

Restorative Justice in Education

DIALOGUE

Welcome to the November issue of The RJ Dialogue. For regular readers you will note the absence of the word “monthly” in our title. As editors, though our desire has been to send you monthly thoughts, ideas and questions to spur you on, our busy schedules have not allowed for this to happen. We trust you will accept a bi-monthly issue for this year. ☺

This month we welcome a more lengthy reflection than usual from highschool teacher, Kelly Jesperson that will make us smile and stop trying to get elephants to climb trees. We also welcome some shorter, pithy pieces that reflect the joyful and challenging realities of shifting to a more relational way of being! Enjoy!



Focused Lenses

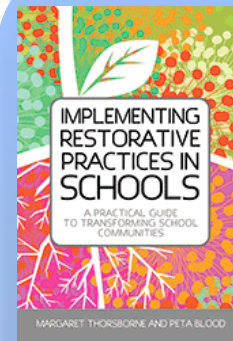
Remembrance Day, Restorative Justice Week, and Peace Lilies



In Canada, November 11 is Remembrance Day and November 17-24 is Restorative Justice Week. Each is set in an effort to remind people there has to be a different way--a different way to work out differences, a different way to repair harm.

As I paid for the peace lily I selected at the nursery today and carried it out to the car, it dawned on me how privileged we are as educators to be nurturing relational communities in schools. Spilled blood and repairing serious harm are realities, but if we can learn to dialogue and honour each other as valued, worthy human beings, perhaps in the future we can be celebrating peace more than we will need to remember death and brokenness.

*The wolf and the lamb will feed together
... They will neither harm nor destroy on
all my holy mountain,” says the Lord.
(Isaiah 65)*



NEW RESOURCE!

As the field of rj in education evolves, more and more excellent resources are being produced. Whether you are

just beginning to implement restorative justice in your school or have been working at it for years, Thorsborne and Blood's *Implementing Restorative Practices in Schools* is invaluable. The authors' years of experience infuse each page and provide a realistic picture of the possibilities and challenges you will face. Its strength lies in its comprehensive description of the change process and the clear direction given for setting a strong foundation. (Available from Amazon.)

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)

The ELEPHANT in the Room—What will we do with IT?



The cartoon on the left represents the crossroads at which we have arrived in today's education system. While we recognize that there are very significant differences in the way each child learns, the expectation continues to be results-oriented in a very standardized way. At the end of the year, there is still a measurement required in terms of how well each individual has performed according to the average, and whether or not that child is ready to continue to the next level, equally prescribed. It's as much of a conundrum as trying to get an elephant to climb a tree!

How then, as educators, do we teach effectively within a system that no longer matches our core values and beliefs about how a child learns? A shift in thinking is never a comfortable thing. We

tend, especially in times of change, to curl up into the comfort of our traditions and balk against the idea of adding more on to our already very full agendas. Alternatively, we grasp frantically onto the new trends hoping that they will save the day: Multiple Intelligences, collaborative learning, differentiated instruction, popcorn reading, foldables, pathway supports, zero tolerance, no zeroes allowed and on the list goes. Needless to say, teachers, administrators, and students are overwhelmed with the demands of this fast-paced society; we spend a great deal of time trying to navigate the information overload that has become our norm and hope that we as adults—and our children—make it through to the next holiday with our sanity fully intact and our bathroom passes hanging smartly by the sign-out sheet next to the door. Before throwing up our hands in defeat, I'd like you to consider the following studies:

- “Normal children today are more anxious than child psychiatric patients in the 1950's. This trend in anxiety and depression will continue to increase over the next decades. The reason? Our young people are feeling socially disconnected, unsafe in their environment, and mistrustful of others. Little wonder, then, that the authors of this study entitled this era, “the age of anxiety.” (Dr. Jean Twenge, 2000)
- A study by Dr. Lynda Younghusband (2000) on Newfoundland and Labrador teachers fits with the age of anxiety and feelings of isolation too. According to Younghusband, teachers express that educational change in the province in the past few years has resulted in leaving them feeling bombarded by demands and deadlines within the work day, with little time to reflect on their practices. Feelings of resentment for lack of personal and familial time were also noted.

Okay, now you can throw your hands up in defeat. Everyone is feeling alienated, resentful, and overwhelmed—students, teachers and administrators alike, so how can anyone cope with reaching her highest potential?

Let me share with you a little of my journey:


How do we build healthier relationships between youth and adults?

We recently asked youth to submit responses to the question above. We got over 1000 statements that we displayed in paper cranes at the EDGE 2013 conference. We continue to share them in the RJ DIALOGUE.

 *Look at things from our point of view.*

 *Actually try to talk to us about what we are doing.*



 *Adults can listen more and have greater trust in “youths”. I think they're always assuming “youths” are going to mess up.*

 *Treat us like equals rather than talk down to us and belittle us.*

The ELEPHANT in the Room, cont'd...

Feeling like a hamster caught in one of those exercise balls (which believe me, I don't want to be), I initially tried to keep up with the demands. "I must work harder so my students will succeed" was my inner mantra. One day, in the extreme heat in my classroom (windows bolted to prevent possible injury-or escape?) and filling in forms as to how many of my students were failing and what I was doing about it, I felt a modicum of resentment. This increased the following week when I had to fill in forms showing which students were passing which, in my opinion, was already indicated on the previous forms. Added to that was the horrendous job of keeping track of the hall pass which, at that time, certain kids were pilfering at an alarming rate. Was this a diabolical plot to undermine the bathroom needs of their peers? Or, was it a pointed action designed to send the message that bathroom oppression is not the answer in a school system? As I searched high and low-not for the philosophical meaning of it all but rather my hall pass-I thought, "When did I become the potty police rather than an experienced teacher of literature?" When I did then recover my hall pass, it was time to move on to a deeper question. It started out as, "Wait...what?" and then grew into, "How can my values as an educator fit with today's classroom in a way that my students are encouraged to grow into responsible and independent young learners? Really, that's a true story.

This is a huge question with which to grapple but, like most complex concepts, there is a simple shift that needs to occur in order to create a space for this "Wait...what?" dialogue to begin. Simply put, we need to reconnect with the values that, at the core, make us feel a sense of belonging to a community, and a sense of being valued as human beings.

So, teachers, let's throw off the "scent of burning martyrdom" and have a spritz of RJ-it'll cure what ails you. Instead of looking to the future, sometimes a journey into the past may hold the answer. Often, in society's attempt to keep up with itself, important lessons are lost. I think this is the case for Restorative Justice, the new/old paradigm shift that will allow educators to re-evaluate their core values, to reconnect with their students on a meaningful level, and to create the space where real learning can occur. Restorative Justice is not an "add-on"; it's an "instead of", providing a much needed refocus on what's important for the well-being of our community.

Restorative Justice has its roots in the spiritual and indigenous traditions. Essentially, in being created or being a part of things, it follows that we must be interconnected to others, and to the world around us. That makes each of us not only a valued member for what we have to offer, but also makes us accountable to the planet and those inhabiting it.

Does this sound like a tall order, or is it astounding in its simplicity? The good news about RJ is that it's a philosophy, not another "to do" list. At the grassroots, it entails one little change which will open a whole cornucopia of possibilities. Howard Zehr, an RJ advocate, suggests that we must change our lenses-the way we look at others- from ones that judge to ones that honour. In doing so, we will learn to appreciate the gifts that each one of us brings to the whole. Then, and only then, can we rebuild the trust and relationships that we, as human beings, so desperately need.

Starting with that simple question: "Am I honouring?" can lead to a whole shift in the way our classrooms foster growth and learning. With the RJ philosophy in mind, the space where metaphorical elephants, monkeys, and goldfish in bowls meet, becomes an intriguing adventure.

~Kelly Jespersion

Am I honouring?
Am I measuring?
What message am I sending?

Three key questions remind us of the ground RJ is rooted in --each challenges us to look at what we are doing personally to nurture healthy relationships. (See Issue 3:1 for details.)



"Nobody listens to me. I'm scared to fail. It feels like no one wants to help me. I'm going to fail English because I don't wanna get up in front of the class to do a project. I feel sick and sweaty when I do. I'm a shy person I can't help it, and there's a lot more kids like me that would rather fail, I wanna pass and prove my parents wrong, but, yeah, remember, don't make a kid do what they don't wanna do, trust me."

Insightful ideas

Encouraging community with your colleagues...

Kathy takes her understanding of restorative justice beyond her classroom to the choir of which she is a member. Consider how the following ideas might help you build relationships with your co-workers.

I am a member of a local women's community choir in St. John's. Every September, we hold a weekend-long retreat to rehearse music and to get to know each other better. Our conductor approached me about planning teambuilding activities for the choir as we both believe that building relationships helps build musicianship. Besides check-in circles, we decided on two activities:

1. Cheers to Us! Each chorister picked the name of another, and at an appointed time raised their glass in a toast, celebrating the special qualities and talents of their selected person.



2. Happy Wall: Each person wrote their name on a sheet of paper and posted it on the wall. Throughout the weekend, the choir members would anonymously write warm fuzzies on each person's sheet. It was a weekend full of joy: hugs, tears, smiles, laughter, and friendship. The feeling of family and community is tremendous and continues to fuel our strenuous rehearsals and performance schedules. :)

~Kathy Conway-Ward

A restorative justice film festival

Getting the word out to parents and community, as well as keeping our own learning about restorative justice in schools growing, is a challenge.

Consider feeding our communal need for growth by hosting a monthly (or once a term) film festival. This can be held in the school gym, your home, the staff room, a classroom. If the numbers are below 30 your event agenda could look like this:



- Welcome
- Beginning check-IN circle (remember to bring your talking piece and key guidelines) with a light topic such as, "What's the best thing about today?" This will demonstrate for adults how teachers in your school are working to build community in their classrooms.
- Introduce the film by giving some key principles of restorative justice and ask the audience for them to look for them in the film.
- Show the film.
- Gather in a check-UP circle to debrief thoughts that arise using questions such as: What surprised you? What did you notice? What questions do you have?
- Close with a check-OUT circle: What one new idea/action you are taking with you from tonight's event?

Along with a good variety of on-line videos such as those available from youtube or www.transformingconflict.org the following videos are a great place to begin:

Building Our Community (available from iirp.org)

Planting the Seeds (RCMP-BC www.rcmp-prtc.ca)

The Reena Virk Story (www.heartspeakproductions.ca)

Healing River (www.heartspeakproductions.ca)

Restorative Practices in Hull (www.iirp.org)

Several feature length movies are also emerging. Three great examples:

Bond of Silence: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1659192/>

Face to Face: <http://www.facetofacethemovie.com/>

How to Train Your Dragon: (Dreamworks)—a great story for children and adults alike to discover how knowing both sides of the story can result in the resolution of on-going conflict.

❖ *“Create a understandable method of teaching not based on what the adults learned in the past.”*

A bit of background ...

****THE RJ 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 Christian School Teachers Association (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:

- * Twenge, J. (2000). The age of anxiety? Birth cohort change in anxiety and neuroticism, 1952-1993. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol. 79 (6) p. 1007-1021.
- * Vaandering, D. (2011). A faithful compass: Rethinking the term restorative justice to find clarity. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 14(3), 307-328.
- * Younghusband, L. (Fall, 2000). Teacher stress in one school district in NL. *The Morning Watch*
<http://www.mun.ca/educ/faculty/mwatch/fall00/younghusband.htm>

[Happy Wall image courtesy of Kathy Conway-Ward; Crane images courtesy of G. Vaandering; all other images courtesy of Microsoft clipart]