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Beyond Punishment

RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE IN SCHOOLS

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2000 SUMMER INSTITUTE

MCS is joined by Eastern College in sponsoring the 2000 Summer Mediation and Facilitation Training Institute, July 17-21, 2000, in St. Davids, PA. Early registration is \$450 (\$500 for late registrations); scholarship assistance is available. For more information, contact MCS or visit our website (see Bulletin Board for address).

EDITOR'S NOTES

Recently my nine-year-old son came home from school with the story of an argument that had almost come to blows because they had "gotten smart" with each other. Our post-supper conversation was about respect and choices and consequences and conflict escalation. I left it feeling tired. Shaping behavior is tough work (my own included!).

As the mother of two young sons, I have a growing respect for the challenges teachers and school administrators face in addressing misbehavior and discipline needs. Even though I have a general understanding of and basic commitment to restorative justice principles in my parenting, I have enormous difficulty living up to them on a regular basis. I am amazed at my frequent need to exert power over my sons, to show them who is in charge, to punish them for breaking a family rule. Often in those times when they most need (and perhaps are most ready) to learn respect, responsibility and accountability, I find myself least able to help them learn it.

So when I hear about school personnel who are working at changing decades of punishment traditions to more restorative ones in the midst of constant challenge from creative, young minds, I tip my hat. They are swimming upstream against the strong pressures of a society and an educational system bent on retribution.

Indeed there are hopeful things happening in some of our schools. Quietly. Without the sensationalism given to recent shootings. It is called restorative discipline. It is, in its most simple definition, discipline that attempts to "make things as right as possible." It includes, says Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz, co-compiler for this issue and the director of Mennonite Central Committee's Office of Crime and Justice, "focusing on the harms of wrongdoing more than the rules that have been broken, showing equal concern and commitment to all participants, providing opportunities for accountability and dialogue, and respecting all parties."

Restorative discipline (RD) was born out of the marriage of peer mediation and restorative justice/Victim Offender Mediation Programs, bringing together two powerful sources of theory, skills/processes and transformative potential. If we can implement the best from both of these disciplines into our educational system, I believe we can affect both the children of today and the adults of tomorrow.

This issue of *CQ* begins to tell the stories of that transformation process. Restorative discipline is still in a very formative stage and we hope that this compilation will be a small step in the development of it. We'd love to hear your responses (Idea Exchange needs you!).

Carolyn Schrock-Shenk, Editor