

Restorative Justice in Education

Monthly DIALOGUE

Happy New Year! Happy 2012!

We live in precarious times, times when it is easy to lose hope. The beginning of a new calendar year brings with it a sense of newness, a sense of hope. Where do we find our hope? How do we make hope practical in our lives? In this issue we consider the benefit of resolving to live restoratively so all people are honoured for who they have been created to be—this requires an ongoing commitment that will touch every part of our lives. Are you up for the challenge? It's will be a lot easier if we do it together.

Focused Lenses



Resolutions for Restoration

A new calendar year brings with it resolutions for working to change life for the better. Do you remember what you committed to doing on New Year's Eve? Is it a distant memory already or a daily source of encouragement? If you forgot to make a resolution, already broken your resolution, or need another to keep you hopeful, consider resolving to work to live in relationship with others especially when things go wrong. What would this mean for you? What would it take to don new lenses so that:

- Even the person you have been most hurt by appears differently to you?
- You *notice* the person you easily walk by or ignore?
- You are motivated to apologize when you've hurt someone?
- You recognize the lesson you are teaching in math puts a group of people in a negative light?
- You recognize the deeper pain your belligerent student is trying to hide?

Stopping to identify if you are *blaming* or looking to see *who is being harmed* is a step. Stopping to check if you are *welcoming* or *resisting* being in community is another. Stopping to consider the hidden messages you are sending through your words and actions is another. But ultimately, it requires loving your neighbour as yourself—and that's a heart change. Without it we and the restorative justice we are seeking to promote will only be noisy gongs and clanging symbols. Resolve to dig deep to discover how you are connected to the people nearby and far away. (For another restorative justice resolution see Mark Vander Vennen's article in the "Northumberland Today"

<http://www.northumberlandtoday.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=342639>)

Soft eyes turned to wonder ...

A circle guideline I invite students and colleagues to engage with as they listen to each other is 'soft eyes turned to wonder'.



(Palmer, 1997, p. 116). To address their puzzled looks when they hear it for a first time, I ask them what the opposite would be—'*hard eyes turned to criticism*.' So when we hear something we don't like, think is stupid, can't understand, we commit to a broader view, *wondering* about why it may have been said instead of *judging* the person who said it. Participants of all ages seem to connect quickly to this metaphor.

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)

Bullfrogs and Butterflies



A promise with results ...

Steve is a high school math teacher in St. John's, NL. Shortly after being introduced to restorative justice he wrote ...

I made a promise to myself to do something with rj starting this week. Both on Monday & Tuesday past I did a check-in with all my classes. I have to admit that I was very hesitant to do this because as a math teacher my curriculum is packed. Time is of the essence. I still carried on and this is what happened ... I asked students on Monday to tell their favourite costume for Halloween. On Tuesday I asked them to tell their pet's name(s) or their favourite colour (purple was popular). I took a break today. I noticed:

- Not as many students passed as I thought. Some strange looks on faces when I told them about the check-in.
- In a couple of classes they calmed down a bit after we finished.
- Had a couple of cases where students spoke when I didn't think they would bother.

Several weeks later, Steve writes, "I am still managing to do check-ins several times a week. Now when I don't do them students ask to do them. When I probed as to 'why' they said that it "calmed them down", and they "were interested in what others said".



Using literature for restorative justice ...

In a Grade One class, students were learning about how their class community is like a body with many parts. Just as God created the hand differently than the toe, He also created Joey different than Sarah. Both are important to the body/class, bringing unique functions and gifts to the body so that it can function in a harmonious, healthy manner. But if they work against one another, or when one does not face up to his/her responsibilities, difficulties and conflict can arise.

Within this setting, the Grade One teacher led students through several lessons dealing with ways to work through times of conflict. A student from an older grade came and talked with the Grade One students about how to play peaceably on the playground showing care and respect for one another. After reading the book "Chrysanthemum", by Kevin Henkes, in which a girl is taunted and teased because of her name, the teacher asked students the restorative justice questions: What happened? How did that make Chrysanthemum feel? How do you think the other girls felt? What needed to be done to make things right? Who helped Chrysanthemum and the other girls with this? The students were presented with a number of "What if...?" scenarios in which they practiced resolving the issues using the restorative process. Through role plays, students practiced 'knee-to-knee' problem-solving sessions, and small group restoration circles. Students soon came up with their own real-life situations, and were able to apply the restorative justice questions to these as well, thereby solving conflicts they had personally experienced. Students were given the tools to solve problems, and were able to understand the importance of working through conflicts for the class 'body' to be healthy and well in the way God intends this community to live. (Based on lessons from the OACS Creation Studies curriculum: One Body, Many Parts: Our Home and School Communities) --Bernice Huinink-Buiter

My 'Most Present' Self

I find that I am learning new things daily in class, and it is very important to me that I am at my 'most present' self when I am in the class. I think it is a learned thing to trust oneself to pick up on the subtle signs that students give us. With the encouragement of administration, and the school as a whole accepting the value of time spent building community, then the learning part of school becomes easier... *Leslie Putnam (Banting Secondary School, London, ON)*



Big Questions ...

Deep aches, and lasting distrust

Recently, I was in the middle of being a mom to my two young children who were in a heated disagreement, when the depth of what an apology is presented itself in a very clear and simple way. I was telling my son that his grumbled “sorry” had very little meaning if he didn’t acknowledge first, that he had done something wrong and second, that he would try his best not to repeat it.

An ache of deep hurt came over me when I connected my words with my son to a situation of serious conflict that is happening in my local Christian school community. I am on the periphery of the conflict between the school board, administration, and staff, and yet as a community member I have been dealing with a sense of broken trust in the leadership of the school and a feeling of frustration that there doesn’t appear to be a serious desire by those in positions of power to repair the brokenness and address the far-reaching hurt. I think apologies are needed. In a sad way, I appreciate that there have not been glib and superficial apologies offered, and yet, even though more than a year has passed, I am still left wondering how to move forward when trust has been broken.

Certainly, time heals wounds in that the urgency and immediacy of the situation lessens as more time passes, but the strong feelings of distrust have stayed sharp and full of hurt. I know there is wisdom in these words from the Queen’s Christmas broadcast: “It is in forgiveness that we can feel the power of God’s love.”

Even though it seems simple enough to understand, it is so complicated to live out. My choice to distance myself from the school keeps me healthier in some ways, but still leaves me wondering how to move in restorative ways towards healing the hurts and the broken relationships in this community.

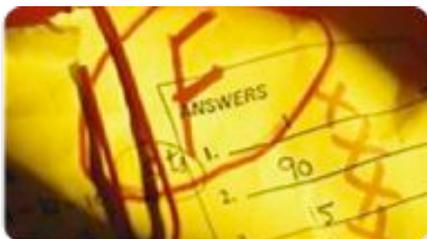
If I’m thinking these things and I am only on the periphery of the issue, what is it like for those closer to the heart of the conflict where the hurt runs deeper?

One thing that stands out for me is that restorative justice in education is not just something for students.



If we’re honest, we have many conflicts amongst colleagues or between school boards and teachers that cause rifts of hurt and distrust. I plan to keep thinking and writing about connecting restorative justice in education to the conflicts we have between adults. *If you have stories to tell, questions to ask, or thoughts to share, we welcome your words and encourage you to send us an email.*

--Sharon de Vries



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.

Jean 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 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:

- Palmer, P. (1997). *The Courage to Teach*.
- Salverda, L., Vaandering, D. (2003). One Body, Many Parts. Ancaster: Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools.
- Vaandering, D. (2011). A faithful compass: Rethinking the term restorative justice to find clarity. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 14(3), 307-328.
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