

Restorative Justice in Education

Monthly DIALOGUE

Summer

Just around the corner, days stretch ahead of us where we do not need to think “am I ready for tomorrow?” Instead we can **dream**, and **rest**, **play without planning**, and **work at things we put away** while we taught. Enjoy the break. In that summer space, take this issue to help you reflect on what was and plant seeds for what could be next school year.

Blessings for a safe and happy holiday!

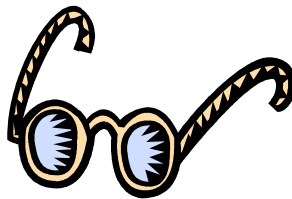
Focused Lenses

JUNE ... the last month of the school year. We watch our students and realize that soon our role as teacher in their lives will be over. As you reflect consider both what was and what will be. Though we often think of using the 5 restorative justice questions when there is conflict, take them to reflect on this school year. How would you characterize “what happened for you this year?” What are you thinking and feeling about it? What impact has it had on you? What’s been the hardest/best thing about this year? What do you need [to do] to move forward? Then also consider the year, or perhaps each of your students using the questions, Did I honour Stephen this year or did I measure him? What message did I send him and leave him with as he left my class this year? Did I honour Kathy this year or did I measure her? What message did I leave her with as she left my class this year?

These questions are not meant to leave you with guilt. As teachers we can be particularly difficult on ourselves as we can never meet all the needs of all our students all the time. And thus the final questions must be, “Am I honouring myself? Am I measuring myself? What message am I sending myself? We need to reflect critically and carefully on the impact we have on our students, colleagues and ourselves.

And in the end, we need to realize that

honouring means that we are accepted no matter who we are or what we do ...but simply because we are image bearers of God, human beings ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’. *"In the evening of life we shall be judged on love, and not one of us is going to come off very well, and were it not for my absolute faith in the loving forgiveness of my Lord I could not call on him to come."* M. L'Engle.



On-line Resources to explore

Restorative Justice Council's

VIDEO WALL

http://www.restorativejustice.org.uk/resource/rjc_video_wall/

This excellent website hosts ongoing information about the implementation of restorative justice in the United Kingdom. The video wall has videos relating to schools, communities and criminal justice.

Restorative justice acknowledges justice as honouring the worth of all and being 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)

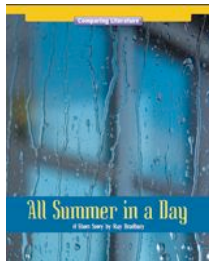
Curriculum Resources to Consider over the Summer!

RAY BRADBURY'S "All Summer in a Day"

The Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (OACS) has recently published a revised version of the Grade 7 and 8 short stories' anthology, *Choices and Decisions*. One of the themes in this anthology is entitled "Responding to Injustice". Its thematic statement says, "...The choices and decisions we make on a daily basis affect the people around us. We use our words and deeds sometimes to help and sometimes to harm. God calls us to love our neighbours. A first step in loving comes when we value the stories of all people: our neighbours next door, our neighbours around the world, those who have been harmed and those who have harmed. As agents of change we are called to make just choices and to maintain and to restore relationships with one another and with God. Throughout the unit, students will be challenged to reflect on the choices and decisions that were made in the story using the lens of God's call to respond to injustice. It is the goal of the unit that the students will come to understand that their own choices and decisions can create restorative living in all their relationships."

The lessons in this theme lead students through learning how to use the restorative justice questions and how to run peacemaking circles. Through the stories in this section, students practice these skills. It is a great way to put restorative justice into the everyday living of the teachers and students!

Here follows one of the lessons written by Ron Vandenburg (Grade 7 /8 teacher at Beacon Christian School, St Catharines, ON) for his class. You can read more on the OACS curriculum website.



Before reading the short story, "All Summer in a Day" by Ray Bradbury, students discuss examples of bullying that happens or can happen at their school. After reading the story, students are challenged to write in the role of one of

two characters- William or 'one of the girls', knowing that the parents, teachers and principal all know the injustice that has occurred. The character responds in writing to the restorative questions:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking about at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?
- What do you need to [do] make things right?

After the writing exercise, students and teachers sit together in a circle to reflect on their responses. Using the lens of God's call to respond to injustice, they then link these responses to the incidents of bullying at their own school.

(Used with permission of OACS)

NOVELS with RESTORATIVE JUSTICE themes

Noted science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin has several novels for people 12 and older that explore the role of power, justice, and the importance of relationship for living in peace. Consider *City of Illusions*, *The Dispossessed* or the series *Annals of the Western Shore*. The second in the series *Voices* "is the story of an occupied city-state and of how the conquered and the conquerors negotiate a formula for peaceful coexistence. They are able to do so by enacting a restorative justice script." (Oziewicz, 2011) Consider these for summer reading and the new novel study you are looking to do next school year!



"There can be no peacemaking or social work or anything else to improve our world unless we are convinced that the other is important. You are precious—you, not just people, but you. And we have a call to make history—not just accept history. We are called to change things—to change the movement of history, to make our world a place of love and not just a place of conflict and competition." (Vanier, Living Gently in a Violent World, 2008 p. 63) .



RJ, music class, and drumming circles

As a music teacher in two inner city elementary schools, I work with children who come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Most of my students grow up in poverty and unstable environments: young, uneducated parents, welfare and social assistance, foster care, and public housing, amongst many issues. Though these children can be quite troubled and difficult, I enjoy working with my students – it is very rewarding.



Teaching music to these children has been wonderful, but quite challenging at times. When I first began teaching all was going quite well, but after awhile, constant reprimanding, raising my voice to get attention, and my increasing sarcasm were beginning to wear me down. Ordinarily I am a good-natured, laid back person but I was acting like someone else – these qualities I was demonstrating with my students are not the kind of person I am. I was starting to feel burned out, and I had hit a wall: teaching music was not giving me joy any more.



One Saturday, I attended a restorative justice workshop. The presentation was truly inspiring to me. It was the kick start I needed to get my career back on track. On Monday I returned to school and in my first class of the day, with two slots of kindergarten, I tried asking “what happened?” instead of “why?” Immediately, I could feel myself remaining calm when confronted with student behaviour issues, and I could sense that my students were reacting positively. At the end of the day I felt elated – the day had been a success, and it was just the beginning. After several days it was obvious something incredible was happening. I could sense a positive energy in my classroom. Even the most difficult children were reacting quite well to my new demeanor. I could feel calmness and patience manifesting in me.

From a musical standpoint, drum circles are an extension of restorative practice. In a similar way, drum circles strive to embrace and respect self worth. These principles are demonstrated in youth remand in Denver, Colorado. A community program called the Whittier Drum Project incorporates drum circles when working with troubled teens. Youth offenders and their caregivers receive eight weeks of therapy from the juvenile court system. This includes one hour a week; half an hour of drumming and half an hour of talk therapy. The drumming is used to build ties in a non-threatening way between group members and between youth and their families. In drum circles, the objectives are to create a greater sense of community, to improve communication skills, to reach and develop untapped creativity, to listen to each other, to develop flexible leadership skills, to encourage innovation, and to bond as a group.

The transfer of these drum circle activities to the music classroom brings about similar results. The sense of unity amongst the students has been incredible, and they are all able to participate in the music making. The drum circle incorporates a lot of improvisation, and encouraging this artistic freedom helps students build confidence in expression.

Nancy Riestenberg (2011) makes a connection between a Circle and a musical ensemble: “a talking piece is much like the baton in a conductor’s hand. The musicians agree to follow the baton and to work together under its control. Like the direction of the baton, the talking piece directs the group. . . The talking piece brings together the members of the Circle to work together in a peaceful way” (p. 79). This technique could be successfully employed in music classrooms or rehearsal spaces, as well. (Kathy Conway Ward-St. John’s)



Restorative Justice in the News!

April 23, 2012

How a Toronto high school fights bullying without bullying — using restorative talking, not discipline and suspensions

<http://www.thestar.com/news/article/1166708--porter-how-a-toronto-high-school-fights-bullying->

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)****

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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 Edifide and the 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.

Need more support or ideas? Looking for an idea you read in past
RJ Monthly DIALOGUES?

Back issues of the RESTORATIVE JUSTICE in Education Monthly DIALOGUE are available
on-line at http://www.shalemnetwork.org/?page_id=243

WE NEED YOU!

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.

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