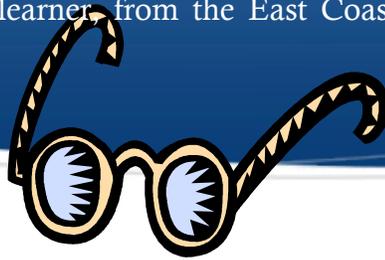


Restorative Justice in Education

Monthly DIALOGUE

May, and our thoughts turn to flowers, warm weather, possibly swimming and summer on the horizon. After a winter where we feel the promise of growth, but often see little, we get excited when the sun shines warm, buds burst forth and flowers bring colour. This issue's stories are all about flowers and swimming, of the warmth that comes with renewed and rebuilt relationships. Enjoy the stories from the very young learner to the adult learner from the East Coast, the West Coast and several places in between!

Focused Lenses



Learning to swim ...

Do you recall the experience of learning to swim? How cold the water felt, how you walked in up to your knees, then waist, then bent down tentatively and moved your arms, kicked one leg, but left the other firmly in touch with the ground, fearful that if both feet left the ground your head would go under water and you'd drown?

As people engage with restorative justice in education, though it often sounds inviting, most approach it hesitantly, wading in as long as their feet are solidly on the ground, but very reluctant to let the water buoy them up so they can swim through the silky water. One way educators keep their feet on the ground is to consider restorative justice only as a form of mediation. Though mediation of some types may actually be in line with restorative justice, most are significantly different as they focus only on the one who has caused the harm and the one experiencing harm. The perspectives of the community/supporters are not invited in. Why do people prefer this? Could it be that we are more comfortable with mediation because we get to dig into and defend our own position if we are involved; or if we are the mediator, we can advise and structure a way forward? Ultimately in these roles, participants get to stay in *control*.



Restorative justice requires something more—*vulnerability*. As participants we are not asked to defend ourselves or justify our actions or responses; we're asked to tell our stories, share our emotions, expose our needs. As facilitators, we create space and do not advise. Ultimately we all need to give up control, lift our feet, and trust that we will be buoyed up.

It's a lot like faith.

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)

On-line Resources to explore

1. **Restorative Justice at JKCS**—Podcast: Mike Meinema:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOkGDIN1dXc>
2. **Restorative Justice and Circles**—Blog: Kris Miner:
<http://circle-space.org>
3. **The Circle Way--**
Youtube:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ra11PiobsGw>
4. Implementing restorative justice in school: Youtube:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RP2M9TPNDZ0&feature=related>

Bullfrogs, Butterflies, and Bouquets

A bouquet of flowers –

*Never assume you know what the one harmed needs...
even if they are in grade 1*

Last week the students were busy working in small groups during a creation studies lesson. The students were charting questions and answers concerning plants. Allyson was the scribe for the group. She was busy writing information down on the chart paper when Hayden and Matthew told her that her 'writing was messy!' Upset and feeling hurt, Allyson reported their words to the student teacher. Upon learning of the situation I asked the students to please come out in the hall with me to discuss the matter. We began to circle, each student having an opportunity to talk about what happened. The boys gave a verbal apology but I also asked that they each write/draw Allyson a note of apology at home that evening. We were closing the circle and I turned to Allyson and asked her if she was accepting of the boys' apology. She looked at me and said "I think they should bring me flowers." I said, "Pardon?" (Thinking in my head - this is not in the manual!) Allyson repeated "I think the boys should bring me flowers." I asked "What made you think of this?" Allyson stated "Well, when I have to say sorry to my mom, I give her flowers!" The next morning the 2 boys arrived at school with their notes of apology. Together we went out to the flower beds in front of the school. The boys enjoyed every moment of picking the prettiest flower for Allyson. We went inside and the boys presented Allyson with her notes and flowers. She was beaming! *Lesa Racicott*



Engaging the whole high school student body

We have been integrating Restorative Practices into the fabric of life at Surrey Christian School in 3 main ways: in some staff meetings, within some classes, and with our school's advisory program. Our advisory program involves all the students who have been organized into mixed-age groups of 16-19 students who meet every Monday morning and every other Friday for purposes of enhancing a sense of belonging among students, dealing with current school issues, encouraging faith development, and engaging in friendly in-house competitions designed to promote team-building. Many of these staff-facilitated advisory groups use a restorative circles model; we have found that it's a great way to address issues, problems, celebrations, and basic weekly check-ins. It allows our groups to communicate in inclusive ways.



Kathy VanAndel

Circles and adult students

In my university course for pre-service teachers I begin each class with a light-hearted check-in circle. The impact can be incredible ... ***Personally, I found circles helped me a lot for presentations in other courses. Having the opportunity to share ideas each class gave me confidence and practice I needed, even though it was only for a few seconds.*

Shelly

***I absolutely love this aspect of the course. I honestly have never felt this comfortable speaking in class, from elementary to now! I cannot wait to actually try this in my own classroom to help students, such as myself, break free of the fear of speaking up in a judgment-free talking circle—Krystal*

Reviewing the key questions

What happened?

What are/were you thinking?

What are/were you feeling?

Who has been impacted? How?

What's the hardest thing for you?

What do you need [to do] to move forward.



??? Wondering ???

When circles go wrong... cont'd from last issue

In the last issue I addressed ways in which circles could go wrong. In this issue, I'd like to share how teachers can put themselves and their students into an unproductive problem-solving cycle because of a fear of including a 'third' student who is not directly involved in a harmful situation to give their perspective on the impact the incident has had. In using the key restorative justice questions (see bottom of page 2) to address a particular initial incident, the steps in the continuum of practice suggests that teachers first use the questions to form an *affective statement* about the impact of the actions on themselves personally. Then if the action persists, to pose the questions to the student responsible. If this has no effect, the third step includes inviting the people most impacted to share how the action has affected them. Up to this point, educators usually are able to engage in the process.

However, the next step is more difficult. An invitation to one or more peers who are impacted more peripherally is given to share their concerns and suggestions for how to resolve the situation. Though this can still be quite informal and take place in a corner of the classroom, the hallway, or at recess time teachers are hesitant to move into this. Though it is not clear why, conversations with educators reveal that besides being concerned about privacy, and the time it takes, they are most concerned because they are uncertain about what that student voice will bring and they do not trust that it will be valuable. Instead, they will revert to a more punitive, authoritarian approach or go back to step one ... the affective statements and essentially begin pleading with the student. At this point, the student recognizes they are now in control and become more resistant.

For those who overcome this fear and learn to trust their students, it becomes obvious that this student voice is usually one that speaks wisdom into the situation in a way that those involved and the teacher cannot imagine. To overcome this hesitancy, consider beginning by including an empty chair to

represent that others are impacted as well. Imagining what they might suggest can be enough to move the discussion forward. When this has some effect, it is a much smaller step to filling that empty chair with a wise peer.



Dorothy

Can you share an example of how a circle might work if there is a disagreement between a teacher and a parent?

When communication breaks down, misunderstandings can multiply. Distrust and anxiety build and community is broken. It is a blessing when we recognize this brokenness in our lives and take steps toward healing. As teachers, we teach and guide our students to use circles to repair harm and restore relationships. We are so blessed to see students work together to make things right!! However, there are also times when we as teachers, administration and/or parents need to repair harm in our relationships through the circle process. When it happens to us personally, we experience the miracle of healing for ourselves.

Recently, when a conflict between parent and teacher developed about what was best for their child/student, they met together in an informal circle setting with a fellow staff member as facilitator. Both teacher and parent took time to listen and communicate with one another, telling their stories, listening to one other and communicating what needed to be done to repair the harm they experienced. They were able to be honest and respectful, honouring each other's viewpoints and then took concrete steps to move ahead. Together, they left the circle assured of ways to work together in nurturing their child/student, knowing that the facilitator would support and encourage them in the actions to which they had committed.

Bernice



We may not all be called to do great things that make the headlines, but we are all called to love and be loved, wherever we may be. We are called to be open and to grow in love and thus to communicate life to others, especially to those in need.

Jean Vanier, 2001

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

*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:

- Vaandering, D. (2011). A faithful compass: Rethinking the term restorative justice to find clarity. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 14(3), 307-328.
- Vanier, J. (2001) *Seeing beyond depression*. New York: SPCK Publishing.

[images courtesy of Microsoft clipart]