

Restorative Mindset: an Overview

Restorative practices are grounded in a common mindset among many Indigenous cultures and communities of color that views individuals as profoundly interconnected and inherently good.¹

This world view is articulated in the Lakota phrase—“Mitakuye Oyasin”—which means ‘we are all related.’ “It is a mindset,” says David Espinoza, a Lakota teacher at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, “of knowing and respecting all life, knowing that we can all co-exist. We all bleed, we all hurt, and we all have the same feelings.”² Humans are in relationships with all of creation: all that walk or swim or fly, the trees and grass, the water and the stones. The Seven Grandfather teachings of the Anishinabek (Ojibwe) help the people to seek ‘Mino Bimaadiziwin’, the Good Life. The Good Life “describes a way of living in a good way, in a respectful relationship to all our relatives.”³

The Navaho practice of “hozhooji naat’aanii” or peacemaking embodies both prevention of and response to harm. The clan—parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles—helps to prevent harm from happening by teaching and training the children in their culture and ways of being. When there is conflict and harm, people talk together to reform relationships with each other. The question for participants to address is “Why did this happen in the first place? The focus is on K’e: to help restore the dignity and worth of the person who did harm by helping them be responsible and accountable for what they have done.”⁴

The Maori People of New Zealand see the place of the individual within the context of the community: I am because we are. Helen Bowen and Jim Consedine in their article “Restorative Justice: Restorative Justice – Contemporary Themes and Practice” describe Māori Tikanga (customs). “Under tikanga, the interests of the immediate family (whanau), the wider clan (hapu) and the tribe (iwi) were the yardstick by which justice was measured, not the interests of the individual....Māori had a well-developed system of custom and process that ensured protection of the individual, the stability of social life and the integrity of the group....A breach of tikanga would be resolved in a whanau, hapu or iwi meeting, during which the voices of all parties could be

¹ St. Paul Public Schools and Prevention Research Center, [PRC e-newsletter, Jan-2019](#).

² [Mitakuye Oyasin \(We are All Related\)](#). Three Degrees West Productions, 2015. Retrieved 1/24/19.

³ [Seven Grandfather Teachings](#), Seven Generations Education Institute. Retrieved 1/25/2019.

⁴ Mursky, L., 2004. [Restorative Justice Practices of Native American, first Nation and other Indigenous People of North America, Part One](#). International Institute for Restorative Practices. Retrieved July 7, 2019.

heard and consensus decisions would be arrived at (kotahitanga) with the purpose of restoring the social order.”⁵

The restorative ethos is also embedded in the Nguni proverb: “Umuntu, ngumuntu, ngabantu,” translated as “I am because we are and we are because I am.” Social justice activist and founding director of Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY), Dr. Fania E. Davis identifies the communitarian view of “ubuntu”: the individual exists only in relationship with the community. This southern African word means that ‘a person is a person through their relationships.’⁶ Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes it this way: “Ubuntu [...] speaks of the very essence of being human...it is to say: ‘My humanity is caught up, inextricably bound up, in yours.’ We belong in a bundle of life.”⁷ Ubuntu affirms our interrelatedness and our responsibility to each other.

Davis, in her book, “The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice” quotes restorative justice pioneer Howard Zehr, who linked restorative justice to “shalom,” the Judeo-Christian concept which “[e]mphasiz[es] ‘right relationships’ between individuals, between groups of people, between people and the earth, and between people and the divine [and] declares an allegiance to respecting life in all its forms....[It] encourages us to see the nurturing of this sacred relational web as our ultimate calling.”⁸

To use the practices of circle and repairing harm with humility requires this understanding of the roots and history of restorative practices. They represent a paradigm shift based on centering indigenous values of relationship and humanity. Davis, in her forward to “Getting More Out of Restorative Practice in Schools,” writes:

“...The contemporary educator and public intellectual bell hooks suggests that today, the praxis of education as liberation embraces three fundamental strategies:

1. Create radically democratic classrooms where every voice matters, everyone’s presence is acknowledged and the wisdom of every student is recognized.
2. Develop anti-colonial approaches that interrogate existing systems of domination—whether ageism, sexism, elitism, racism, heteropatriarchy and others.
3. Create innovative ways to meaningfully engage with diverse students (adapted from hooks, 1994).

⁵ Bowen, H., and Consedine, J. (1999) *Restorative Justice: Restorative Justice – Contemporary Themes and Practice*. Ploughshares Publications, Christchurch.

⁶ Davis, F. (2019) *The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice: Black Lives, Healing, and US Social Transformation*. Good Books, New York, NY, 17-18.

⁷ Tutu, D.M. (1999) *No Future Without Forgiveness*. Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc.

⁸ Davis, F., *The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice*, 19.

It is plain to see that each of the above three approaches that hooks identifies as fundamental to carrying forward the African-American tradition of education as liberation resonates strongly with the ethos and aspirations of restorative practices in schools.”⁹

Further Resources

Further information about circles, restorative practices and Indigenous knowledge can be found on the Living Justice Press website page [The Indigenous Origins of Circles and How Non-Natives Learned About Them](#). The International Institute for Restorative Practices has a two-part article entitled “[Restorative Justice Practices of Native American, First Nation and Other Indigenous People of North America](#).”

Three Degrees West Productions produced a video of interviews with Lakota people about their land and culture, [Mitakuye Oyasin \(We are All Related\)](#). A discussion of the [Seven Grandfather Teachings](#) of the Ojibwe can be found at [Seven Generations Education Institute](#).

For a longer discussion of the Maori worldview and restorative justice, see “[Recent Developments Within Restorative Justice in Aotearoa/New Zealand](#).”¹⁰

Fania Davis provides further discussion of the Indigenous Ethos of Restorative Justice in “The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice,” published by Good Books, an imprint of Skyhorse Publishing, Inc.

⁹ Thorsborne, M., Riestenberg, N., McCuskey, G. (2019). *Getting More Out of Restorative Practice in Schools: Practical Approaches to Improve School Wellbeing and Strengthen Community Engagement*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London and Philadelphia, 400 Market Street, Suite 400 Philadelphia, PA 19106, USA, p.11.

¹⁰ Bowen, Helen, Jim Boyack, and Janet Calder-Watson. 2012. *Recent Developments within Restorative Justice in Aotearoa/New Zealand*. In *Restorative Justice: Adults and Emerging Practice*, eds. Jane Bolitho, Jasmine Bruce, and Gail Mason, 121–141. Sydney: Federation Press.