

# Restorative Justice in Education

# Monthly DIALOGUE

The month of December brings with it Christmas and Christmas brings with it the familiar refrain of *peace on earth*. We often think of this globally but what can it mean for our daily lives? In this month's RJ DIALOGUE we bring you stories and reflections that we hope will inspire you to celebrate hope in the actions of young people who are leading the way in showing what restoration is really all about. Enjoy the *gifts* they bring and the *gifts* they are!

## Focused Lenses

### The Gifts Youth Bring!

#### *I played my drum for him ...*

By now you have probably seen Sean Quigley's rendition of Drummer Boy on youtube. The young man's joy radiates as he drums in snowy Winnipeg and sings the simple lyrics of this beautiful Christmas carol proclaiming the arrival of Jesus, the tiny Son of God who has come to restore us to God. In his birth, life, death and resurrection we see God's heart for us, his desire that all people be reunited with him. There is such hope in this arrival of the tiny child, there is such hope in the creativity of Sean Quigley's work. Larry Grossberg (2005) challenges us to realize that as adults we can diminish the gift of youth simply in our language. He states, "How we as a society talk about kids in public—and in private—is important. Language plays an active role in our lives... We slide from kids in trouble, kids have problems, and kids are threatened, to kids as trouble, kids as problems, and kids as threatening. (pp. 15-16). For those of us who have had the distinct privilege of sitting in circle with young people, we know that when a space has been created where they can speak openly, share their stories and thoughts, and know they are being listened to, amazing things happen. In their insights, in their willingness to face challenges and work to repair harm, we catch a glimpse of God's intention for this world. It's easy to slip into despair when media emphasizes the harm young people cause, but restorative justice gives us a means for highlighting their potential for making things right! Take a moment to watch the video (again) and marvel at the stories in the following pages.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IrNcD34KFhM>

*Then He smiled at me ... pa rum pum pum pum!*

*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)*



## Video-Website Resources

Restorative Justice Council:

[http://www.restorativejustice.org.uk/resource/rjc\\_video\\_wall/](http://www.restorativejustice.org.uk/resource/rjc_video_wall/)

This site has several videos that show how restorative justice is being used in schools in the UK. Very powerful details are given that illustrate how circles can be conducted and school cultures can be changed.



## Bullfrogs and Butterflies

### Classroom: A place of belonging

What does it mean to label a young person as “at-risk?” I teach a class of secondary students who are all crown wards and they are often referred to as “at-risk.” I find myself wondering of what exactly it is that they are “at-risk.”

The common threads that weave through the lives of these young people include broken relationships, poverty, hurt, questions of who to trust, lack of support, and a sense of homelessness beyond physical buildings. Of what are they “at-risk”? Not graduating from high school? Of poor health and poverty? Of destructive habits of drug and alcohol use? There is more. Perhaps they are at risk of despair and loss of hopefulness. Some are at risk of not believing life could be anything other than it is. In their striving for independence it could be that they are at risk of living in ways that stop them from being willing to be vulnerable in relationships of trust and love.

As my term of teaching began, I was caught up in the busyness of planning and preparing curriculum. During a moment of silence in a Sunday morning worship service I tried to stop thinking about schoolwork. In the quiet, I heard God whisper to me: “Be a sanctuary.” Though I am not always sure what it means to say my students are “at-risk,” I do know that our classroom is to be a safe space and a place of belonging. These young people are children of God. Indeed, they are children of promise.

*Sharon deVries (London, ON)*



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)

## Helicopter Parents

**Helicopter parents (n.):** *A helicopter parent is a parent who “hovers” over their child, rarely out of reach, always ready to swoop in at a moment’s notice if they detect any possible harm, discomfort, or challenge that might befall their child. (even if the lessons would help their child learn, grow, or eventually, succeed). (Cline & Fay, 1999).*

As educators we know which of our students have helicopter parents. [If we are honest, we also know that we can slip into the role of “helicopter teacher”.] How could we as educators engage with these parents in a restorative manner to develop partnerships with them that would allow these students to take risks and learn from their mistakes and challenges. Mark Vander Vennen has developed a restorative justice template that could initiate and then guide the kinds of conversations you could have with them. (See the attached appendix.) Notice how the standard restorative justice questions and framework are used in holding effective conversations with adults. Thank you, Mark for this excellent resource.



## Bullfrogs and Butterflies cont'd

*Often educators feel that when holding a restorative justice circle with students means that only the students can contribute ideas for how the harm can be repaired. Though the students' contributions are very important, it is also crucial for educators to realize that they have been impacted by student actions and thus they can also add ideas that would address their needs. In the following story, take note of how the vice-principal contributed an idea that led to empowering students in a very exciting manner. Thanks for this example, Bernice.*

### Presentations to Empower

Five Grade 6 boys were rough housing and play fighting on the playground at recess. When asked to stop, they showed disrespect for the teacher and said they weren't hurting anyone and so could see no sense in this school rule. The students were asked to meet with the vice-principal in a circle. By the time they met (30 minutes later), their tone had changed from one of belligerence and disrespect to one of calmness, cooperation and a wish to repair the harm done. They voiced their regret in belittling school playground guidelines and asked to apologize to the supervising teacher for the manner in which they had lashed out at her when she had asked them to stop their fighting. They were able to talk about how much fun it is to play fight, but all were also able to testify to times they had been hurt by this kind of play, and how this type of activity most often led to real fighting- anger and harm. When asked what could be done to move ahead, the vice-principal asked the boys to prepare a safe play presentation for students in the primary grades. The five boys got very excited about this idea and immediately began to work out a plan within the circle.

A timeline of one week was given and included in this work would be a 5-minute lesson with a poster and/or slide presentation highlighting the main ideas. Each of these boys would also go out and help the teacher on the primary playground with supervision for one recess period. All 4 boys took their assignment seriously and prepared an excellent presentation. Each student was assigned a primary grade and was

responsible for going to schedule their presentation with the teacher. The outcome was absolutely mind-boggling as each of these students took responsibility and embraced this assignment. Here is the story of one of the boys:

Spencer went to the SK teacher and asked permission to come and teach her class about playground safe play. He checked with her about the availability of a projector so he could prepare a powerpoint presentation. Then he came and asked the vice-principal for a copy of the school's Student Code of Conduct, and described the lesson as he was thinking about it. He spent the weekend preparing, sent a copy to both the SK teacher and VP for affirmation and editing. On Tuesday afternoon, he taught an amazing lesson to the SK students centering it around the school theme "Passion for Jesus: Compassion for Others", pointing out how they could play safely. He talked about why he had been selected to come and speak to them, and they could understand that he had been involved in a fight and needed to help them not make the same mistakes. They were very responsive and asked questions and told their own stories. Spencer was very patient, listening to and responding to all their comments, directing them to loving others in their play.

The SK students look up to Spencer, and he feels enabled to carry out the talk that he presented to the SK students. He sees himself as a leader and role model to them and is looking forward to being on outdoor duty with the SK teacher. He has also committed to coming to talk to the students any time they may need further support and direction in playing outside at recess times.

*Bernice Huinink-Buiter*



## 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)\*\***

*Co-editors: Sharon de Vries; Bernice Huinink-Buiter; Dorothy Vaandering; Mark Vander Vennen*

*(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.*



**“We all know well that we can do things for others and in the process crush them, making them feel that they are incapable of doing things by themselves. To love someone is to reveal to them their capacities for life, the light that is shining in them.”**  
(Vanier, 1992)

### 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](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.

### References:

- Cline, F. & Fay, J. (2007). *Parenting with love and logic*. Love and Logic Press.
- IIRP (1999). SaferSanerSchools: Restoring community in a disconnected world. <http://www.iirp.org/library/safersanerschools.html>.
- 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.

*[images courtesy of Microsoft clipart]*

## APPENDIX: A Possible Template for use with “Helicopter” Parents

Mark Vander Vennen, MA, M.Ed, R.S.W.  
Shalem Mental Health Network

Please note that the bullet points are meant merely as prompts for discussion—this is not a “script” that you should feel bound by.

### *1) Invitation to Collaborate*

- I would really like to collaborate with you in the care and education of your Johnny/Susan. I believe that we need each other; I know I need you. I’m hoping we can talk about what that partnership might look like, and I want to begin by talking about your strengths and gifts as a parent.

### *2) Identify Strengths*

- I just have to say that I’m so impressed by you as a parent. You have such strengths: you are dedicated to Johnny’s/Susan’s well-being. You are a powerful advocate for him/her. You take parenting very seriously. You provide all kinds of opportunities for him/her, like...; you give of yourself hugely. You also know him/her best and you’re not afraid to share that knowledge. What others would you add? I would like to have your strengths in a partnership between you and me, for the sake of Johnny/Susan having the best learning experience possible here.
- Now these are what I see as Johnny’s/Susan’s strengths:
  - 
  - 
  -
- How about you? What do you see as Johnny’s strengths?
  - 
  - 
  - 
  -
- Here are the strengths that I think I bring as a teacher:
  - 
  - 
  - 
  -

### *3) The importance of risk in learning*

- Lately I’ve become more and more impressed by the importance of risk in learning, even in human development as a whole. Childhood risk-takers have many advantages as an adult over non-risk-takers. We don’t really learn without some element of risk (see *Too Safe for their own good* noted above).
- As an example, tell a childhood story of your own, where you learned something, became more competent and discovered some limits, through some form of risk-taking, doing things on your own.
- I’m curious: do you have a story that illustrates something like that from your childhood?

#### 4) Ground rules of the partnership

- The “With” quadrant: we want to do things “With” Johnny, not “For” him or “To” him. But we also want to do things “With” each other: that is, if you feel I’ve done something that’s off, I expect you to confront me with it in an atmosphere of support and nurturance. Conversely, you can expect me to do the same with you. Are we agreed?
- if an incident happens at school involving Johnny, we will use these questions with everyone involved, including Johnny:
  1. *What happened?*
  2. *What did you think when you first realized what happened?*
  3. *What do you think about it now?*
  4. *Who has been affected by what happened? In what way?*
  5. *What needs to happen to make things right?*
  6. *What are you prepared to do to help make things right?*
- I would like us to agree that in the aftermath of any kind incident we too will use these questions with each other. I would like us to agree to asking these questions of each other before you or I make a firm opinion or decision about something that Johnny has told one of us about the other. Can we agree to that?
- Other ground rules?

#### 5) Thank you. I’m looking forward to our ongoing partnership and to learning from each other in support of Johnny/Susan.

(For more, see Ungar, M., *Too Safe for their own good*. Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, and “Parenting to Prepare”, *Shalem Digest*, Fall, 2011, [www.shalemnetwork.org](http://www.shalemnetwork.org))

## Building a Restorative Culture in our Schools

