

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN A CANADIAN SCHOOL CONTEXT

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I am thrilled and honoured to participate in this international conference in Budapest. It is my privilege to be able to share some of what has been happening with restorative practices in schools in a region of Canada.

Children meeting in impromptu restorative circles, thousands of informal restorative interventions, over 130 formal restorative conferences last school year, teachers meeting in facilitated restorative circles to address interpersonal conflict, the restorative questions posted throughout schools as a way to guide and influence language and thinking — these are some of the exciting signs that the schools of Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board in Ontario, Canada, are embracing restorative language and practices. I can think of numerous examples of how restorative practice has changed the conversation among students and teachers and thus the outcome. I strongly believe we are in the midst of a paradigm shift as school administrators, teachers, students, and



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parents move from a punitive way of thinking to a restorative one!

The Kawartha Pine Ridge School Board is located in central Ontario just east of Toronto, Canada. With close to one hundred schools, seventeen secondary and eighty elementary, it covers a large territory the size of two and half counties, incorporating rural, small-town and growing urban areas. In addition to what we have been doing, there are other school boards in Ontario making great strides in developing restorative practices in their schools: York Region north of Toronto, Hasting and Prince Edward counties in Eastern Ontario, and Waterloo Region west of Toronto are some that come to mind. British Columbia, 4000 kilometres away on Canada's west coast, also has seen some exciting developments over the past number of years. Due to the limited time frame for this presentation, I will focus on what has been happening in Kawartha Pine Ridge.

Over the past three years, our school board has moved from doing a few formal restorative conferences to embracing the 'restorative practice framework' for use in all of its schools. As school administrators, staff, and students began to experience the powerful impact of well-run conferences, the board leadership began looking for ways to increase schools' use of restorative practices. When Terry O'Connell graciously shared with us the restorative practice framework that he had developed for use in schools in Australia, along with teachers and others in the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), things really began to take off! The framework provides a logical, explicit, comprehensive approach to school life, incorporating elements such as Socratic engagement, a restorative practices definition, the restorative questions, the continuum of restorative practice, the social discipline window, fair process, sociological and psychological theories, and a restorative practice checklist. It is an effective path to transforming school culture where restorative philosophy and practice become the way of thinking and being. With its focus on building and strengthening relationships and repairing harm when issues arise, it truly enhances teaching and learning and creates safe school environments. This past year we trained all of our 160 school administrators along with police officer representatives in the two-day Real Justice conference facilitator training. To the end of this past June, all staff, students, and parents in 38 elementary and 9 high schools experienced restorative practice

framework training through a series of in-services. All this has been propelled by a two-week visit by Terry a year ago, as well as changes in provincial safe schools legislation, where we have been ahead of the wave, since restorative approaches are encouraged.

What's ahead? In addition to the ambitious plans that are now in motion to complete the restorative framework training for all staff, students, and parents in the remaining 51 schools this year, other thrilling things are taking place. For example, as a way to further embed restorative thinking and approaches in grades 9–12 schools, four of the high schools are conducting two full-day restorative practice intensive workshops for all grade nine students. A two-week unit focusing on restorative practice in all grade nine English classes in those four schools — with the theme 'relationships are most important for learning and the choices you make affect you and others' — is complementing this. We also are exploring ways in which restorative practices can have greater usage in addressing workplace issues. Also, as a practical tool for teachers, we have developed a scripted parent-teacher interview process based on a Socratic engagement style incorporating restorative questions. We continue to train formal restorative conference facilitators as well as incorporate numerous approaches on the continuum of restorative practice in all our schools. These are just a few of the exciting developments occurring and I am truly grateful to be part of it!

The video we will now be viewing, 'Beyond Zero Tolerance', demonstrates how restorative practices are effectively utilized in schools in southeastern Pennsylvania, USA, and the Netherlands. These examples have had a profound influence on the development of school-based restorative practices around the world and have been an inspiration for our work in the Kwartha Pine Ridge District schools.