

Restorative Justice in Education

Monthly DIALOGUE

As the school year progresses we see and experience more clearly both the wonder of relationships and the struggles associated with relationships. This issue builds a deeper understanding of the relational foundation on which restorative justice principles and practices lie. The contributions this month illustrate how we are challenged personally when we think critically about our attitudes and interactions with others. Thanks to all who have contributed.

Focused Lenses

“I have nobody; I need someone.”

Amanda Todd’s final words as displayed on youtube for millions to see are disconcerting. There is much to grieve when people in our society are harassed to the point that they have no hope and see that their only solution is to take their own lives.

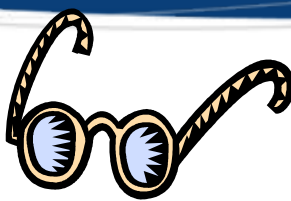
Amanda, in her final words, has identified the root cause of her pain ... she is bereft of a relationship with someone who is committed to her, who values her as a human being, and is concerned for her well-being. Though she may have had people in her life who tried to be there for her, she was not convinced of it and could no longer withstand the power of the harmful relationships that ruled her life.

As adults we need to take note, and though we may be trying, we need to acknowledge that we are not being as successful as we hope to be. Why is this? If I think critically about my own responses to the people around me, I realize that I can say and think all the right things, but the message I send them most likely echoes our society’s emphasis on success and *not* well-being. I too often measure those I engage with, and don’t even know fully what it means to live in such a way that nurtures their well-being. I realize then, that the task ahead of me is much greater than simply changing what I do. I need to re-form what I believe about what it is to be human, what it means to thrive, what it means to live.

Recently I read, “*Moses was not engaged in a struggle to transform a regime (in Egypt); rather his concern was with the consciousness that undergirded and made such a regime possible.*” (Brueggemann). In implementing restorative justice in schools, it is the consciousness that is undergirding

what we as adults do that needs to be our concern.

Can we hear the voices of our youth who are crying out for nurturing, caring relationships and create cultures where relationships really do come before acceptable behaviour?



Restorative Justice WEEK Nov. 18-25

November 18-25 has been designated Restorative Justice Week in Canada by Correction Services. Though education has a slightly different emphasis than the judicial system, the foundational principles are similar. This year’s theme relates well to schools-- “*Diverse Needs; Unique Responses*”. Restorative justice practices allows people “to formulate unique responses that can contribute to a person’s sense of safety, justice and well-being.”

Consider designating a day, week, or month to highlight restorative justice at your school to introduce or review the restorative justice foundation once again.



For more information and resources see <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/rj/rj2012/index-eng.shtml>



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)

Making hope practical!



[This regular column for 2012-2013 explores young people's perspectives of hope and its place in their lives.]

Theory and Practice

"I think education's kind of self-absorbing for most people. Like 'I'm learning for me. I'm not learning for you.'" (Lisa--grade 11)

Theory and practice dance together. Theory shapes our practice and in turn practice reshapes our theory and ways of thinking. How are you involved in education? Does the practice of what you do match the way you think things ought to be? Restorative justice is about honouring the inherent worth and dignity of all people. This is in contrast to the kinds of competition and measurement that strip away dignity and demand that some of us be losers. Listen to the voices of these secondary students as they speak about this tension:

"I think people need to slow down a bit. we're always on the go and doing stuff and like trying to get to the top kind of thing and that's not really what it's all about.

I don't really talk about these things so much.

I guess the world doesn't see that so much as being of importance. And as teens, we are so sucked into the media and how the world sees things. So we don't necessarily make our own ways so much and talk about what we really want from things or like what we think is important and what we want to do." (Anna--grade 11)

"We have these ideas of how things ought to be right now, but they're not really how things ought to be, I guess. They're just selfish things of what we want it to be.

*This whole idea of a normal life—
growing up,
having two kids,
and a 9-5 job
with a dog
and living in the suburbs.*

*It's usually what people are told what the good life is.
By their parents...
Schools as well.
Media.
It's just like the guidance counselors
and the courses themselves
are all selected for a purpose of getting one job.
From getting from here to the next stage to getting to the job.*

*We need to forget about this normal life
and like growing up and having a job and like me, me, me.*

*But like us,
As a whole community, like a world I guess.
And stop worrying about our things and worry about other people."* (Dane--grade 12)

When you listen to what these young people are saying, what connections do you make to your own practice and theory? Do you experience similar tensions? Do you have stories to share of when things came together in great ways? How is your practice connected or disconnected from your theory and ways of thinking? To continue this dialogue, you are invited to share your responses with your colleagues and with us at the *RJ Dialogue*.

~Sharon de Vries

Restorative justice is like a three-legged stool

The seat—commitment to honouring the worth of and working for the well-being of all people.

Leg one—the person(s) causing harm;

Leg two—the person(s) harmed;

Leg three—those affected indirectly and / or supporting the other two legs.

The third leg is crucial—without it, incidents remain individual experiences and the impact on the broader community as well as the resources available for healing and resolving issues are never engaged. The relational aspect of who we are is cut off. Community dries up. "Relationships matter; they connect character with community." (Walter

Wright, 2012)



Real teachers, real students, real stories

Resisting restorative justice for myself

Though I have the RJ framework questions available and want to use them, it's hard to do so when the difficulty I am facing is my own conflict with a colleague. In my first real challenge since learning about the RJ framework, I found myself grappling with how, when, where, and why I was going to follow this new framework.

I hit many roadblocks...to be honest, it was VERY difficult getting past my own emotional "stuff"...it is so much easier to be a facilitator than a participant☺. I learned very quickly you cannot facilitate a restorative process if you are a participant in it. I also learned, it is very easy to go to your natural "defaults"...feeling angry, hurt, sullen, or frustrated...



Secondly, RJ assumes that open communication occurs and for a variety of reasons that I cannot go into here, I felt unable to share what I was feeling and how it was impacting me. So my fear was that the process would victimize me again because I could not share my thoughts and feelings and while my colleague might be healed, I would still be hurt.

When I was asked to think about the framework questions for my face-to-face conversation with my colleague, it seemed impossible. I guess the key in this case was that we were both harmed and we both caused harm. So who was making restoration to whom?

One of the key things that led to a successful outcome was taking some time to process what had happened. Far too often, we try to "fix" things when we are still "in the moment." In this processing time, I began to ask myself the RJ questions out loud and I really made an effort to articulate an answer to myself. This process REALLY helped me gain clarity on what had happened, how I felt, and what I felt needed to be done to make things right. I then asked myself the same questions and tried to answer them as honestly as I could from the perspective of my colleague. It was amazing to me how the questions helped me gain perspective. And when we finally did have our face to face, it helped us gain understanding and empathy for each other's situation.

The RJ questions for me became critical in the process of reflecting on what had happened and where we could go to make it right. While our situation did not lend itself to full disclosure in a circle process (and not all situations will) the restorative questions framework can certainly help in the resolution of many conflicts. The key is to be open to challenging our "defaults" and looking towards restorative practices to guide the way☺

~Educator, Newfoundland

Check-ins—Yes, but ...

I live and breathe Restorative Justice probably more than I want to. It is a part of our conversation at some point often in the day. In casual conversation and more seriously when discussing another article that needs to be written. I help out with RJ workshops and probably know more than many people on the subject. I advocate often for creating a relational atmosphere using check in circles. I am not a professor at a University and I don't teach High School anymore. I am an artist. Recently I began part-time work teaching evening adult art courses 5 classes per course. They are pretty full classes and I use the time as best I can to make sure people get their money's worth. My continuing employment at the art school is somewhat dependent on people wanting to be taught by me and I want them to feel they are getting what they paid for and that it does not come off as frivolous.



After my third class my wife asked how the class was going. I said it was going fine but the group is very quiet. "Nobody speaks up, it is so silent it drives me nuts, I want interaction." She asked if I was doing check in circles. "Well no, I didn't have time for that," I said, "I'm sure that they would not appreciate valuable time being used up on check in circles." Well needless to say I was lightly reprimanded for not doing what I have so faithfully told everyone else to do. I mean everyone, from church groups, to office meetings, classrooms and even one-time adhoc meetings. Check-in circles help to create a micro culture that reciprocates respect and trust.

The next class I started with a check in question. A simple question that took all of 2 minutes to complete with the whole class--"If you were a tree, today, what kind of tree would you be?" Then we got on with the lesson. People were smiling and by the end of the class I even heard people asking each other about the trees they had mentioned. Work got done and people felt good and participated in the end of class critique. Hmm... what we think we don't have time for is often what we need to make time for.

~Gerald Vaandering, Artist

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.

References:

- Brueggemann, W. (2001). *The prophetic imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press
- Vaandering, D. (2011). A faithful compass: Rethinking the term restorative justice to find clarity. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 14(3), 307-328.
- Wright, W. (2012). CSC Convention.

[images courtesy of Microsoft clipart]