

BOOK REVIEW

Lindsey Pointer, Kathleen McGoe and Haley Farrar, *The little book of restorative teaching tools: games, activities and simulations for understanding restorative justice practices*. New York: Good Books, 2020, 126 pp., ISBN-13: 978-1680995886.

This book is not what you might expect it to be. In fact, it is much more. The title and the subtitle lead one to expect that it is a little book of tools and that in the toolbox are activities, games and simulations for restorative justice education. The book does offer that, and then some. I would suggest, however, that the book is a substantive and extended discussion and illustration of the conceptual underpinnings and the practices for a restorative pedagogy. This review will provide the reasons for what I am suggesting.

The intent of the book is, as the authors state, to offer a 'well-structured and intentional framework' (2) to facilitate 'the delivery of connected, courageous, honest and empowering learning experiences' (2) that counteract the experience of being in controversial discussions without the benefit of trust and a relationship; or having had a process that was enjoyable and allowed for connection but did not involve meaningful discussions; or still, been in a one-way lecture where at the end only the usual suspects voice their thoughts.

The authors outline how to implement their central objective by describing a restorative pedagogy, in Chapter 2. This is achieved, in part, by employing experiential activities that facilitate a particular type of learning that is directed towards praxis and is transformative. This is supported by the work of Paulo Freire and bell hooks, both of whom employ and articulate an anti-oppressive pedagogy. It is also found in and grounded in particular values that distinguish the restorative world view exemplified by numerous practitioners and writers (e.g. Davis, 2019; Valandra, 2020). I will return to this chapter after highlighting some of the key points from each one.

Chapter 3 discusses the theory, benefits and practice related to experiential learning. The authors offer eminently practical suggestions that support learning that needs to venture into the unknown for it to be learning. All persons operate from within a zone of comfort. The challenge is to construct the scaffolding that can assist persons to move beyond this limit. What the authors suggest are five items in particular: building trust, establishing consent and agreement, engaging relationally, creating value-based guidelines with participants and being explicit about the process and expectations. Of note, these each represent restorative principles and practices and reflect a congruence between content and practice. They could easily be used as a checklist for educators and teaching regardless of the context or content.

Chapter 4 discusses the essential requirement for building a community of learners and learning. Community is defined in various ways, from Howard Zehr's reference to *shalom* and its meaning as just relationships to Fania Davis's reference to *Ubuntu* and its meaning as a way of being that reflects our

interdependence and can be expressed as 'I am because of you'. One could add in First Nations/Indigenous perspectives which, for both Lakota and Cree, the central concept is that we are all related (Davis, 2019). In the modern world when individuals come together in diverse spaces, as are educational ones, they do not begin as members of a community. Therefore, trust, in this liminal space, which exists apart from normal life, rules and conventions, must be built, which in turn becomes a starting point for building a learning community.

Chapter 5 offers the design tools and attitudinal orientation for preparing to teach. This chapter highlights what are essential qualities and practices that support those who teach, to be in the moment, authentic, open, honest, vulnerable and empathic. In this age of increased awareness of the issues in the United States in particular, but by no means restricted to that country, the need to reflect on privilege, bias, power, racism, colonisation and settler dynamics is essential. The authors describe it as being the start of the dialectic and dialogic process that needs to be the core of all pedagogy. I would offer the suggestion that this should actually be placed prior to its location in the book since this, I believe, is the foundation from which all authentic and liberatory pedagogy begins – the constructed self.

Chapter 6 provides a guide to designing experiential activities, presented as a six-stage model, which outlines a developmental progression for a learning community. Each stage is progressively linked, and the last stage is critical, since it is the debriefing section. This is the opportunity to facilitate the process where learning is encouraged and supported through critical reflection. It is an opportunity to take the visceral and transform it into knowledge and, possibly, action. This is where the head, the heart and the hands can be integrated for participants.

Chapter 7 offers the framework and tools for designing activity-based learning. While similar in focus to the previous chapter, since there may be no substantive distinction between what is considered experiential and what are activities, there are a number of helpful suggestions for implementation.

The authors conclude by offering a range of games, exercise and activities that, for those who educate, are practical demonstrations of a process that supports the notions and values central to a restorative praxis committed to transformation. These are easily adaptable and necessary, given the current and historical context of Black Lives Matters and the need to decolonise education.

This little book carries out the promise of what is indicated in the second chapter, which is to outline a theory of, and the praxis related to, a 'Restorative Pedagogy' (11). In fact, I would argue that this is actually the substance of this book. It is primarily about the practices and processes that constitute a pedagogy that can more accurately be called a restorative pedagogy. Integrated into this teaching is the use of experiential constructs that examine and highlight key restorative concepts and principles. By being declarative about a focus on restorative pedagogy it places itself among the small but growing cadre of

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instructors, professors and trainers who practice and espouse just that type of pedagogy.¹

This is emerging as a pedagogical practice that needs to be stated more explicitly and widely, which the authors of this 'little book' amply support in the writing and references. The field exists at an evolutionary flexion point and crossroads where the focus on restorative justice has mostly been and is taught in law and criminology courses, and, in some instances, in education. This makes sense given its origin as an innovation in the field of law and justice studies and practice and later in education. The evolution of the paradigm, however, has been and is being demonstrated to have a wider and more all-encompassing model for practice.

Indeed, with fundamental principles such as relational engagement, the building of communities and the centring of voice, the scope of it as a model for practice can be, and is being, applied to all manner of work and engagement wherever persons are involved with one another, whether in formal or informal settings. The field has extended its reach to be, as many have asserted, a model for practice and also a social science in its own right. There are demonstrable examples of the extension of this scope of practice wherein a whole systems approach is espoused in education,² where city-wide adoption of restorative practices has been implemented,³ where it is asserted as a foundation for 'doing democracy with circles' (Ball, Caldwell & Pranis, 2010), as a foundation for architectural design⁴ and to be the basis for restorative inquiry and listening for the historical harms of the care of black persons in state-run institutions,⁵ and countless youth-focused and -led initiatives.⁶ These are just a few examples of practice which serve to demonstrate the applicability of the model to wherever there is relational engagement and a need for community building and repair. They are outside of the justice arena in many respects as they reflect both a broader focus on issues of equity and social justice and an engagement with the traumatic effects of historical, intergenerational and ongoing structural and systemic violence.

- 1 See recent initiative by UNODC Education for Justice in collaboration with Maynooth University to hold online roundtables on restorative justice pedagogy (www.unodc.org/e4j/en/tertiary/events/e4j-webinar-series_roundtables-on-restorative-justice-pedagogy.html, last accessed 21 October 2020).
- 2 Numerous authors have written on this topic, including Peta Blood and Margaret Thorsborne, Belinda Hopkins, Brenda Morrison and Martha Brown.
- 3 See this journal's recent Notes from the Field (2019/2(2)) dedicated to the topic of whole city restorative projects.
- 4 See the work of 'Designing Justice + Designing Spaces' under Deanna Van Buren and their results in Oakland. Details can be found here: <https://designingjustice.org> (last accessed 21 October 2020).
- 5 See Final Report of the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children Restorative Inquiry by Jennifer Llewellyn and others, available here: <https://restorativeinquiry.ca/report/Restorative-Justice-Inquiry-Final-Report.pdf> (last accessed 21 October 2020).
- 6 See, for example, the work of Udoro Gatewood and Anita Wadhwa at Restorative Empowerment for Youth in Houston (www.restorativeempowerment.com, last accessed 21 October 2020).

This book provides the opportunity to continue to integrate, in an authentic way, the union of content, restorative justice and restorative and pedagogical practice. It illustrates what constitutes an authentic restorative pedagogy, one that is preceded by commonly accepted values and principles, which include relational engagement, the sharing of power, the capacity to journey with others, a fair process for high expectations, the centring of voice which extends to the diverse embodied experiences, the role of affect, the capacity to engage in productive, difficult conversations in safe spaces, the opportunity to learn, fail and grow and the ability of these processes to support the development of empowered personal narratives.

It is also essential to look through the window and turn the gaze inwards on our own biases and, where applicable, privilege. In fact, the ample quotes and references to Freire and bell hooks clearly speak to a different model of education that aligns itself with the intent of restorative practices, which is a praxis that is transformative. Equally, all educational processes need to be empowering for students, culturally relevant and supportive of transformation and the development of new narratives. This pedagogy has wide application in all learning contexts.

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References

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