

Restorative Justice in Education

Monthly DIALOGUE

Time “MARCHes” On

Welcome to our March issue, the time of year when we are all ready for a break, when we have had to deal with one challenge too many, when we realize very clearly that our adult relationships are as needy as those of our students. March is often a difficult time for educators and students. We trust that this issue will encourage you to continue in your efforts to live out of a relational paradigm, one that allows for us to be vulnerable and weak. Blessings as you finish report cards, have parent-teacher interviews and take a much needed break.

Focused Lenses



The word ‘fair’ often gets in the way of understanding justice as honouring the worth and working for the well-being of all. Equating the two can prevent us from shifting lenses and paralyzes our heartfelt desires to engage relationally with our colleagues, peers, parents and students. Consider discussing the message in this image with your colleagues and also with your students. What insights emerge?

Parent-Teacher Interviews

As report cards are being sent out, students and parents are often over or under-whelmed by what they read. In all of our efforts to *honour* our students the report card sends a very clear message that in the end, schools and teachers *measure* the academic and the social capacity of youth. It is a humbling, confusing piece of paper that impacts greatly a student’s self worth. Much work is being done to explore how we can evaluate in a more humane way. Is it even possible? How do *rj* and report cards mesh? Do they?

To help you as parents and students come to discuss their report cards, this *rj* issue includes a script (Appendix #1) that uses the key *rj* questions to guide your discussions. We trust that this will help you keep in mind that our primary purpose is to honour our students, not measure them.

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.)

Time

Imagining and articulating an alternative way of being takes time and an open space of creativity and thoughtfulness. Maxine Greene (1988) refers to this as freedom—freedom to imagine a future that is different than our present reality. The secondary students in the research study on practicing hope that this column draws from, shared that they did not often experience that freedom. Rather, they often felt too busy. They felt that their discussions, both in and out of the classroom, rarely included the time and space to creatively and thoughtfully imagine possibility and *what could be*.



Listen to the voices of these young people:

“Maybe we are stuck in somewhat of a rut—the whole world together. In some ways we’ve reached the point where we all know something’s wrong, but we don’t quite care enough to do something about it. ...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 about. ...I don’t talk about these things so much.” ~Anna

“I talk to my friends at school and stuff like that, but it’s not very often that you have a really deep conversation. ...I might talk to somebody for five minutes, but then usually someone else comes along. A five minute conversation is a long conversation.” ~David



“Life is fast. It’s hard to make time for stuff... Well, like, there’s so much you have to do. Life is busy. And then you feel like you always have to be doing something. So, like the busier you are, you’re stressed. You don’t have time to think about these kinds of things.” ~Amber

Educating for social justice includes the challenge of opening up time and space to create pathways of practical hope—pathways that encourage students to imagine *what could be* and promote the agency needed to move in that direction. **How does this connect to your role in education?** ~Sharon deVries

Daily RAP and Occasional CHATS

Two readers share key insights into creating spaces and time for dialogue. Lauren Abramson from the Community Conferencing Centre in Baltimore, Maryland sent a link to an excellent 10 minute video that illustrates the The Daily RAP time in K-12 schools. Check it out at: <http://vimeo.com/32384751>.

Roxanne Skanes from Coley’s Point Primary in NL sends her unique discovery: I had begun using the acronym 'CHAT' when speaking with those who need to talk or repair. I found I was often saying "I think we need to have a little chat about that!" and thought, maybe let it stand for something with an RJ twist. I came up with: a 'C-aring H-arm A-wareness T-alk' which the students are quickly catching onto!



“A substitute commented to me that the one thing she has taken from her time at HGP is the circle and talking piece. As a substitute she never felt connected with the students that she usually only saw for short periods of time. Now when she substitutes she begins every class with a check-in circle and always finds out something interesting about the group of students she is teaching at that moment. She loves it!” Brenda, NL

Wondering...

Question? *In my training and in the guidebooks I have regarding facilitating rj circles, I notice that the recommended script is designed strictly for situations that have 2 clearly delineated parties--a person harmed, and a person who has caused harm. Though I have facilitated several of these, I have rarely had a situation in which this was clear. Most of my circles have involved a long history of hurts going back and forth and both parties playing both roles. Is there a script for situations in which it is not clear who is responsible for the harm?*

Administrator-Ontario

Answer: This is an important and common question. Though scripts are important and helpful for keeping focused, each situation is always different, making it next to impossible to create a truly versatile script. Thus facilitators need to learn to think for themselves in doing this work. There are common elements to all circles addressing harm: i.e. remember the key purpose for bringing people together; remember that your role is to create space and maintain a safe environment so that effective dialogue can occur; remember that the situation needs to stay in the hands of those involved, etc. There are various guides for facilitating conferences. One that really helps to show the range of what is possible is *Circle Processes* by K. Pranis. She provides approaches to different circles rather than scripts. Ultimately, during the pre-conference sessions remember several things:

1. Have all the questions available to you in your pre-conferencing sessions so you can be flexible in terms of what you ask as different details come to light.
2. When it is not clear who is responsible, do your best to help each participant identify what part he/she might be responsible for and ask them if they will express this in the circle.
3. Be keenly aware in the pre-conference who expresses a need for harm to be repaired. Be sure that the questions used in the circle insure that these needs are expressed.
4. Finally and most importantly, be sure that everyone explicitly agrees to come to the circle with the understanding that they are there to work together for a solution that is best for everyone. In this way, even if it is unclear who is responsible, what is clear is the purpose for holding the circle.

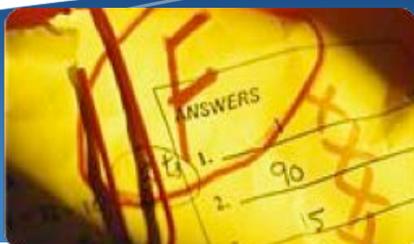
Then in preparing for the circle:

1. Write out your introductory statement so that you are clear about the circle's purpose and you can convey it clearly as the circle begins. You can begin with something like: "we are here today to discuss the incidents that have occurred recently with _____. These people all agree they are involved in and have contributed to the situation. Our purpose today is to hear each other's stories and then work together to come up with solutions that are best for everyone so that everyone's needs are met and harm is repaired."
2. Identify the questions from the script that are most relevant. Include other questions but remember that they need to be open-ended questions that keep you in the facilitator role, not a mediator role. I tend to use the same 5 key questions for all participants in circles like this: What happened to bring you here today? What were you thinking/feeling at the time? Now? Who has been impacted? How? What's the hardest thing for you? Then when everyone has had a chance to share, the final question: "What do you need [to do] to move forward?" is posed and an agreement is compiled from these.

Then during the circle:

1. Set the tone (a carefully chosen talking piece; review a few key guidelines on a card in the middle; an opening quote), make introductions, and then clearly identify the purpose for meeting and ask for agreement from each person present.
2. Proceed with the questions with those most involved first, and then move on to their supporters.
3. Give everyone an opportunity to respond with a final comment at the end.
4. Be sure someone agrees to follow-up on the agreements made within a definite time frame.

I trust this is helpful and frees you up to create safe, caring, healing spaces for all who participate.



I remember visiting a school in Canada where there was a big poster: "It Is a Crime Not To Excel." There was another poster of one car overtaking another which said: "Are You in the Passing Lane?" Right from an early age we cultivate this feeling that it is a crime not to be the best.

³Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community*, p.33

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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(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 (now called Edifide) 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.

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:

- *Greene, M. (1988). *The dialectic of freedom*. Toronto: Teachers' College Press.
 - *Pranis, K. (2005). *The little book of circle process: a new/old approach to peacemaking*. Pennsylvania: Good Books.
 - *Vaandering, D. (2011). A faithful compass: Rethinking the term restorative justice to find clarity. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 14(3), 307-328.
 - *Vanier, J. (1992). *From brokenness to community*. New York: Paulist Press.
 - *P-T interview script: Source Unknown. If you know who the originator of the work is, please let us know.
 - *Fairness-Justice image (p. 1): Modified from image found on-line. Original source unknown. If you know who created this image, please let us know.
- [images courtesy of Microsoft clipart]

Appendix #1: Parent/Teacher Interviews

A script for guiding short, effective conversations

Introduction – The script below is intended to be a simple and practical guideline. The focus is on building relationships through a conversation with parents and teachers in order to work WITH each other - parent-teacher-student. It is important to hear from the parent perspective first through a guided conversation.

Rationale – A guided conversation can help to shape and to focus the discussions teachers have with parents. Parent – teacher interviews are really conversations about communication and relationship building between parent and teacher and between student and teacher. Many common errors in these interviews include one party talking for the entire 10 minutes, line-ups for individual teachers or defensive reactions from either parent or teacher. The script below is an attempt to structure the interview in the time given, usually 10 to 15 minutes.

Step 1 Introduction (if necessary)

Hi my name is _____ and I am (student's name)'s teacher. I'm glad you came to the parent-teacher interview. You received the report card and I have a copy as well. This time is for each of us to fill in any gaps we might be experiencing and to work together for ____ well-being. I'd like to invite you to start with your perspective. Is that OK?

Step 2 Questions for parents

From your perspective, what's been happening with _____ (student's name) this term?
(Alternate – How's it going with ____ this term?)

What do you think some of the successes or challenges have been this term?

How has _____ (student's name) been affected by this?
(How has this affected you?)

What do you think the main issues are for _____ (student's name)?

Step 3 Answer the above questions from your perspective in statements.

(What's been happening is ... The success have been.....The challenges have been.....The main issues are.....)

Step 4 Where to from here

What do you think we need to do together WITH _____ (student's name) during the next term?

Step 5 Record the conversation results.

Make notes of what you agreed to, date them and check with parent to be sure that it is clear to all.

Step 6 End the interview

(Stand up and shake hands) *Thank you very much for coming in. I am looking forward to working with you and your child.*

***If the conversation needs to go beyond 10 minutes, ask the parent to schedule a separate meeting and say something like "It's really important that we discuss your child's progress in more detail and I'd like to schedule another meeting with you to discuss this further. What time and date would be good for you?"*