

Restorative Practices and “Crucial Conversations” and “Crucial Confrontations”: Engaging Troubled Youth in Effective Problem Solving

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15th International Restorative Practice Conference, August 2, 2012

Bethlehem, PA



About the Presenter

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Purpose of the Presentation

- The purposes of this presentation is to synthesize Restorative Practices, Life Space Crisis Intervention, and “Crucial Conversations” and “Crucial Confrontations” (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan & Switzler, 2005 & 2012).



Purpose of the Presentation

- The mission: Facilitate effective conversation and restorative problem solving with troubled youth.

Talking to Troubled Youth Literature: The Restorative Tradition

Over the past fifty years professionals have learned much about talking with troubled youth.:

- Redl, F. (1959). Strategy and techniques of the life space interview. *American journal of orthopsychiatry*, 29a, 1-18.
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- Long, N.J., Morse, W.C., & New man, R.G. (1980). *Conflict in the classroom*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Brendtro,,L., Brokenleg & Van Bockern (1995). *Reclaiming youth at risk: Our hope for the future*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service .
- Long, N.J, Wood, M.M. & Fecser, F.A. (2001). *Life space crisis intervention: Talking with students in conflict*. Austin, TX: Proed.
- Costello, B., Wachtel, J. & Wachtel, T. (2009). *The restorative practices handbook for teachers, disciplinarians and administrators*. Bethlehem, PA: International Institute of Restorative Practices.



Leadership & the Restorative Tradition

- Fisher, R. & Ury, W. (1981). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in*. NY: Penguin.
- Ury, W. (1991). *Getting past no: Negotiating in difficult situations*. NY: Doubleday.
- Stone, D., Patton, B. & Heen, S. (1999). *Difficult conversations: How to discuss what matters most*. NY: Penguin Books.
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The Challenge of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

- Troubled youth are often, but not always, students with emotional behavior disorders (EBD). They are among the most difficult students to serve in public and private education.
- Students EBD with often come from families that experience multiple challenges, including histories of trauma, socioeconomic disadvantage, marginalization, etc.
- These youth are the most likely to wind up in the criminal justice system (National Longitudinal Study of Students with Disabilities 2, 2005)

The Challenge of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

- Students with EBD have histories of emotional and behavioral dysregulation that include:
 - Harsh and punitive child rearing and disciplinary practices (punitive and authoritarian)
 - Absence of appropriate boundaries and limit setting (neglect or permissiveness)
 - Shame
 - Guilt
 - Humiliation
 - Inadequacy
 - Poor people problem solving strategies

The Challenge of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

- Students with EBD are among the most difficult youth to engage in conversation and problem solving because they have had such difficult experiences in trusting adults in authority to act in their best interest. As a result, they are often highly defended, resistant, overtly or covertly oppositional, and engage in chronic self-defeating and self-destructive behavior. In group contexts these behaviors can be contagious and result in negative peer cultures.

The Challenge of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

- Teachers and paraprofessional as mental health first responders.
- Teachers and paraprofessionals have the most day-to-day influence regarding EBD youth and are engaged in the most conversations with them.
- Teacher and staff turnover working with EBD youth is the highest of all child serving professions.
- Ironically, the emotional first responders are the least trained to have highly effective conversations with EBD youth.

The Challenge of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

- Think about the students with EBD you've worked with in your professional practice. What's the worst conversation you've ever had with a student with EBD? What was the result of that worst conversation?

The Challenge of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

- Think about the best conversation you've had with a student with EBD. Why was it a "best" conversation? What happened to make it so? What did you do as a professional or paraprofessional to make it an effective conversation?

The Challenge of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

- Professional development of mental health first responders can be enhanced by combining the philosophy and strategies of Life Space Crisis Intervention (Long, Wood & Fescer, 2000), Restorative Practices (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel 2010). , and “crucial conversations” (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan & Switzler, 2012) and “crucial confrontations (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan & Switzler, 2005) . Each of these approaches promotes effective functioning by engaging youth in dialogue and collaborative problem solving.

The Challenge of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

- Students with EBD make academic and social-emotional progress if they can be effectively engaged in problem solving and empowered to take up authority for their own learning and responsibility for their own behavior. This requires a commitment to a power-with versus a power-over approach and avoidance of neglectful or permissive approaches to social discipline.



Conversations with EBD Students

- It has long been recognized that students with EBD require a trusting relationship in order to have a meaningful conversation and engage in successful problem solving. However many students don't sufficiently trust us to engage in such conversations, but they desperately want them. In fact, EBD students engage in a variety of acting-out behaviors to test us and see if we're trustable.

The Challenge of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

- It's within the context of this reality testing that relationships are built. Fritz Redl (1959) recognized that engaging these youth in traditional counseling and therapy had limited value. In conceptualizing the Life Space Interview, Redl recognized that some of the best therapy occurred in the “here and now” as events unfold.

The Challenge of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

- Over time, here and now transactions coupled with problem concrete problem solving with responsibility for behavior could result in improved attitudes, behavior, and socialization.
- Long, Wood, and Fescer extended Redl's Life Space Interview to Life Space Crisis Intervention (LCSI). Crises, they argue, is an opportunity for learning. Conversation is vital to the problem solving, crisis resolution process, and ultimately trust with others. When done effectively this results in restoration.

The Challenge of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

- LCSIE consists of six steps:
 - 1. Acknowledgment of the crisis event
 - 2. Building a crisis or problem time line
 - 3. Search for the core or central issue(s)
 - 4. Appeal to values
 - 5. New skills and rehearsal
 - 6. Reintegration into the activity

Carry in, Carry Over & Tap In Problems

The Challenge of Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders

TO Punitive & Authoritarian	WITH Authoritative & Restorative
NOT Neglectful & Irresponsible	FOR Permissive & Paternalistic



Restorative Practices

- Restorative practices are compatible with LSCI. Restorative problem solving involves these questions:
 - What happened?
 - What were you thinking at the time?
 - What have you thought about since?
 - What has been affected by what you have done? In what way?
 - What do you think you need to do to make things right?



Restorative Practices

- Additional restorative practices questions:
 - What did you think when you realized what happened?
 - What impact has this incident had on you and others?
 - What has been the hardest thing for you?
 - What do you think needs to happen to make things right?



Restorative Practices

- Well-focused questions alone will not result in restoration to the highest level of adaptive functioning possible. They must be coupled with methodologies for conversation, dialogue and problem solving.

Crucial Conversations and Confrontations

- Patterson, Grenny, McMillan & Switzler define a “crucial conversation” as “a discussion between two or more people where (1) stakes are high, (2) opinions vary, and (3) emotions run strong” (*Crucial Conversations*, p. 3.P
- Patterson et al. define a “crucial confrontation” as “a face-to-face accountability discussion” with “someone who has disappointed you and you talk to him or her directly” (*Crucial Confrontations*, p. 21).



Crucial Conversations and Confrontations

- Any chronically self-defeating or destructive behavior may be the basis for a crucial conversation or confrontation. The term confrontation here refers to holding someone to account for their behavior.
- In the language of Life Space Crisis Intervention such behavior is an opportunity for learning.

Avoidance of Crucial Conversations and Confrontations

- Caring adults are prone to fall into what restorative practices refers to as neglect or permissiveness. Avoidance or simply insistence on compliance with adult authority is the default strategy of well meaning adults because they are not sufficiently skilled in having difficult conversations.

Avoidance of Crucial Conversations and Confrontations

- We tend to avoid crucial conversations and confrontations because:
 - 1. It is easier and convenient not to deal with them by insisting on rule compliance
 - 2. We can have a history of handling them poorly.
 - 3. We are unaware of the signs for when to engage in them (*Crucial Conversations*, p. 4).

By being skilled in diagnosing the need for them and being in handling them adults can turn potential crisis events into powerful learning opportunities.



Recognizing the Signs for a Crucial Conversation or Confrontation

- Physical
- Emotional
- Behavioral

Recognizing the Signs for a Dysfunctional Conversation

- These are the signs of a dysfunctional conversation:
 - Attack
 - Blame and blame games: Locating the problem on you or others, “You” statements, finger pointing
 - “Yes-but” or passive aggressive variations (“stealth butting”) of it as in “polite” conversations that use “however,” “still,” “only then,” “It’s just that”
 - Mind-reading: assumptions that haven’t been checked out, such as “He doesn’t like me” or “She always sets me up”
 - Catastrophe forecasts and predictions: “You know he’ll just deny it;” “I’ll bet he’ll have a melt down if I tell him the truth.”
 - Question traps: “Don’t you think?” “Wouldn’t you agree?”
 - Inner story: An story emerges in the conversation.
- (Benjamin, Yaeger & Simon, 2012, *Conversation Transformation*)



Adult Vulnerability

- The most critical thing for adults working with EBD youth is to become aware of what they set off in us and how we get pulled into dysfunctional conversations.



Adult Vulnerability

- Perhaps one of the biggest problems for youth workers with EBD challenged kids is over identification with the student/client. When this happens, the adult is vulnerable to acting-out for the student. These youth come from abusive backgrounds and have become skilled in seeking negative attention and punishment.



Adult Vulnerability

- This awareness of the adult's emotional state is the clue to what the youth is consciously or unconsciously locating (projecting feelings) on us. If we pick up on this, and can make the interpretation that what is occurring is a projection, we can be in a position to be helpful. If we are unaware, we become vulnerable to acting-out on the projection and we get caught projective identification. All too often when this happens adults adopt punitive stances, and miss the opportunity for teachable moments. Indeed, it is the teachable moment that is at the heart of Life Space Crisis Intervention and restorative practices.



Why Adult Vulnerability?

- When adults get provoked what gets generated in one's head is a story, an interpretation about what's going on in the here and now and in the interaction or relationship. The story is about why we think the person is doing what he or she is doing. In other words the story is about the motives we ascribe to the youth. The adult may simply be relying on gut instinct. Often we are wrong in our interpretation and begin a conversation which the youth picks up as an attack or a failure to understand and to be empathically accurate. This, then sets in motion a discussion rather than a dialogue. A power struggle or avoidance ensues and the learning opportunity is lost.

Moving from Story and Discussion to Dialogue and Problem Solving

- Peter Senge distinguishes between discussion and dialogue. Discussion is conversation that persuades the other person of a position. Dialogue, on the other hand, is about inquiry and the search for shared understanding (*The Fifth Discipline*, 1990, p.10). Dialogue is about the creation of a “meaning pool” (Patterson et al., *Crucial Conversations* p. 24).
- “Dialogue is the free flow of meaning between two or more people” (Patterson et al, *Crucial Conversations*, p. 23)

Moving from Story and Discussion to Dialogue and Problem Solving

- Moving from the story to dialogue requires awareness of the story. Sharing the story in one's head and taking ownership for the story is the first step. "When you threw the book at me," I got a story going on in my head that you were angry with me or some other adult and were taking it out on me."



Moving from Inner Story to Dialogue

- Step One: awareness of one's emotional state and the inner story. What am I feeling? What is the narrative in my head?

Moving from Inner Story to Dialogue

- Step Two: Replace the inner story with the facts. What has actually occurred? What can be objectively observed? (e.g. The student threw a book versus the student the book because...)

Moving from Inner Story to Dialogue

- Step Three: Share the story as a story rather than fact. Also share the feelings associated with the story. (e.g. “When you threw the book across the room I thought you were angry with me, and I felt threatened.”)

Moving from Inner Story to Dialogue

- Step Four: Ask a question to verify or disconfirm the story. Ask what happened from the student's perspective and what the student was thinking at the time?

Moving from Inner Story to Dialogue

- Step Five: Talk about the problem or issue in tentative terms. Ask the student to build a time line.

Moving from Inner Story to Dialogue

- Step Six: Encourage with questions. Tell me more about what you were thinking or feeling? How do you think others were affected? What do you think needs to occur to make things as right as possible?

Moving from Inner Story to Dialogue to Problem Solving

- In the context of moving from the story to dialogue, a skilled adult youth worker is collecting data about what may be the central or underlying issue (trust/mistrust, fears of abandonment, inadequacy, competency, identity)

Moving from Inner Story to Dialogue to Problem Solving

- Also in the context of the shift from story to dialogue, an effective youth worker appeals to the student's values and reinforces him/her for engaging in the conversation.



Moving from Inner Story to Dialogue to Problem Solving

- Further, the effective youth worker probes about what skills the student needs to be successful and finds ways to model and rehearse the skills.

Moving from Inner Story to Dialogue to Problem Solving

- Lastly, the effective youth worker makes a plan with the student. The plan may be returning to the classroom or activity without incident or accepting consequences or making restitution, etc. as a way of bring the incident to closure.

Implications for Administration and Supervision

- Just as story and discussion can dominate adult-student conversation, so too can they dominate professional conversations. Therefore school leaders (administrators and teacher leaders) must be committed to creating a dialogic and restorative culture.



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