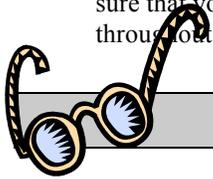
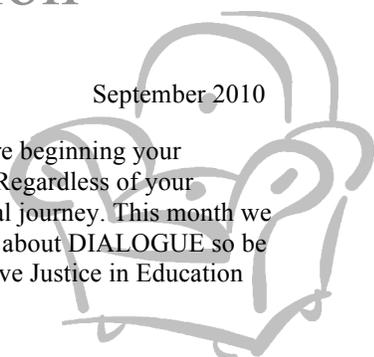


# Monthly Restorative Justice in Education DIALOGUE

Volume 2: Issue 1

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Welcome to a new school year and the second volume of the RJ DIALOGUE! For some, you are beginning your experience with rj; for others you're into refining what you have experienced in the past years. Regardless of your experience the *RJ in Education Monthly DIALOGUE* is here to walk WITH you on this relational journey. This month we have anecdotes, suggestions, and stories to get you going. Pull up a chair and join in. We're all about DIALOGUE so be sure that you participate by reading, sharing, or suggesting anything at all in regards to Restorative Justice in Education throughout the year.



## Focussed Lenses

Your students have arrived. You've met new colleagues and have become reacquainted with those you worked with last year. If you tried to count the number of people you have interacted with in these beginning days of the new school year, you would find it difficult as there are literally thousands of interactions that take place each day within a school. Considering that, it is truly amazing how well we do in communicating with each other.

What allows for positive interaction to occur?  
What is at the foundation of these relationships?

When considering restorative justice we often think of its role in helping us through broken relationships. However, restorative justice is most effective if we use its principles to establish a safe community environment before we run into problems. Establishing group guidelines for how to interact when you are together is key to doing this well. If you take time to share what you need from others to feel safe, able to interact, and work at your best and take time to listen to what they need from you, you will discover what is foundational to positive relationships both with your students **and** with your colleagues. One way of doing this explicitly is described in what follows.

## Putting rj into practice

As people who work regularly with children and youth, we can be inclined to think that if we can teach our students to communicate effectively, then there is hope for greater peace in this world. What we forget is that our youth are careful observers of how the adults in their lives live and then they model what they see. Thus what is critical in a school is that adults model effective, respectful interactions for the students. Hence the following activity is designed for adults who interact and gather together regularly for meetings. With a few modifications, the activity can also be adapted for use with students of all ages.

- Sitting in a circle around a table or with an open space on the floor in front of your group, provide everyone with 5 strips of paper and ask each person to write "5 things you need **from others** to work at your best."
- When completed ask each person to lay their ideas on the floor speaking them aloud (without further comment). As each successive person lays their ideas out, if they are similar to one already displayed, they are placed with those that are similar.
- After everyone has shared their needs in this manner, discuss: What do you notice? What surprises you? etc. As this discussion takes place, continue to refine the groups so that similar needs are together in piles. Then organize the piles of comments from most common to least common.
- Divide the large group into pairs or threes and give each group a long strip of paper and one of the piles. Ask each group to turn their pile of needs into a guideline by completing the statement: *To work at our best when we are together we will ....* Write it on the strip of paper.
- Invite each group to present its guideline by laying it in the middle of the circle.
- When all are displayed, ask the whole group if they can agree to these guidelines as they interact with each other daily and during formal meetings, etc.
- There may be a need to tweek each to make it more readable/agreeable.
- After these have been refined, post them on the staff room wall, or the wall of the room where you meet regularly.
- At future meetings, choose one guideline to unpack by having people share an experience with how these needs were met. IE: A time I felt encouraged? A time I felt discouraged? A time I felt respected? A time I felt disrespected. Use only one topic for each meeting and remember to not use names in sharing.
- Another way of doing this would be to brainstorm ideas, pictures, or words around each of the guidelines. IE: what does [encouragement] look like, sound like and feel like?

## Stories—Bullfrogs and Butterflies

*'What do you need to make things right?'*

As the Vice Principal of Community at our school I deal with many things and community conflict is one. At our school we are implementing a Restorative Justice philosophy as a way to cultivate relationships and community that pursues Shalom. This journey started in 2007 and Restorative Justice is becoming a part of what we do at our school. Knowing that we are on a journey is very important as we see how we have changed and we are moving onward. The change is obvious in many ways. We can look at our classrooms and see physical changes; we can observe teachers and students interacting in a multitude of circumstances looking for restoration as opposed to punishment.

But if we were to stop now and think that we have reached our destination I think we would be missing so much. One of the areas that I think we can explore on our journey is the response students who have caused harm give to the last and ever important question of the RJ process. For those who are unfamiliar with the process, the question asks, 'What do you need to do to make things right?' Far too often I am struck by the fact that students don't talk at this moment. They say nothing, assuming that I will fill in the blanks with a punishment that fits the crime.

What strikes me about this is that the students are looking to me to create the list of possibilities for them to make it right. Have they never thought about how to make things right? OR could it be that they were never allowed to share? There seems to be an assumption that when students get into a Vice Principal's office they have no voice. This appears particularly true for students who are new to the school and for students who are seldom in my office.

My concern in this is that if we don't allow for students to have a voice in 'making things right' we rob them of an opportunity to creatively take responsibility for their actions. If we dole out a punishment that is formulaic and comes from the handbook, the student 'washes' their hands of the responsibility. They don't own the consequences of their actions and justifiably get disgruntled at the 'system'. What becomes clear to me in these moments when a student doesn't answer the final question, is that we are so embedded in a punitive process that the paradigmatic shift of Restorative Justice for students is as great as it is for adults. I cannot forget this and need to constantly recommit to remembering this is new for the students and waiting patiently for them to answer 'what they need to do to make things right'.

*Nathan Siebenga, HDCH*

## Our students said it ...

At the end of June I asked my Grade One students to write letters of encouragement to the principal thanking him for being awesome principal this year. To prepare for this, I asked them what he does for us. The FIRST thing they said was that he helped them fix their problems. Then Mark, said, "He loosens up our problems for us so we can fix them."

Rj at work in our school! Isn't that just awesome?!

\*\*\*\*\*

*Rj principles impact **how** we teach. Justin Cook of HDCH used a circle structure and the principles of rj to teach Writer's Craft to his grade 12 class. His students' comments speak to the impact:*

*\*\*the time spent in Writer's Craft in 2009/2010 gave me a deep insight into what it means not only to communicate effectively, but also to communicate as we were meant to as human beings: harmoniously.*

*\*\*I have never been in a class where I have felt so comfortable with everybody in the room. The style of teaching was good especially for the very timid and shy people. I saw many people who I had never heard speak before starting to say their mind during discussions.*

*\*\*\*This circle was the best part of the class because not only did it provide you with an excellent view of almost everyone in the class, it was perfect for remembering who was missing, and for creating a list of all those in the class when you needed one... this circle was ... a crucial crux in the class's development of character and of learning ...*

## 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? 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.

*dvaandering@mun.ca*

*\*\*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)\*\**

*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)*