

# Monthly Restorative Justice in Education DIALOGUE

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Ideas have legs. It's always great to see how one good idea can lead to another, to another, and to another. That's the intent of the RJ Monthly DIALOGUE—a place to get rj ideas rolling. In this month's edition, we roll out some more great ideas from folks like you, working on the ground to integrate the principles of rj into daily life—discovering the wonder and the challenge of approaching life believing that restoration and healing are possible. Thanks to Owen Webb for a story that speaks boldly of what we need in our brokenness and what we offer our students; thanks to Paul Stallard a long time friend in England who took up the circle ideas of rj in education and immediately shared it with his colleagues, creating 3 types of circles; thanks to a reader whose understanding of rj past, present and future presents us with a challenge and hope; and finally it's wonderful to discover new resources regularly that share the richness of other people's experiences with implementing rj in schools. "O how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" Ephesians 3.

## Focussed Lenses

### *The Pear Tree*

When I was 17, my father asked me to pick the pears from the pear tree. Being 17 (or perhaps 'being human'), I sought the most efficient way to complete this task. I climbed half way up the tree and shook the tree as hard as I could. Pears fell like rain. It was amazing! I managed to get all of the pears down in a matter of minutes. I picked them up, placed them in buckets, and thought to myself, "nicely done!"

When my father came home, he asked me if I had picked the pears. I responded that the buckets were in the cold room. When he came back he was irate! Unbeknownst to me, I had bruised every pear -- I had wasted the crop. I recall a long lecture that summed up simply stated, *the easy way is not always the best way.*

When my father picked the pears, he would use a 25 foot piece of wooden dowel with a small tin can nailed to the end. He would reach up, put the can around the pear, and with a small twist the pear would fall into the can. He would then lower the rod to the ground, and gently turn the pear out onto the grass. The pears were not always perfect. Crows had pecked them, wasps had eaten them, or nature had simply taken its toll on the fruit. Nevertheless, my father worked to make the best of what he had.

If I look back on my teaching, I recognize that there were classes that I 'shook up', through my language and my pedagogy. My intentions were good, but my decisions and actions did not uphold the students' best interest. Giving detentions, raising my voice at students to seek respect, working with zero-tolerance rules, or using evaluations as a form of punishment were some of the tactics I employed. At the

time, I thought 'making it through' was an accomplishment. I no longer want to be a teacher who is just 'making it through'.

When I am broken, shaking is the last thing I need. I need to be gently turned toward love, truth, and grace. Every student comes to us broken. Detentions, strict rules, punishments, and our demeanour, may be 'easy' ways to bring about compliance and order, but they also subtly bruise the brokenness that already exists. We have somehow come to the conclusion in education that kids will change for the better if we make them feel worse. I know what I need in my brokenness, and students are no different.

Restorative Justice attempts to uphold the worth of each individual student. Through investing in students, building positive relationships, and providing high support to uphold high expectations, we as teachers have the privilege of moulding individuals who are more likely to be gentle and just in their learning and in their life. I desire to be in a community of teachers and students who are compelled to uphold the best interests of others. The time investment is not always easy, and it isn't quick, but it is good!

I am chomping on a great pear right now, and the taste is awesome...

Owen Webb

## Wondering

*If you had caused someone harm or had been harmed by another, would you be willing to sit in circle with those affected? Why or why not?*

*Your answer could give you insight into what needs to happen to move forward.*

## RJ, Curriculum and Pedagogy

### Beyond the *check-in* circle

Central to encouraging dialogue and building community is creating a space where everyone's voice is heard. To ensure this occurs and to consciously practice living in community, *check-in*, *check-up*, and/or *check-out* circles make an incredible difference. In the RJ DIALOGUE, we have focused quite intensively on check-in circles—those circles that occur at the beginning of the day, class, or meeting to acknowledge everyone who is present. Now using the same format of passing a talking piece around the circle so that each can share their ideas without being interrupted, consider the potential of a *check-up* and a *check-out* circle.

*Check-up circles* occur mid-lesson/mid-meeting and are used after or during discussion on significant topics. Stopping to go around the circle provides space for reviewing. It is a time of information gathering, summarizing, and posing questions to confirm that everybody is still on task, being heard and on board. It also ensures that those who have been quiet [and often hold deep insights] are offered a space to voice their thoughts. Topics could include:

- What's one thing that is surprising you?
- One thing you now understand?
- What's the hardest thing for you right now?
- I'm wondering ...
- I realize ...
- I need to know ...
- I appreciate how [classmate] ...
- I can't concentrate because ...
- I am interested because ...
- One thing I am doing well is ...
- Now I'm ready to ...
- One thing I will do to make the decision happen ...

*Check-out circles* occur at the end of the time together allowing for a final response. Confirming, concluding, affirming statements are invited as well as commitments to action one will take as a result of the lesson/meeting. Topics could include:

- I am glad that ...
- I learned that ...
- I will never forget ...
- Thanks to \_\_\_\_\_ for ....
- I am still confused by ...
- A question I am leaving with ...
- Something we could do next is ...
- For next class/meeting I will ...

*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)

## You said it!

*Looking back* I never thought of restorative justice.

*Now I think* restorative justice is a comprehensive practice, a world view.

*In the future* I believe restorative justice will come to be understood as being more complex (but not more difficult), three dimensional, a fuller way of living in community. It will be sewn into the fabric of our culture. The term "restorative justice" will change to something that reflects that more complex understanding.

## Resources

A recent article in the Hamilton Spectator is worth reading as it highlights a whole community approach to rj. Check it out at: <http://www.thespec.com/news/crime/article/278249--community-police-turn-to-restorative-justice>

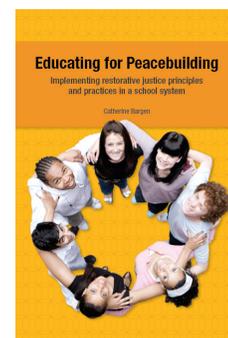
Another new resource has just been published coming from British Columbia.

*Educating for Peacebuilding:*

*Implementing restorative justice principles and practices in a school system* by:

Catherine Bargen. "In 2000, the Langley School District in British Columbia, Canada, joined with Fraser Region Community Justice Initiatives in a venture to introduce restorative justice principles and practices into their schools. Six years later the Langley School Board mandated that the schools in its district offer a restorative approach when dealing with conflict and harm. *Educating for Peacebuilding* is a lively account of how this happened — the successes, failures, challenges, and lessons learned — and the ongoing efforts to bring about positive culture change in school communities."

Available for \$10 from: CJI-Langley: [mail@cjibc.org](mailto:mail@cjibc.org) or 604-534-5515.



## You are invited!

Do you have a story to share, a question to ask, a great idea for integrating rj into your curriculum and pedagogy, a resource? 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)\*\***