

Training in Restorative Justice: Enhancing collaboration with public school educators

David Osborn

Abstract

In this article I explore the use of training in restorative practices as a means of developing educators' collaborative abilities. The research in this article is based on the development and implementation of two restorative justice training programs. Both training programs made extensive use of a talking-circle format, which provided the space for both experience and reflection.

The effective use of collaboration assumes that individuals are actively engaged in their social environment and are therefore able to assert their needs within that context. It also assumes they can reflect on their actions and are able to co-operate within their social environment

In developing my argument I use dialectics, such as assertion and co-operation, to support my conclusions. My study concludes that training in restorative justice will develop and improve educators' ability to be collaborative.

In my work as a counselor and educator, a consistent focus has always been to link an individual's cognitive understanding (the head), to his or her emotional experience (the heart). After my training in restorative justice as a facilitator for community conferences, I was struck by the impressive balance I saw between the "head" and the "heart" within the restorative framework.

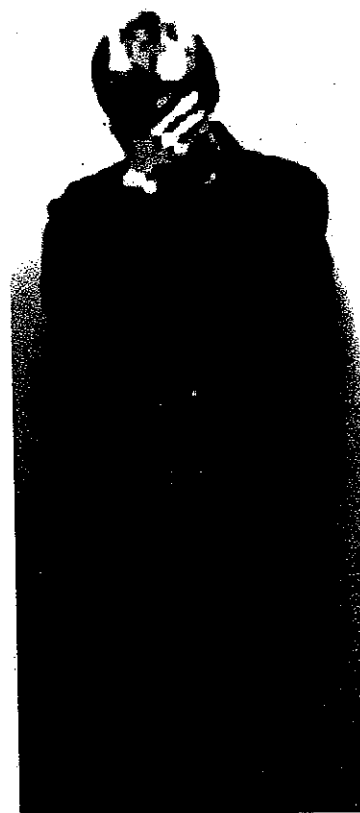
Background

This research article explores whether training in restorative principles and interventions would help school staff trust the value of experiential learning and reflective abilities for themselves and lead to an increase in their collaborative abilities. The tasks of finding one's voice (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986) and of developing dialogue with others (Vella, 1994) are critical for individuals developing their reflective and experiential abilities. I also observe, directly and through the

literature, that often schools and many educators tend to devalue experiential learning (see Gatto, 1992). Research demonstrates that reflective and experiential educators tend to include others in creating solutions to problems and conflicts, to be more collaborative (Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998). Moreover, collaborative educators function "with" their students by appreciating the relational quality of the learning experience (Robertson, 1996) and tend to respond more effectively to conflict (Kearns, Pickering, & Twist, 1992). My intent in doing training in

restorative justice was that through the restorative interventions educators might develop a clearer set of distinctions that allow them to connect more fully with their own experiential learning and in their relationships with others.

To work restoratively, individuals must experience a paradigm shift, moving from the reliance on punishment and rewards to building relationships and intrinsic support of individuals (Kohen, 1993; Zehr, 1990). Working restoratively is a value-based activity (Pranis et al. 2000), and individ-



uals cannot use restorative principles unless there is an increased awareness of how one's actions are statements of one's beliefs and values (Dilts, 1996). Working restoratively is about openness, trust and respect; it is about building and re-building relationships—it is relational.

Participants in this study

The participants in this study are all staff members in a public school system. I conducted their training in restorative justice principles and practices in two separate groups with significantly different goals and using different curriculum and formats for each group.

The first group, Group A, comprised 20 staff members from a local elementary school. Group A's training took place during assigned staff meeting times over a 7-month period of the school year and included 10 sessions. Staff were given the opportunity to learn and use the informal interventions of restorative language patterns (Chelsom-Gossen, 1992 & Rosenberg, 1999), were also introduced to the semi-formal interventions of small impromptu group discussions (Wachtel, 1999), and talking circles (Baldwin, 1994; Pranis, Stuart, & Wedge, 2000).

The second group, Group B, comprised 11 staff members from local schools, trained as facilitators for the school district's Restorative Justice Program. Group B's training took place with other volunteers from the Community Justice Program over a 10-week period and included training to facilitate a formal community group conference.

Group A Training Program

In my thinking, reading, and preparation for Group A I laid out a range of interventions from formal to informal that I felt a school staff would need in order to develop restorative thinking in their practice and in the school's culture. As I contemplated how to begin this training, I continually returned to the centrality of the circle process in my experience and training with restorative justice. So I started with the big picture of the circle process.

The initial talking circle took place at the school district's outdoor education retreat centre during the morning section of a professional development day. The participants were seated on chairs of equal height and there was nothing but open floor space inside the circle. I had prepared four questions to use during this talking circle. My first question was, "When you leave this school how would you like the school to be different because of your work here?" I allowed two rounds for this question, and we took a short coffee break before we proceeded to my second question, "When you leave this school, what gift would you like to leave to your peers, or how would you like to be remembered by your peers?" My third question provided the debriefing to get at the principles and qualities of interactions involved in working restoratively, "What was this process like for you?" Time did not permit for responses to my fourth question, "How can you imagine using this process with your students?" So in my closing and summarizing of the circle I left the

staff with this question.

The first talking circle was followed in a couple of weeks with a mock community conference. I role-played the community conference facilitator, and other staff members volunteered to be participants of the community conference. My next demonstration took place during the following staff meeting, and was an example of a group intervention a teacher might use in a classroom setting. Through these initial experiences (the talking circle, the mock conference, and the group intervention) I felt comfortable that the staff had experienced and was beginning to understand the shifts I was looking for.

I then turned my attention to the development of restorative language patterns (as cited in Chelsom-Gossen, 1992 & Rosenberg, 1999) for the staff to use. Rosenberg's (1999) language patterns use a four-step framework that includes: an observation, a feeling, a need, and a request. Chelsom-Gossen (1992), based on her work with Glasser's model of control theory, has developed the concept of a restitution triangle: side one, *Stabilize the Identity*; side two, *Validate the Misbehaviour*; and side three, *Seek the Belief*. Each side has an associated statement from control theory and a series of questions or language patterns designed to help the learner reflect on an experience and to return the locus of control back to the individual. Side one's control theory statement is, we are doing the best we can; and its questions would include, "Is it OK to make a mistake?" Side

two's control theory statement is, all behaviour is purposeful; followed by questions like, "Could you have done worse?" Side three's statement is, we are internally motivated; using questions like, "What kind of person do you want to be?"

My work in these remaining sessions included my demonstrating and the staff's role-playing using the specific language patterns, debriefing of staff's experience within the role plays, and debriefing their exploration and use of these patterns and restorative principles.

Group B Training Program

For Group B's training, I was a member of the training committee for the Community Justice Program that was responsible for the design and implementation of the facilitator's training program.

Before we could begin training, we needed to select the trainees for our program. Our concern was how to screen and select applicants in a way that was congruent with the values and process inherent in the program. Rather than the traditional job interview process we decided that a more respectful way for us to select new volunteers was through the use of a "screening circle."

These screening circles were opened with an introduction of the people present, a brief summary of the circle format and talking piece, and an explanation that the purpose of this screening circle was for us to get to know them and for them to get to know us. The screening circles were pivotal in establishing the training

committee's confidence that the entire training process could be done in a congruent fashion with the beliefs, values and practices of the Community Justice Program, and our understanding of the restorative justice process. From the start, the new volunteers were given a clear example of the process and the values we would be introducing in working restoratively. The screening circles, along with our initial opening circle, established a clear expectation that this volunteer work would not be solely about helping others and learning a few restorative justice skills; it would require an openness to address matters of one's own "heart," a desire for personal growth and a willingness to open oneself to the emotions of others.

The training modules were developed from the raw material of the themes generated by the on-going work of the training committee and their collective experience in facilitating community conferences. Eight modules (not counting the screening, opening, and closing circles) and a training manual were created to provide the structure for the training program. The intentions and titles for the eight modules were: The Circle Process; Community Circle Conference; The Conference cont'd; Listening & Values; Our Initial Contact with Clients; Needs, Seeing and Hearing; Practice & Debriefing; and, Practices & Victim's Issues.

A useful model

I considered it important to find a tool and a model that could link theory and practice. In developing a framework for restorative justice practice, Wachtel (1999), uses what he refers to as a social control window to describe the shift from a linear model to a restorative model. He begins by suggesting that the traditional model and the prevailing response to crime or misbehaviour is a "punitive-permissive continuum" (see Figure 1). This continuum provides the limited choices of punishing or not punishing.

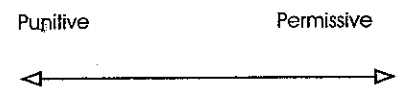
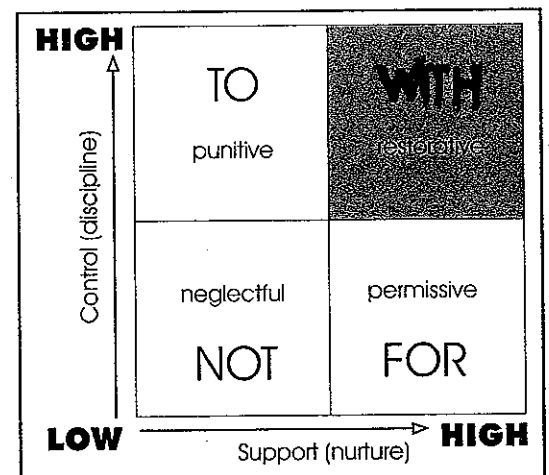


Figure 1. The punitive-permissive continuum.

He then places this line diagonally on the social control window (see Figure 2), which utilizes a more comprehensive dialectic between the axes of control and support.

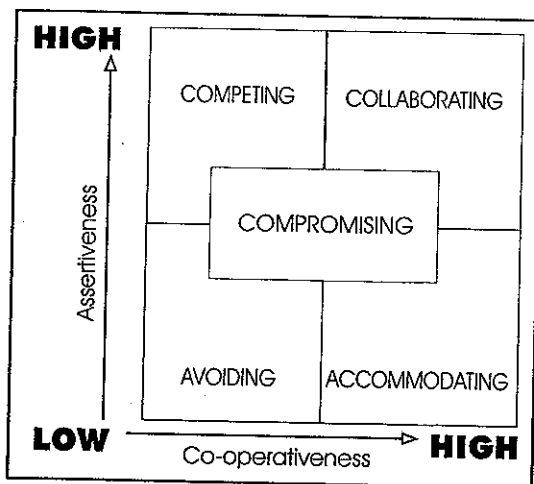
Figure 2. The Social Control Window.



The use of the social control window helps practitioners to reflect on their practice. For example, in the 'NOT' quadrant a practitioners would not be providing support (possibly by not listening) and control (possibly by not setting clear expectations) to his or her clients. Practitioners functioning in this way would be treating their clients in a neglectful manner. Wachtel suggests that "we can combine a high or low level of control with a high or low level of support to identify four general approaches to social control: neglectful, permissive, punitive (or retributive) and restorative" (p. 1).

I am familiar with the social control window and use it in my counseling work with parents. Seeing it in this context reminded me of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Kilmann & Thomas, 1974). This inventory uses the dialectic of assertiveness and cooperativeness (see Figure 3), and categorizes

Figure 3.
Five Conflict-Handling Modes.



responses to conflict into five ways: avoiding, competing, accommodating, compromising (quadrant intersection) and collaborating.

I started to play with melting these two models (figure 2 and 3) together and arrived at a unique combination of the two models (see Figure 4 at right).

A model is helpful if it represents reality and can help predict outcomes (Dossey, 1999). I felt this model could help describe and demonstrate possible changes in an educator's practice through training restorative justice.

The words 'NOT', 'TO', 'FOR', and 'WITH' become very important and helpful in understanding not only the outcomes of this

inquiry, but more importantly the practitioners' involvement with their clients. In the 'NOT' quadrant, individuals are unable to co-operate with others on some level and are unable to assert their own needs. Practitioners who are both not co-operating and not asserting suggests an inability to be open to experiences, an inability

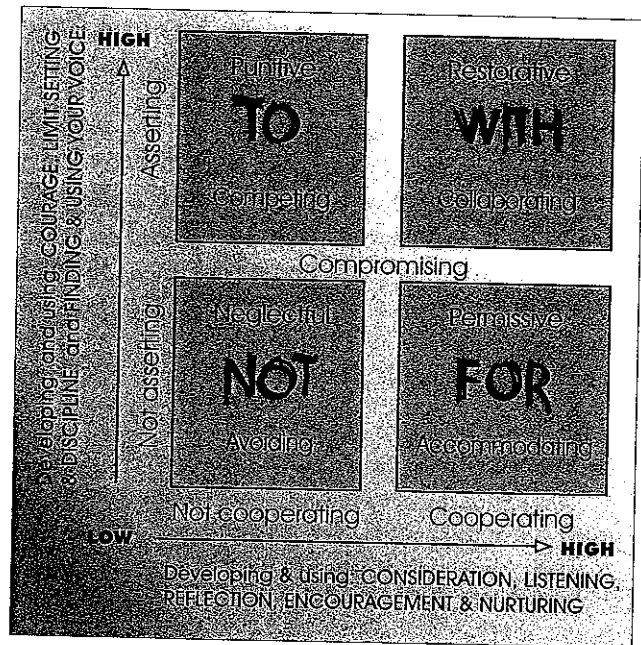


Figure 4

to engage in the world. Schön's (1983) work has demonstrated that reflective practitioners tend to be collaborative (able to be assertive and co-operative) and are therefore more open to experiential learning (Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998). I thought if educators trained in restorative principles showed a shift to the 'WITH' (collaborating) quadrant, this would indicate an educator was more open to learning from his or her experiences and able to collaborate with others. Individuals functioning in the 'WITH' (collaborating) quadrant would be more assertive and co-operative than individuals functioning in the 'NOT' (avoiding) quadrant. From the 'NOT' quadrant, a shift could be demonstrated in three ways: moving in one direction along either the co-operating axis to the 'FOR' quadrant; or along the asserting axis to the 'TO' quadrant;

or by moving along both axes to the 'WITH' quadrant.

Data Gathering, Group A

I designed a pre- and post-questionnaire to assess participants' knowledge and valuing of experiential learning and reflective practices in their work, and used a conflict mode inventory to assess their responses and resourcefulness in dealing with conflict.

Their goals on the pre-questionnaire could be summarized into three groups: (1) the desire to support the development of a common process within the school community; (2) continued development of personal skill in working with students; and (3) to support children to be more respectful and empathic towards each other. Comments from the opening question were thoughtful, showed a strong love for teaching, and displayed a genuine appreciation of opportunities to influence others. The themes and values could be summarized as the desire to create a safe and open environment, where children are encouraged to develop respectful relationships through communicating with each other.

I made two changes to the post-project questionnaires to help gather my data. Again their answers could be categorized into three basic groups: (1) appreciating the opportunity to develop staff relationships through the discussion and during the project; (2) the importance of these discussions happening over an extended period of time; and (3) the expressed usefulness of the language patterns on a personal level. Comments from opening

Quadrant	Score	Change from Pre-project
NOT (avoiding) <i>NOT</i>	138	-28
TO (competing)	52	+2
FOR (accommodating) <i>FOR</i>	109	-14
Intersection (compromising)	119	-5
WITH (collaborating) <i>WITH</i>	87	+17

question were insightful and showed strong support for my project and the principles covered. There was clear and consistent recognition of the effectiveness and value of the language patterns. Staff expressed that they felt that these patterns were effective not only in helping students to be more resourceful and better problem solvers, but were also helpful on a personal level. A number of staff felt that the patterns were key to the changes they had made in self-talk, and those changes allowed them to be less judgmental, more open to exploring solutions with children's learning, and not so hard on themselves. Total scores from the post-project conflict inventories and the changes from the pre-project inventories are shown in Table 1.

Data Gathering, Group B

The pre-project questionnaires and inventories were given to district staff between the screening and welcoming circles. Their goals on the pre-project questionnaires were focused on learning the skills required to facilitate a community conference, improving professional skills, and developing a greater connection and support to community and spirit. Comments

Table 1. Post-project conflict inventory scores for Group A

from the opening question were significantly different from the elementary school community's opening responses. The themes for the district staff focused more on the acceptance of the individual child in non-judgmental ways that affirmed the uniqueness and potential of each individual. There was a strong focus on the importance of the relationship and respect. Both of these qualities and values were linked with a desire to develop accountability and to help students to be the caretakers of their own learning.

Again, I made the same two changes for two questions on the post-project questionnaires for Group B as I had for Group A. Answers could be summarized as the trainees' increased experience and appreciation for the power of the talking circle to create a safe vehicle that allowed respect, honoring, trust, deep listening and connection with others. Comments from opening question reinforced the use of language in de-escalating situations, how the language from the community conference can be used effectively in individual situations with children, and again, the value of the



Quadrant	Score	Change from Pre-project
NOT (avoiding)	75	-3
TO (competing)	22	-3
FOR (accommodating)	77	+8
Intersection (compromising)	58	+1
WITH (collaborating)	74	0

circle as a problem-solving tool. There was recognition of the way in which "rituals" (Lawlis, 1996) can help bring security and support as well as provide meaning in our relationships with students. A number of educators commented on how their listening ability changed and improved. Some felt more patient and more comfortable not having all of the "answers." They also recognized that as they trusted the "process," students had a greater opportunity to solve problems. Total scores from the post-project conflict inventories and the changes from the pre-project inventories are shown in Table 2.

Participants' experience

Several elementary school staff said that they valued having the continuous training throughout the year; that it enabled them to be engaged more consistently in their own learning process. Research (Jones & Lowe, 1990) has shown that staff training that provides for extended periods of time with debriefing and consultation is more effective than workshops of short duration with no consultation. The school district staff training, although very intense in nature, may not have provided adequate duration of

Table 2. Post-project conflict inventory scores for Group B

time to internalize the concepts being introduced.

Comments from Group A participants suggest that the specific language patterns were also very helpful on a personal level. Several staff commented in the post-project questionnaire that their use of the language patterns allowed them "to not be so hard on themselves" and encouraged their abilities to "not have to have all the answers." These comments suggest that significant internalization and integration happened with the elementary school staff due to both the duration of training and the specific language patterns used in their training program. The comments also point to educators who are moving away from seeing themselves as responsible for other's feelings and are moving towards seeing themselves as responsible for their own intentions and actions. Rosenberg (1996) suggests that these changes represent the development of emotional liberation.

Comments from Group B often focused on how the training had deepened their ability and understanding of the importance of listening, particularly a listening

that is present *with* other, and not to be concerned or preoccupied with having to find the "solution;" a listening that invites others to tell their story. It was also exciting to see how educators from group B spoke of transferring the principles of the community conference out into their classroom settings. One teacher spoke of her experimentation with using the concept of a support person as practiced in community conferences. This educator started to invite her students to have an advocate or support person for solving conflicts within the classroom. She noted a decrease in students' anxieties and an improvement in their resourcefulness. The practice of a support person or support from the community are validated by McDonald et al. (1995), and seen by Lawlis (1996) as a requirement for individuals to make change. Others spoke of using the fundamental questions (language patterns) from the conference process in everyday problem solving with their students. Most educators in Group B referred to a new respect and appreciation for the use of the talking circle. One interesting by-product of the slowing down of the process within the talking circle was one teacher developing a new respect for the amount of time a student may need to respond in a given situation.

The comments made by educators from both training groups speak of individuals who are respecting students' rights to be the subject of their own learning and of educators who are appreciating students' experiences and providing opportunities for those

students to reflect upon the possible meanings in their experiences. These comments speak of educators who are effectively collaborating with their students, working in the WITH (collaborating) quadrant.

Analysis for collaboration

Throughout my study, I had the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of training in restorative justice philosophy and interventions with two groups of public school educators. Between the two groups, there were strong similarities in the philosophical base, the methods of presentation, the information presented, and in the qualitative changes from the pre- to post-project inventories. There were also considerable differences in the settings, relationships of group members, the intensity of the experiences, the intentions and goals of the training for each group, and in the quantitative changes in the scores from pre- to post-project inventories. In this analysis, I will draw strongly on my developed model (Figure 4).

Similarities from data that suggest collaboration

The common themes that emerged from the anecdotal comments of both groups were: (a) an increase in the educator's ability to listen to their students; (b) the ability to be less judgmental; (c) increased patience, with a willingness to allow more time for the students to develop solutions; (d) more openness to the solutions students generated; e) an increased comfort in not having to have all of the answers;

and (f) a recognition of how the language patterns of Chelsom-Gossen (1992), Rosenberg (1999) and the patterns used in the community conference process (McDonald, Moore, O'Connell & Thorsborne, 1995) all helped to develop dialogue with their students.

These themes testify to individual educators' willingness and possible desire to let go of their "expert" positions and roles, which in turn strongly suggests the use of experiential learning and the ability to reflect on their experience. These themes, from the anecdotal questionnaires, point to a group of educators who are becoming more collaborative with their students, which Ferry and Ross-Gordon (1998) say indicates educators who are more reflective in their practice. It follows that educators who are feeling more patient, in their interaction with students, will allow their students to practice more and to make more "mistakes." I also suggest that, as educators experience more patience, they will give themselves more freedom to make "mistakes" and to see their mistakes as the practicing of new skills. All are characteristic of individuals who are able to collaborate with others.

Differences from data that suggest collaboration

I was surprised by the results of the post-project conflict inventories for Group B. Given the intensity of the 10-week facilitators' training program compared with the more modest experiences that could be generated during

traditional school staff meeting. I had expected a more significant change for the facilitators' group. However, it was the elementary school staff's results that demonstrated a more comprehensive change. In examining these differences I considered: my model, the different goals expressed by both groups, and the differences between the two training programs.

For both groups, their scores on the pre-project conflict inventories were higher in the 'NOT' (avoiding) quadrant than on the post-project inventories. In the 'NOT' (avoiding) quadrant individuals are unable to co-operate with one another on some level and they are unable to assert their own needs. A number of reasons could justify avoiding behavior: a lack of safety in the working environment; an environment that is uninteresting for the individual; and a possible lack of confidence in the individual's ability to meet the demands of the environment. However, both groups showed a similar percentage shift away from avoiding to other quadrants: to collaborating for the elementary school staff, and to accommodating for the district school staff. The elementary school staff made change along both the asserting and co-operative axis while the district school staff made their changes primarily along the co-operating axis.

The expressed goals from each group were significantly different. Group A's primary goal was the development of a common process within the school community, whereas, Group B's primary goal was to learn how to facilitate a



community conference. Given the context and expectations set by the training, these goals are reasonable and somewhat predictable. Group A's stated (asserted) needs and their desired goal may have, by its very nature, evoked greater collaboration. It seemed that even before the training began they expressed the desire to move in a collaborative direction. Group B's primary goal, of learning a new skill, may have pointed them in an accommodating direction. For example, when I am learning a new skill, I tend to be more self-absorbed and initially I need to co-operate more with the process, before I can assert my mastery with the process and be more collaborative with others.

These different goals reflect in part the differences in the two training programs, but there were other important differences. There was the difference in the duration of the training programs. It seems reasonable to expect that the longer training of Group A allowed learners to move from co-operating with the material and process to asserting their mastery with the new skills. For Group A, there was also the very focused training in the use of language patterns (Chellsum-Gossen, 1992; Rosenberg, 1999). The use of these language patterns appeared to give educators some very respectful and powerful ways to assert themselves—with their students, and more importantly, with themselves. The language patterns used in training Group A were different from those used in the conference process. For Group B the language patterns were learned through

training in the conference process and were not made explicit and taught as specific skills.

The discussion of these differences helps highlight the value of my model in understanding educators' involvement with the two training programs. The different results away from the 'NOT' quadrant, suggest that both groups of educators were asserting their own needs more clearly and/or co-operating more effectively in their practice. These results suggest that both groups of educators were able to engage in the materials and experiences presented to them and, as supported by the data, made progress in their understanding and use of the materials and skills. These different results point to educators who were making changes in their abilities to collaborate.

Conclusions

My goal of providing learners with the opportunities to use their experiences more effectively, to reflect on their meaning, and to reflect in a social context is an example of what Kolb (1984) refers to as the interactionism of experiential learning theory. He states: "The interactionism of experiential learning theory places knowing by apprehension on an equal footing with knowing by comprehension, resulting in a stronger interactionist position, really a transactionalism, in which knowledge emerges from the dialectic relationship between the two forms of knowing" (p. 101). I suggest this is also a description of collaboration, partners working in relationship with each other to

create. Looking at my study from an interactionist position, I offer three conclusions:

1. I have used dialectics, such as apprehension and comprehension, discipline and nurture, assertiveness and co-operation to explore and understand the impact training in restorative justice might have on public school educators. Their existence, and my growing ability to recognize and work with them, continues to produce new learnings. As educators begin to work within the context of the dialectic relationship new learnings and new collaborations can emerge.

2. Kolb's (1984) words of "equal footing" (p. 101) suggest the notion that equality is deeply tied to the dialectic process. I have long held the belief that I can only know myself (intra-personal) as fully as I am willing to reveal myself to others (inter-personal). It is by my presence, my willingness to reveal myself, that I invite others to collaborate with me. My experience and path throughout this research was to find my voice and to speak it respectfully—the assertiveness axis—and to listen to and with the stories of others—the co-operation axis. It is through these two qualities that I am able to collaborate more fully with others. This path, as I have stated in various ways, is a mirror of the steps in the community conferencing process, the principles of restorative justice, and the healing of relationships.

3. It is my conclusion from my work discussed in this paper and my experience as an educator and counselor, that both individuals and their communities will benefit

from strengthening their collaborative abilities. In the 21st century, the skills individuals require will be wide and varied, from the ability to use increasingly complex technology, to effectively communicating and collaborating with individuals of divergent opinions and values. This is expressly true for educators and those in the "helping" professions. My inquiry demonstrates that training in restorative justice leads to changes in practitioners behaviour that include the ability to be both more assertive and co-operative — to collaborate

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