

BOOK REVIEW

Craig Adamson, *Intentional classroom engagement*. Bethlehem: International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2020, 110 pp., ISBN: 978-193435550-3.

The journey of the restorative practitioner is one of constant striving towards adherence with restorative values and principles. There is no endpoint; it is indeed a *practice*, which involves regular intentional self-reflection and avenues for receiving feedback from others in the field who are on the same journey of adopting a more restorative approach to the way they are in relationships. In *Intentional classroom engagement*, Craig Adamson has provided a helpful tool for restorative practitioners working in the school context to adopt a constant practice of self-reflection and peer feedback. Strategies and tips for operating restoratively in schools are interspersed with prompts followed by blank lines to record the reader's response, so that the book functions partly as an accessible guide and partly as a personal journal, documenting the thoughts and reflection of the developing restorative practitioner.

As the body of literature around developing restorative practices facilitator competencies grows, so too does a collection of more practical guides and tools to aid facilitators in this reflective process. I will offer examples from two additional authors here. Barb Toews has put forth three helpful tools for engaging in this critical self-reflection: identity memos, teaching statements and self/course evaluations (Toews, 2013). The identity memo helps to surface assumptions, biases and experiences that a teacher brings to their role and how they influence the class. The teaching statement helps to identify the educator's motivations, beliefs, goals and strategies related to teaching. The course and self-evaluation guide invites reflection on the extent to which your teaching promoted or hindered student expression of personal experiences and perspectives, communicated respect for students, created opportunities for students to be teachers, challenged your own assumptions and more. Each of these tools is designed to be done with feedback from fellow teachers as well as students.

Annie O'Shaughnessy has offered a mindfulness-based approach to support teachers in this essential act of self-reflection (O'Shaughnessy, 2019). This tool invites educators to Pause (take a deep breath), Assess (bring awareness to their own experience), Acknowledge (begin the interaction with the student by acknowledging what you notice), Inquire (ask restorative questions to learn more, intentionally dismantling your assumptions) and Restore/Repair (collaborate with the student to come up with ways to repair harm and relationships). O'Shaughnessy uses the acronym P.A.I.R. to help educators remember this process, which builds an opportunity for real-time mindfulness and self-reflection into interactions with students in the classroom.

The proliferation of tools to aid restorative practitioners and teachers in this self-reflective process points to the pressing need for this sort of structure in the development and continued growth of new and seasoned restorative practitioners. Different methods for approaching this reflective process include mindfulness and

Lindsey Pointer

meditative practices, embodied approaches, arts-based processing, dialogue-based approaches and written reflections. The approach and prompts put forth in *Intentional classroom engagement* will be a great fit for educators who prefer verbal processing methods, especially written reflections, and dialogues with others in their school community. Regardless of the method, ongoing critical self-reflection is a requirement for teaching restoratively. It is imperative for practitioners to keep exploring until they find a method that works for them (Pointer, McGoey & Farrar, 2020).

In Chapter One, Adamson begins by offering an explanation of his own background and experience working with youth and adult-learners. This is followed by a description of the Community Service Foundation and the development of the Social Discipline Window. He then shares a series of prompts and space for written reflection on times the educator has found themselves in different quadrants of the Social Discipline Window and a list of questions to ask a trusted colleague to solicit feedback on the reader's teaching approach. The chapter concludes with short sections on understanding restorative practices as a social science that looks at how to build and restore healthy communities and ensuring your practice is research-informed. These are supported by additional reflection prompts and space to record your thoughts. The final set of prompts invite the reader to engage students and parents in a dialogue, inviting feedback on the reader's teaching and classroom culture. These questions would provide very helpful information for the educator, assuming adequate trust has been built to ensure honest and direct feedback.

In Chapter Two, Adamson reminds readers of the importance of restorative educators changing their own thinking, approach and behaviour. This includes careful reflection on how the educator engages others, the tone used, their mindset and pedagogical approach. These brief content sections are again supported by reflection prompts and space for the reader to write their thoughts and experiences. This chapter also suggests that the reader video or audio record themselves facilitating a circle or exercise and then reflect on their tone, body language and general delivery. I would add a cautionary note that participants must freely consent to being recorded and that the act of recording may shift the dynamic of the process; however, I do see the usefulness of creating the opportunity to observe yourself and your teaching approach in a more removed way.

In Chapter Three, Adamson provides reflections to support the reader in advancing their own restorative practice including further information about circle practice, how to keep going even when it feels awkward, embracing silence as a good thing, inviting critical voices and focusing on equity, voice and inclusion. Reflection prompts and space for writing are further supported by a simple recipe for giving feedback, and example circle questions to use with your class and encourage deeper sharing. There is a separate section of higher-risk circle questions such as 'How does race impact your relationships?', 'What does privilege mean to you?' and 'Are you experiencing any difficulties in learning? How can this community support your learning?' There are a number of really excellent circle questions included in this section. It would have been helpful to also include an example circle structure and discussion of how to scaffold circle questions in order

to build trust and comfort in the circle community before taking a deep dive. Adamson opens the book with a note that the book, as part of the Advanced Practitioner Series from the International Institute for Restorative Practices, makes some broad assumptions about the reader's prior learning and experience with restorative justice, so it is possible that this art of scaffolding circle questions and building trust is considered part of this more foundational material, though a reminder alongside these higher-risk circle questions could be helpful to the reader in supporting best practices.

Chapter Four is about intentional, proactive relationship building in the school community. The exercises in this section include mini-assignments such as 'Think of someone who might be struggling at your school; ask how you can support them.' These simple acts are great ways to build a relational and caring school culture. This chapter also includes further information on proactive circles to create community and space to create your own circle questions based on the Circle of Courage, a model for understanding students' needs for Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity. There is further guidance in this chapter on how to offer both positive and constructive feedback.

In Chapter Five, Adamson provides guidance for when issues come up in the school community. Adamson advises teachers to trust their intuition when something does not feel right and to intervene with a restorative question or expression of care. This chapter includes space for brainstorming affective statements, circle questions to use when the community is impacted by a student's behaviour and a list of times to facilitate circles in your classroom.

Chapter Six addresses issues of significant harm including bullying and violence or threats of violence. Adamson discusses when to use a conference versus a circle process, the restorative questions, what to do when a student is both the harmer and the harmed, and what to do if it keeps happening. These short sections are supported by space for written reflections on prompts such as 'When someone refuses to take ownership through the restorative questions, how will you respond? Can you use affective statements or questions to reengage the conversation?'

In Chapter Seven, Adamson turns his attention to restorative reintegration and how to accept someone back into the community. This is a short chapter with just three reflection questions inviting readers to consider how students are currently reintegrated after an incident, suspension or expulsion; how it could be approached differently; and how the wider community is involved and could support the reintegration process. A short summary chapter concludes the book with a bullet point list of reminders for restorative educators. Some of these are helpful slogan-like reminders, such as 'Your tone and body language are as important as the words you choose.' Some represent points of great complexity within the restorative justice field and perhaps deserve further exploration and discussion at each point mentioned so that they do not lead to cultural appropriation or actions that may be experienced as harmful such as 'Understand your community's history and whether there are any indigenous influences that could help frame norms about your processes.'

As Adamson notes, this book is not a standalone, it is intended to be used as an aid in a larger journey of learning and practice for the restorative educator.

Lindsey Pointer

What it does provide is some helpful prompts and exercises as well as literal space for restorative educators to track their thoughts and developments as they endeavour towards greater expression of restorative values in their approach to teaching and relationships. Particularly for the verbal and written processors among us, Adamson has provided a helpful tool to aid in the individual's practice of restorative approaches.

*Lindsey Pointer**

References

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