school uses suspensions and detentions by reflecting on the following questions:

Are these practices being employed out of an attitude of: *the more you punish the less likely they will do it again* OR is time out a means for embodying the commitment that: *the stronger the relationship the less likely we will act inappropriately towards each other* (IIRP, 2000).

Another way to assess your school's use of suspensions and expulsions is to ask: does this action reinforce for students that they *belong* or that they are being *alienated*? Be sure the link connecting people remains strong.



You are invited!

As indicated earlier, this newsletter is unique because it carries your thoughts, questions, ideas, concerns. Thus to keep it going, we need your input regularly. Do you have:

- a story to share?
- a question you *wonder* about?
- a great *idea* for integrating rj into your curriculum and pedagogy?
- a quote or insight that will *focus* our restorative justice lenses?

If you do, email it to:

dvaandering@mun.ca

Remember this is a *talking circle* DIALOGUE. Don't fret too much about format or style ... just get your thoughts down in writing and send it my way. If necessary, I'll edit it, ask for your approval, and add it to an upcoming issue. When necessary, it's possible to not have your name attached to it if identifying you will impact your school, colleagues, or students.



A bit of background...

****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)****

*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.*



“To be human is to accept and love others just as they are, weaknesses and strengths, because we need each other. Weakness, recognized, accepted, and offered, is at the heart of belonging, so it is at the heart of communion with another.”

- Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human*, p. 40

Hopkings, B. (2011). *The restorative classroom*. London, UK: Optimus Press.

Pranis, K. (2007). Restorative values. In G. Johnstone and D. Van Ness (eds.) *Handbook of Restorative Justice*. Collumpton: Willan Publishing.

Vaandering, D. (2011). A faithful compass: Rethinking the term restorative justice to find clarity. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 14(3), 307-328.

Vanier, J. (2008). *Becoming human*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press.

Student Code of Conduct

John Knox Christian School, Woodstock, Ontario

"Love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind...; and love your neighbour as yourself." Luke 10:27.

God created us to live in relationship so we can help each other be who He intended us to be. As we seek..."

To Grow in Our Relationship with God, we:

- speak of God and His Word in respectful ways.
- encourage others and remember to listen and talk to God in whatever we do,
- develop and use the talents and abilities God gave us for serving.

To Grow in Our Relationship with Those in Authority:

We recognize that they are a gift from God to guide us and keep us safe and therefore we:

- respect each other in our speech and conduct.
- obey so no harm is done.
- encourage others to do the same.

To grow in Our Relationship to Others:

We work to honour, respect, and encourage each other. We do this when we:

- address each other properly and kindly.
- respect each other's property, body and personal space.
- encourage everyone to feel included.
- use humour for enjoyment, not to harm others.
- apologize and make things right when we have caused harm
- forgive those who hurt us
- ask God to give us strength to care for each other as he cares for us.

To grow in Our Relationship to our task at J.K.C.S.:

Since all we do is for the Lord we:

- do our best to participate in lessons and activities to learn about God's creation and use it with respect.

To grow in our relationship with Creation:

We proclaim that the 'earth is the Lord's and everything in it' (Psalm 24:1).

Therefore we:

- respect the resources God has blessed us with at school (reduce, recycle and reuse wherever possible).
- accept responsibility for the cleanliness of the school
- care for school property (furniture, books, equipment, and building).
- report any damage done and volunteer to pay for damages if we are responsible.
- enjoy and care for our playground.

"My [child], do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart." Proverbs 3:1

Discipline Policy at JKCS, Woodstock

As image-bearers, the task as students, teachers and parents at JKCS is to live a life of service to God and to each other. Christian love, as found in 1 Corinthians 13, forms the basis for all interaction between the teachers, the parents, and the students. Together we strive to create within the school a wholesome and safe environment where significant learning is possible and God is honoured.

The COO will ensure that the school property is a safe place for learning and for social relationships to occur. All Ministry policies applicable to JKCS as well as JKCS Board policies will be made known to the educators, parents, and students.

It is the mission of JKCS, as society and board, to invite students into a world and life view that brings them closer to God. Teachers encourage growth for the whole child, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. They strive to invite students into a relationship with God and all those around them. Teachers invite students into a greater awareness of their true status, purpose and destiny, as covenant children, citizens in the Kingdom of Heaven, and citizens in this country of Canada.

A wholesome school atmosphere develops when the roles of teacher, student and parent are fulfilled with mutual love and respect.

(i) Teachers are called to guide, to motivate, to instruct, and to create an environment in which the child will freely want to engage with learning. Teachers will be aware of their moral and legal obligations to implement the Board's policies. Teachers communicate with parents as they deem necessary when their child(ren) have chosen to break community through hurtful, inappropriate activity. Parents may then also be invited to participate in the healing process.

(ii) Students are called to engage with God's world in playful, meaningful ways so that they grow in their ability to problem solve and respond purposefully to their world and its Creator. When they choose to respond in inappropriate and hurtful ways that damage relationships, they will be called back into community through an invitation to dialogue and repair the harm done. In this way students experience forgiveness, restoration, and unconditional love and learn to provide this for others.

(iii) Parents are partners in education. They assist the staff by helping their children understand the importance of developing, maintaining, and restoring caring relationships. Parents communicate with teachers as needed, sharing any concerns their child(ren) may be experiencing.

It is our prayer and desire that JKCS be a school that is safe for all, where growth in student responsibility and self-discipline takes place, where a growing sense of community is built, and an open, transparent process of discipline exists to bring about restoration of relationships.

Commonly it is conflict that gives rise to the need for discipline, that is the need for correction, restitution, and reconciliation. Too often conflict is seen as a negative when instead it presents positive, valuable opportunities for teaching and learning. A key concept in discipline is teaching, and therefore teachers play a vital role in the process. Teachers must provide a high level of support, nurture, and encouragement, while at the same time making sure that clear, consistent expectations are in place. In this way, students are led to take responsibility for their actions, given opportunity to repair harm/damage that was done, and experience the forgiveness of those affected by his/her actions.

At JKCS, a continuum of Restorative Practices is used to bring about restitution, forgiveness, and reconciliation. These include:

A) In order to foster a sense of awareness if a student has erred, teachers will use affective statements and questions so that students will come to know what they have done wrong, whom they may have hurt, and what steps can be taken to bring about restitution. This phase usually involves just the one causing harm and the teacher.

B) If ineffective then teachers will set up small conferences with the student involved in the unacceptable behaviour, including, if appropriate, those affected by the action. The purpose of this meeting is to promote healing and reconciliation by prompting the students to find a solution acceptable to all parties. The teacher leads this conference asking affective questions.

C) If the behavior has caused considerable hurt and/or gentle reminders and small conferences have been ineffective, the teacher will call students involved to a more formal large group conference involving those directly involved as well as their peers--the whole class. The intent of this meeting is to expose how all are impacted by the action in question and working together might find ways to provide support and ways for restoration, forgiveness, and reconciliation to be experienced.

D) In cases where reconciliation has not yet been achieved after using the previous steps, a formal conference is scheduled. Such a conference includes those who have caused the harm and their parent(s), the harmed and their parent(s), and administrator(s), one-two classmates/other adults chosen by each student directly involved, and one-two classmates/other adults chosen by the teacher. This meeting is chaired by the school administration (or outside facilitator), and its purpose is to seek restitution, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Should this goal not be reached and it is not possible for the harm to be repaired, school administrators with Board endorsement will make a final decision that upholds the wellbeing of all in the school.

While the process is being undertaken, to ensure that further harm is not experienced and enough time is provided so that the well-being of all is ensured and pursued, a teacher/administrator may suggest a temporary loss of privileges, appropriate work assignments, in-school or out of school suspensions, etc. If deemed necessary, parents will be contacted to inform them of their child's involvement in the process.

Through grace, God intervened to restore the broken relationship between Himself and His children. He sent Jesus to be our redeemer, bringing us back to wholeness. So we too at JKCS follow this Biblical truth of restoration in the middle of our brokenness. Turning the wrong into that which is right, while honouring one another as God's children, leads to the rebuilding of relationships and a new beginning.

(Spring, 2009)