

Supporting Every Student Learning Series

CONVERSATION GUIDE

An Introduction to Restorative Practices

Part 1. Justice, Identity and Belonging

(with Dr. Brenda Morrison, Centre for Restorative Justice, Simon Fraser University)

Understanding the rationale and theory that underpins restorative practices can contribute to the creation of welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments.

Key understandings:

- Justice is central to our everyday lives. All human beings have a strong, innate sense of justice, felt and measured through the lens of relationships.
- Justice is all our responsibility and must be the central ethos of all social institutions, including schools.
- Our sense of identity is based on knowing who we are and where we belong and who our people are, and is important for our sense of security. Belonging and identity are deeply intertwined.
- Social control is primarily based on fear, leverages punishment, and is characterized by disempowerment and disconnection.
- Restorative practices are primarily based on love and compassion, leverages social engagement, and is characterized by respect, responsibility and relationship.
- We are more likely to act from a place of compassion when we feel we belong to a social group.
- A healthy restorative process can create empowerment, connection, harmony, and order.
- Educators need to be aware of the theory (or model) they are working with to create school and classroom culture.
- Restorative practices are respectful processes of social engagement that nurtures social relationships, develops strong and healthy social identities, and strengthens students' sense of place
- Restorative practices require a relationship focus; that is, a relationship with self; a relationship with others; and a relationship with community.

Justice, Identify and Belonging

Key understandings (cont.):

- As educators, we often expect students to do all of the changing; from a restorative perspective, the onus may also be on the educators to change practice.
- Shifting from an emphasis on social control to social engagement means:
 - matching rules with values
 - negotiating third party (administrator) decision-making with first party (those most affected) decision-making
 - leveraging the power of emotion;
 - thinking differently about how the power of the individual fits with the power of the group
 - asking different questions (from *Who did it?* to *What are their needs?*)
- Restorative practices see the power shift from the social order (external) to human potential (the power within); there is a shift from being task-oriented to being more relationship-oriented; and a shift from asking students '*What do you want to be?*' to asking '*Who do you want to be?*'

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- How would you describe the current theories or models that are shaping your school's culture?
- How would you describe your staff's current understanding of justice and restorative practices? Are these topics of conversation in your school? Why or why not?
- What school-wide approaches are currently being implemented that could support a restorative approach?
- What benefits could a restorative approach bring to your school?

For more information:

- See Alberta Education's [resources on restorative practices](#), including a [video](#), [conversation guide](#), and [external links](#).