Restorative Dialogue:
A Transformative Journey of Peacemaking

Mark S. Umbreit, Ph.D.
Center for Restorative Justice & Peacemaking
University of Minnesota, School of Social Work

2004
Underlying Assumptions of Restorative Dialogue

- Conflict understood as a wound in relationships and fabric of the community
- Changing hearts and minds requires human encounter, acknowledgement of each other’s story, and tolerance of differences
- Focus is on humanizing the conflict and repairing the harm
Characteristics of Restorative Dialogue

- Creation of a safe place where people can speak and listen from the heart
- Suspension of judgmental attitudes
- Openness to hearing the life context of the other person
Characteristics of Restorative Dialogue

- Seeking to hear the truth in the other’s position even while not necessarily agreeing.

- A spirit of humility and compassion, for all.
Characteristics of Restorative Dialogue

- Transformative impact on relationships
- From stereotypes based on absence of personal context
Characteristics of Restorative Dialogue

- To relationships that place the conflict in the context of each other’s personal story

- From “I-It” to “I-Thou” relationships as described by the philosopher Martin Buber
Facilitator Activities in Restorative Dialogue

- Preparation of the facilitator – self-care
- Being centered and focused
- Separate preparation meetings with the involved parties
Facilitator Activities in Restorative Dialogue

- Deep compassionate listening
- Hearing and honoring the personal stories of all
- Connecting with people, remaining impartial
Facilitator Activities in Restorative Dialogue

- Listening and speaking from the heart, as well as the head
- Listening to the language of the body and spirit, as well as the language of the mind
- Honoring the healing power of silence
Facilitator Activities in Restorative Dialogue

- Listening for the strength and compassion within the parties
- Communicating warmth and safety in opening the dialogue
- Facilitator says little in dialogue, yet is totally emotionally present, intervening only when absolutely necessary
Phases of Restorative-Transformative Dialogue

I. Preparation

II. Cultivation
Phases of Restorative-Transformative Dialogue

III. Engagement

IV. Integration
Pathways to Restorative Dialogue

- One-on-one dialogue with NO FACILITATOR
- Group dialogue with NO FACILITATOR
Pathways to Restorative Dialogue

- One-on-one dialogue (often with support people present) WITH FACILITATOR

Group dialogue WITH FACILITATOR
Approaches to Restorative Dialogue

“Many streams flowing into the healing river of transformative dialogue”

- VICTIM OFFENDER CONFERENCING, also known as victim offender mediation or reconciliation

**Strength:** More direct, intimate, informative to primary people affected

**Limitation:** The impact and needs of other people affected are not shared
VICTIM/OFFENDER MEDIATION (DIALOGUE)
Approaches to Restorative Dialogue

“Many streams flowing into the healing river of transformative dialogue”

- FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING

  **Strength:** Others affected by conflict (family members, other support people) are part of process

  **Limitation:** Not as much attention to needs of primary people affected
FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE

- Facilitator
- Offender
- Supporter
- Victim
- Member of Community
- Human Services &/or Probation
- School Administration or Law Enforcement
Approaches to Restorative Dialogue

“Many streams flowing into the healing river of transformative dialogue”

COMMUNITY GROUP CONFERENCING

Strength: Others affected by conflict (family members, other support people) are part of process

Limitation: Not as much attention to needs of primary people affected
Approaches to Restorative Dialogue

“Many streams flowing into the healing river of transformative dialogue”

TALKING OR HEALING CIRCLES

Strength: Others affected by conflict (family members, other support people, others in the community) are part of process

Limitation: Not as much attention to needs of primary people affected
Approaches to Restorative Dialogue

“Many streams flowing into the healing river of transformative dialogue”

**PEACE MAKING CIRCLES**

**Strength:** Others affected by conflict (family members, other support people, others in the community) are part of process

**Limitation:** Not as much attention to needs of primary people affected
Approaches to Restorative Dialogue

“All of the above, with surrogate victims and offenders, or hybrids”

Strength: Allows for maximum flexibility in meeting needs, particularly when the actual victim and offender cannot meet

Limitation: Actual victim/offender never meet
Evidence-based Practice: Restorative Dialogue in Action

MORE THAN 63 EMPIRICAL STUDIES

- 50 on victim offender mediation
- 10 on family group conferencing
- 3 on peacemaking circles
Evidence-based Practice: Restorative Dialogue in Action

- Victim Satisfaction is high
- Offender Satisfaction is high
- Restitution Compliance is increased
- Recidivism is reduced
Evidence-based Practice: Restorative Dialogue in Action

RECIDIVISM STUDY – Meta Analysis
(Nugent, Umbreit, Wiinamaki, Paddock, 2001)

- Sample of 1,298 juvenile offenders
- VOM = 619, Comparison Group = 679
- 32% REDUCTION IN RECIDIVISM
Pitfalls and Unintended Negative Consequences - 1

- Retro-fitting the language of RJ to the same old stuff (Talking the talk but not walking the talk)

- Where’s the Victim?

- Where’s the Community?

- Where’s opportunities for RJ Dialogue? (V/O mediation, family group conferencing, circles)
**Pitfalls and Unintended Negative Consequences - 2**

- Mandating offenders to meet their victim(s)
- Inadequate training/support of volunteers
- Co-opting the movement by CJS
- Reinforcing offender-driven CJS
Pitfalls and Unintended Negative Consequences - 3

- Marginalizing the movement

- OR “The McDonaldization of RJ Movement” (Fast-food version of RJ dialogue – Quick, efficient, no preparation, limited impact)

- Widening and strengthening the net of social control – limited impact as alternative process
Initiating a system wide commitment for citizens to access local community-based RJ practices as first choice to deal with most crime, with legal right to access formal CJS as back-up alternative for those who are not satisfied with restorative justice.
Opportunities for Expanding the vision - 2

- Developing an increased number of hybrids that integrate and compensate for the strengths and limitations of individual RJ interventions.

- Increasing the use of surrogate victim offender community dialogue (Examples of CVORJ/MN and Genessee County).
Opportunities for Expanding the vision - 3

- Applying RJ principles & practices in school settings from elementary through college, on a system-wide basis.

- Expanding the use of RJ principles and practices in workplace settings.
Opportunities for Expanding the vision - 4

- Building increased support and involvement for victims of violent crime, including victim intervention projects and victim offender dialogue programs.

- Developing broad-based legislative support for public resources to support RJ movement, based on evidence of its impact.
Opportunities for Expanding the vision - 5

- Building more bridges between dominant European culture and the many ethnic groups and communities of color in American society.

- Strengthening the fabric of community and civic responsibility by increasing involvement in community-based initiatives.