Adapting restorative practices to a center for teens living and learning without school

Joshua Wachtel
Overview

» Personal approach: How can I, as an individual, apply what I’ve learned through restorative practices in my work?

» What is North Star? - a unique community/learning center

» Assessing the workplace/institution: What is restorative? Where might restorative concepts be fruitfully applied?

» How can I work restoratively as teachers, with individuals and groups, as an advisor and in my role as a staff member?
North Star Self-Directed Learning for Teens

Learning is Natural. School is Optional.
Common room and building as a whole provides a place and a social environment, particularly for teens who otherwise might never choose a life without school.
Weekly classes / one-on-ones

- Core staff
- Extended staff
- Volunteers
- Parents
- Students themselves

Any imaginable subject, if possible!
Advising

Core staff (currently 3 full-time and 5 part-time) meet with each member (currently about 60) every week or two to check in.
What is restorative about North Star?

- Concept of working “with” students and families
- When rules are broken - respect maintained. No punitive measures.
- Family Meetings - 3x per year, open communication
- Annoyance meetings
- Occasional use of responsive circles
- Staff meetings using circle go-around
- General collegial atmosphere. Fair process.
Possible gaps/blind spots

- Little student engagement in norm setting
- “Community meeting” was top down, somewhat chaotic
- Lack of process for students to take responsibility/enforce norms
- Feeling that adults have to nag about things like cleaning up, maintaining reasonable volume in quiet room, etc.
- Some frustrations about student follow-through, homework, attendance, somewhat permissive on this level.
How can I influence the organization?

- Be humble and observe. There are many useful processes, and these processes can be used to learn and have influence.
- Offer a short introduction to the social discipline window and the continuum of restorative practices at a staff meeting.
- Raise issue of disconnects on “community level” on several occasions. Eventually this led to reconsideration of the “community meeting.”
- Talk with others about specific practices.
Practice/model restorative responses

- Model restorative practices in my personal dealings with students whenever possible
- Responsive example: outrageous comment
- Responsive example: student in band
Advising role

- How to apply RP to the concept of self-directed learning.
- Where does this fit on the social discipline window?
- What does it mean to be “explicit”?
- What types of questions to ask and when?
- Narrative therapy, restorative questions & Socratic method.