

## Restorative Justice in Education

# Monthly DIALOGUE

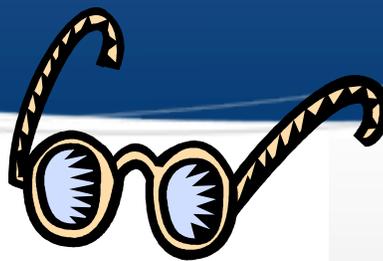
A new school year, new opportunities to dialogue about our experiences and efforts implementing restorative justice in our schools and classrooms. This is our third year of publication and our readership is growing. We welcome participants of workshops held this summer in Ontario and Quebec as well as several new readers who found us on the web! This DIALOGUE is exciting because it tells real stories, asks real questions, shares ideas that come from real teachers and administrators—YOU!. It's a space for you to come, join the circle, listen, share, and be encouraged.

## Focused Lenses

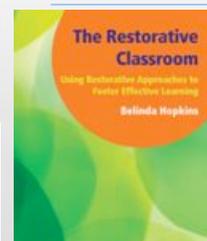
Do you ever feel confused by what restorative justice is? What seemed so clear at the time of your professional development experience suddenly seems complex as you watch your 27 students file into class or run around the playground. All your ideas for what you were going to do disappear into thin air as the workload takes over and a few students challenge all your best made plans. This is not unusual. New perspectives take time and effort to take hold. We all have default settings that are easy to return to. Commit to reminding yourself that restorative justice is **NOT** a school discipline policy, a way to control student behaviour, a student code of conduct, or a program to add to all you are already doing. Instead it **IS** a philosophy, a way of being that:

- Honours the worth of all regardless of who they are or what they do;
- Recognizes the importance of community in individual lives;
- Believes healing of relationships is possible.

As such, restorative justice is not an add-on to what you already do, but a way of thinking, a perspective that impacts your current teaching and living practice.



## New Resources



Belinda Hopkins' new restorative justice resource is a treasure chest full of great ideas for creating a relational, restorative classroom.

Each chapter begins by encouraging educators to reflect on themselves, their role, their purpose, and their current style of interaction with students. Then using a wide range of wonderful interactive activities she illustrates how learning is enriched when students are encouraged to build, maintain, and repair relationships. A must have for any school committed to implementing restorative justice as a way of being. Currently only available through British publisher, but shipping cost and time are reasonable. See [www.optimus-education.com](http://www.optimus-education.com)

*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

Two stories this month:

- A principal in beginning the new year realized he made a mistake in assigning lockers to high school students. His succinct comment says so much: *“I made a mistake . . . so I called a special assembly to make things right. I walked through reflective rj questions with the entire high school sector. It went well.”* (George Van Kampen-Montreal)
- A music teacher was introduced to the basics of restorative justice through conversations she had with a friend over the summer. In beginning the new year, instead of rows and rules, she started each of her elementary classes in a circle, gave them opportunity to respond to some light check-in topics such as “what music do you like?” and what are you looking forward to in music this year? Then rather than telling the students what her expectations and rules were for the year as she used to do, she asked them what they needed for the music classes to go well this year. She noticed that in many of the comments they were telling her what they remembered she expected but they also added their own ideas and she was surprised by how they articulated what they knew her expectations were. Her brief comment also says so much, *“It was so good not to be the one talking.”* (Sandra, British Columbia)

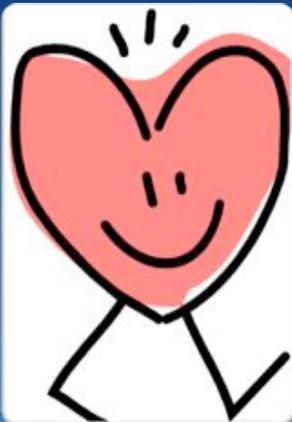
[The title for this section come from a quote by Howard Zehr (2004) who refers to successful rj experiences as butterflies and those that leave us discouraged or puzzled, as bullfrogs—no disrespect intended to the amazing bullfrog!]



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](http://www.shalemnetwork.org/RJ_RP_in_schools.html)

## Thinking Restoratively



In implementing restorative justice in schools, the focus is often on what we do. But before we ‘do’ we need to ‘think’. How do you *think* restoratively? Two simple questions along with the 5 restorative justice framework questions help to shape our thoughts as we assess what we are seeing and doing in our interactions with colleagues, students, and parents. Reflect on your actions and ask:

- *Am I honouring this person? or Am I judging this person?*

Then when things become challenging, **before** you react ask yourself,

- *What’s happening? What am I thinking and feeling right now? What impact is this having on me and others? What’s the hardest thing for me? What do I need [to do] to move on?*

If you can stop long enough to think through these questions, you will likely find that your respectful, relational responses will nurture the same in others.

## Curriculum ideas

*Ron VandenBurg spent time this summer designing a short story literature unit for grade 7-8 students using restorative justice as a framework for understanding themes of justice and injustice. It is an exciting embodiment of how restorative justice can be embedded in curriculum content. One of the introductory activities beautifully illustrates our interconnectedness within school communities. It's described below. Think about how you can modify and use it for your specific classroom environment and curriculum content. [This lesson adapted from: Peterson & Rau: Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities: <http://saesc.ca/resources.htm>]*

### A community web

- Have sticky notes available for students. On each note, ask them to write the name or role of different people that are part of a school community. Examples: the principal, the bus driver, the secretary, the janitor, parent, grandparent, kindergarten student, neighbour to the school, grade eight student, grade four teacher, crossing guard, high school student who graduated, volunteer, educational assistant, resource teacher, librarian, school supporter, coach, etc.
- Display the notes on a specified wall space and continue until the list roles is equal to or is more than the number of class participants.
- Discuss with the students how each person contributes to the school, for example, the kindergarten student comes to learn at the school and the high school student who graduated could be the older sibling of a student at the school and still comes by to help in the school musical.
- Randomly distribute a role sticky note from the wall to each student who places it on their forehead or on their shirt. Be careful to assign the role of "kindergarten student" or other young role, for example "grade two student" to a student who can play the role well without making the activity silly.
- Have each student describe their role to an assigned partner.
- Give a ball of yarn or string to the student who has the role of "kindergarten student" or another young person's role. Ask this student to name another role in the group and then toss the ball of yarn to that second student. The first will hold on to the beginning of the yarn throughout the activity.
- The student receiving the yarn now tells the group how their role on the sticky note is connected to the "kindergarten student". For example, she might say that she is a sixth grade student who is a good friend of the kindergarten student's sister, or she might say that she is the janitor who cleans the whole school where the kindergarten student goes.
- The student holds on to a piece of the yarn and passes the



*"Raise your hand if you felt the tug."*

ball of yarn as it continues to unravel to a third student. This student then identifies how their role is connected to the student they received the yarn from who is connected to the kindergarten student. If a student has no answer, class members can volunteer suggestions to help. A web of yarn will grow and will be easy to see.

- The web is complete when the last person is holding the remaining ball of yarn.
- At this point this last person describes a scenario where a person in community web has been harmed. For example, a scenario in which a fourth grade student has been robbed of his iPod or a sixth grade student has been bullied by a group of girls for a month, or graffiti has sprayed on the school wall.
- Begin by asking the student(s) who are directly affected to tug on string gently. Ask students to "raise your hand if you felt the tug."
- Then ask students to share with a person next to them why or why not they thought their role would have been affected by the scenario.
- Repeat with other scenarios. What type of scenarios had the most impact? Why?
- Discuss: when in real life one person is causing or feeling hurt in a community how can it affect all roles in the community. If all are affected, who can be involved in repairing the harm? What could they each do?
- Discuss and define the word "interconnected."
- End the lesson by telling the students that they will be learning a new way to talk about difficulties in any community. If your school already uses restorative practices, tell students that the class will be reviewing these practices.

## Wondering

*Do you have any suggestions as to how I can deal restoratively with a grade 8 student when his automatic response to having caused harm is to shift blame, make excuses or deny having any responsibility in the incident? He also displays a lack of respect when it comes to his mom and staff. From my understanding, the person who has caused harm must take responsibility for his/her actions in order for rj to be effective?*

*(Teacher, Ontario)*

A complex situation to be sure and definitely signs that the young man is struggling with issues he himself is frustrated with. When a student shifts blame for having caused harm, it is likely his own sense of self-worth has been threatened by his actions. When this occurs, shame sets in and according to Nathanson's (1994) compass of shame theory, people who do not have a solid confidence in themselves or a strong source of support where they feel loved regardless of what they say and do, will respond by (a) withdrawing from others near them (b) avoiding the situation, denying it happened, and distracting themselves from the pain by turning to something that comforts them, (c) attacking themselves, putting themselves down, telling themselves they are worthless, and/or (d) attacking others, blaming the one they hurt, lashing out physically or verbally.

You have identified correctly that this student is probably not ready to be part of a circle, but through one on one and small group conferences where you give the student a safe, supportive space to share what happened to create the incident, you could bring him to a point eventually where he is ready to admit his role. This may be a long time in coming if the student has reason to feel he is not loved unconditionally. You will need to create an environment for him where he begins to feel and acknowledge this. At times a person can feel this is the case when in reality there are several people who love him dearly. A circle, when run well, can bring this out.

Acknowledging responsibility is a key to an effective circle. However, life is not that simple, and incidents are never that black and white. It is more important that the group recognizes that harm has been done, that the incident is real and is troubling enough for a meeting to occur. It can be enough for the student to acknowledge that he was involved in the incident. When he and the others hear each others stories, and they all recognize that this is a situation that can be resolved, it is more important that reparation occurs than that *blame* has been established.



## We need you!

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](mailto: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)\*\***

*(Unless otherwise indicated, content has been written by D. Vaandering)*

*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.*



Each person is important, each is capable of changing, evolving, becoming a little more open, responding to love and to communion ... Our societies are in danger of rejecting those who disturb them too much, and sometimes even wanting to get rid of them.

- Jean Vanier, *Our Journey Home*, pp. 147-148

### References:

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

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Zehr, H (2004) Plenary address, Restorative Justice: New Frontiers Conference, Massey University.

*[images courtesy of Microsoft clipart]*