

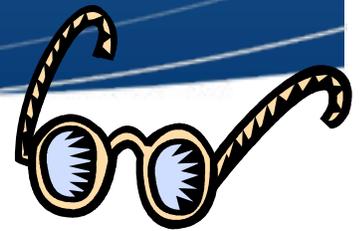
Restorative Justice in Education

Monthly DIALOGUE

Summer, the time of year when we find some time to STOP, to rest, to reflect, and to play. When the calendar page turns to **September**, new adventures begin fueled by what we have experienced away from our classrooms and schools. We trust that this month's RJ Dialogue will encourage you, remind you, and propel you forward into deeper understanding of how to engage with others in a way that truly honours them for who they have been created to be. Blessings for a 2013-2014 where you will discover more fully that living is all about navigating and nurturing relationships—with yourself, your colleagues, your students, your school community, and this incredible Creation we all share.

Focused Lenses

Community



The space and time summer provides for us, whether it be for a week or two or much longer, allows us to reconnect with ourselves and others in our family, neighbourhood, and broader community in more relaxed ways. When we are not consumed by the busyness of each day and night, we can enjoy relationships in ways that remind us of the deep importance those connections hold for us. Wachtel (1999) in an early article introducing rj identifies its potential for helping people reconnect with each other in a world where “alienation and loss of community plagues modern society.” At its core, that is what rj is really about—nurturing connections, building community. But what is community, and what do we strive for? It is tempting to imagine an ‘ideal’ community where we all live in peace and harmony. However, we do well to remember that communities grow because we *need* each other, and this requires that we allow ourselves to be vulnerable, to be ourselves. Vanier (1992) states it well:

Community is not an ideal; it is people. It is you and I. In community we are called to love people just as they are with their wounds and their gifts, not as we would want them to be. It is giving each other freedom; it is giving each other trust; it is confirming but also challenging each other.



As this new school year begins, hold on to the reality of community you experienced this summer while away from school and find ways to create community in your classroom, school, and neighbourhood. That is what is at the heart of restorative justice.

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)

Putting Restorative Justice into Practice

As people who work regularly with children and youth, we can be inclined to think that if we can teach our students to communicate effectively, then there is hope for greater peace in this world. What we forget is that our youth are careful observers of how the adults in their lives live and then they model what they see. Thus what is critical in a school is that adults model effective, respectful interactions for the students. Hence the following activity is designed for adults who interact and gather together regularly for meetings. With a few modifications, the activity can also be adapted for use with students of all ages.

- Sitting in a circle around a table or with an open space on the floor in front of your group, provide everyone with 5 strips of paper and ask each person to write "5 things you need **from others** to work at your best."
- When completed ask each person to lay their ideas on the floor speaking them aloud (without further comment). As each successive person lays their ideas out, if they are similar to one already displayed, they are placed with those that are similar.
- After everyone has shared their needs in this manner, discuss: What do you notice? What surprises you? etc. As this discussion takes place, continue to refine the groups so that similar needs are together in piles. Then organize the piles of comments from most common to least common.
- Divide the large group into pairs or threes and give each group a long strip of paper and one of the piles. Ask each group to turn their pile of needs into a guideline by completing the statement: *To work at our best when we are together we will* Write it on the strip of paper.
- Invite each group to present its guideline by laying it in the middle of the circle.
- When all are displayed, ask the whole group if they can agree to these guidelines as they interact with each other daily and during formal meetings, etc.
- There may be a need to tweek each to make it more readable/agreeable.
- After these have been refined, post them on the staff room wall, or the wall of the room where you meet regularly.
- At future meetings, choose one guideline to unpack by having people share an experience with how these needs were met. IE: A time I felt encouraged? A time I felt discouraged? A time I felt respected? A time I felt disrespected. Use only one topic for each meeting and remember to not use names in sharing.
- Another way of doing this would be to brainstorm ideas, pictures, or words around each of the guidelines. IE: what does [encouragement] look like, sound like and feel like?

[This activity was first published in the RJ Dialogue in 2010. It is repeated here as a valuable activity to start the year off in a way that allows each member to contribute to guidelines that will guide you as a community throughout the year. I use it with each class I teach and often with each committee I chair. Ultimately what is being compiled are key elements of our needs as human beings whether we are 43, 13, 28, 4, or 61 years old. Try it, modify it, and see how it helps you listen to each other.]

How do we build healthier relationships between youth and adults?

In May, we asked youth to submit responses to the question above. We got over 1000 statements that we turned into paper cranes and hung at our EDGE 2013 conference: Creating Direction for Peace and Justice. Thanks to all who contributed. Your words are so wise! They inspire such hope! We'll be sharing your insights throughout this and future issues.

- ❖ *Don't expect too much from us but don't expect too little either.*
- ❖ *Always ask open-ended questions.*
- ❖ *Say good night and good morning.*
- ❖ *Pay no attention to stereotypes set by society.*

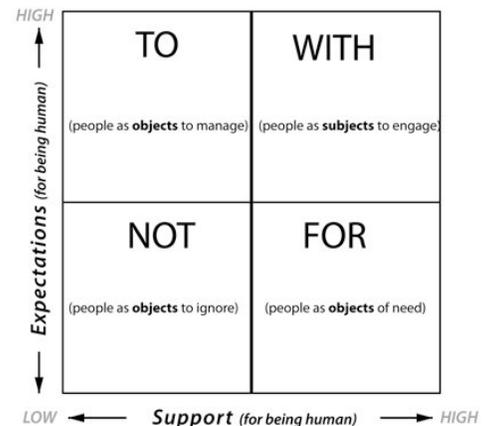


Looking back, looking ahead

A Year of Restorative Support

In 2012-2013 my school provided me with the unique opportunity to serve the school in the afternoons in the role of “Director of Community” Simply put, I was *restorative support*. As I reflect on that experience and look ahead to 2013-2014 in this role, here are some restorative practice take-aways that I will build on and I hope you might find valuable.

1. *Proactive is better than reactive*: Knowing students’ needs enables us to lead out of the needs rather than reacting to the by-products of the needs. Whether it is academic needs, relational needs, or challenges outside of school, investing in our students enables us to provide high support. I attempted to interview every grade 9 who had come into our school in order to discover their needs and to serve their best interests. Circles are valuable tools for enabling teachers to learn of students’ needs.
2. *Grace is hard*: Some students will make the choice to engage regularly in actions or activities that break community. After repeated offenses, every part of me wants to yell and let go on a student. I remind myself often of the big picture and that we are molding and shaping students – which is a long and rewarding process. At graduation in June I had the privilege of watching students who have been supported, and who have endured while being honoured.
3. *Be creative*: A student once said to me, “If you keep doing the same thing over and over and nothing changes, perhaps you need to consider what you are doing!” At one point I took two students for coffee last year. That half-hour conversation went better than anything that could have happened at school. The students were honest, felt honored, and told me how they would change the situation. Discipline would have been easy and would have changed the issue very little. That conversation over coffee reaped benefits for our whole school community.
4. *High expectations and high support have to work hand in hand*: I have been struck this year more than ever that our students need to be lead. Whether that is formally or informally in our role as teachers, mentors, and coaches, our students need high support and high expectations. I was struck that I asked some students day after day to change a habit, but they didn’t change. One day I realized that *my* actions were not helping them. Students need to know what to do, and *why* they should do it. I often fell short on this. Furthermore, I needed to walk along side them in encouraging change. The social relationship window needs to be front and centre in all of our student interactions, ensuring we are working WITH students.



*Social Relationship Window
Adapted from Social Discipline Window (Wachtel, 1999)*

5. *Smile and ask “What’s happening?”*: In interactions with students, it is easy to become accusatory: Why are you not in class?, Why are you playing games?, or Why do I have to ask you this every day? Those are all situations that are common and require high support & high expectations. Nonetheless, starting with an accusatory phrase negates high support and derails the process. Sometimes, the student reason is legitimate, which makes me feel horrible for accusing a student. I have learned to smile and say, “What is happening here?” to engage the student and to initiate the process towards providing high support and high expectations.

~Owen Webb



- ❖ Let me talk when I am trying to explain something.
- ❖ Treat us like you treat each other.
- ❖ Share your dreams.

Sharing Grief through Healing Circles

Tragedy struck the Clarke family with its sudden, blindsiding fury the morning of Jan. 17, 2012.

It was a typical morning in the busy household. Mom Lisa drove Bryanna, 13, to school and herself to work. Melissa, 14, who was home schooled, was allowed to sleep in a bit before being driven by her Dad Bryan to the school where she received academic support. Jessica, 17, who was also home schooled, worked on assignments while awaiting her father's return. No one anticipated the event that would change everything.

Winter roads, black ice, oncoming traffic, a car losing control. Melissa died at the scene. A family of five now a family of four, heartbroken, broken.

The months passed and the anniversary of Melissa's death loomed. Lisa wanted to in some way honor her daughter, and provide an opportunity for Melissa's classmates at West Edmonton Christian School to remember their friend. (Melissa had attended the Christian school from 2005-2011. In the haze of shock and grief following the accident, Melissa's friends and teachers did not have the opportunity to grieve with the family.)

A friend of the family suggested a healing circle. "As I became more comfortable with the thought of having a circle, I began to have a peace about allowing others more intimately into our grief," said Lisa. "I knew Melissa had many friends still really working through her death. This was a way to let them have a voice and hear their pain and suffering. That was a very freeing part of the circle and the beginning of the healing process for us," she said.

About 40 chairs were placed in a circle in the school gym. In the centre a colorful quilt was topped with pictures, soccer shoes, iced cupcakes and other intimate memories of Melissa's life selected by her family for the occasion. The circle grew and more chairs added as people flooded into the gym.

Melissa's grandfather, a retired Presbyterian pastor, opened with prayer. A microphone and talking piece (a river rock from a cherished family camping trip) was passed around the circle, providing anyone who held the talking piece the opportunity to talk about or to Melissa. "I think one of the strengths of the circle is that people are given open opportunity to speak or to be silent. I found the words difficult to say and being allowed to sit in silence and listen was a gift," said Bryan.

Nervously at first, and then with increasing confidence, classmates, their parents, and teachers spoke about Melissa, sharing their memories and offering insight and wisdom. Tears mingled with laughter, regrets with optimism.

At the circle's conclusion each person took a helium-filled purple balloon and released it outside in the frigid air. The circle was followed with a meal and time of fellowship in the junior high lounge.

In reflecting back on the circle, Lisa says it forced the family to discuss Melissa's death "and how losing her left such a hole in our lives. This was the best and worst part." Not everyone in the family wanted the circle. "Bryan just wanted our family left alone. Bryanna didn't want to sit with us or participate in the circle. We argued and raised our voices and hugged and just fell apart some nights...It was the best thing (because) it got us talking again and not ignoring things that needed to be discussed."

Anita Veldhuisen-Slomp and Joanne Munro co-facilitated the circle. "Being part of that circle, sharing in the pain of those sitting there, being part of that community of support, was an amazing experience," said Joanne. "God's grace was evident in the face of every child and adult in that room."

For Anita, a significant moment was in "sensing the relief in the participants as they were able to let go of their grief. The circle provided the safety they needed."

For Melissa's family, the circle was protective. "The circle became very significant because as you sit there you realize there is a connectedness and unbrokenness about the form of a circle," said Lisa. "It is tangible. You can look around and feel love from those around you. Even in the midst of all our personal pain the circle seemed to protect in some way."

Said Bryan: "The trauma and negative memory from the accident was/is still so present in moments when we talk about Melissa that it was difficult to see beyond that deep anxiety that overwhelms. But when several of her friends spoke, I heard them, and it was helpful to see the good memories they had. Seeing so many people who loved Melissa was deeply moving and even now continues a better memory of her."

Taking the chance to invite people into the family's grief through the circle process was not easy, but the rewards were great, said Lisa. "Through a community much larger than our own we received the tangible hands and feet of Christ. I could never have known our burden could have been made a little lighter by allowing others in. It blessed our family."

Joanne Munro is a Restorative Justice facilitator, nationally chartered mediator, and instructor in the fields of Restorative Justice/Practice and conflict resolution. Her five children all attended West Edmonton Christian School.



❖ *One thing or one word can change the whole world. Adults and youth coming together can change the whole world.*



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:

*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 Jersey: Paulist Press. pp 35-36

[Crane images courtesy of G. Vaandering; all other images courtesy of Microsoft clipart]