

**“Too much changing has happened to go back”:**

**Professional Development, Paradigm Shifts and Poetry**

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### Abstract

Restorative justice (RJ) holds significant potential as a means for nurturing relational school cultures and addressing harm within those contexts. However, educators participating in professional development (pd), often articulate a commitment to RJ in principle but tend to continue practicing a pedagogy that focuses on controlling student (mis) behavior apart from its relational context. Considering the strong philosophical perspective of humanity on which RJ is grounded, this phenomenological case study examines the impact of pd that explicitly (a) engages with core beliefs and values of RJ and (b) invites participants to examine their personal philosophical stance. Employing theory guided analysis and poetic inquiry to examine participants' reflections nine months following their experience, results indicate that commitment and practice are better aligned. Significant change in perspectives emerge of self; others; current practice; and group engagement. A list of recommended components for professional development conclude the article.

*Key words:* restorative justice, restorative justice education, professional development, paradigm shift, poetic inquiry

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**Professional Development, Paradigm Shifts and Poetry**

*Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself.*

(Rumi, 13<sup>th</sup> C)

Educators participating in professional development (pd) for restorative justice in education(RJE<sup>1</sup>) often articulate a commitment to restorative justice in principle but tend to practice a pedagogy that focuses on controlling student (mis)behaviour apart from its relational context (Morrison, 2012; Vaandering, 2009; Gavrielides, 2007; Cremin, 2012). As such, RJE risks going the way of ‘flavour of the year’ initiatives or worse being co-opted and used in ways to reinforce approaches that it seeks to replace, particularly those that encourage compliance, complacency, and disempowerment (McCluskey, G., Lloyd, G., Kane, J., Riddell, S., Stead, J., & Weedon, E. 2008). Given that RJE is seen to hold significant potential as a means for

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, restorative justice in education (RJE) is used to refer to education that integrates restorative justice (RJ) beliefs, values, and principles holistically into its daily practice. The term restorative justice (RJ) is used when referring to these foundational concepts and the broader field encompassing arenas that focus on addressing harm such as criminal justice, social work, community justice. Quotes from other sources used in this paper may not differentiate in the same way.

addressing harm in the context of schooling (Gregory et al. 2014) and building relational school cultures at all levels, pre-school to post-secondary (Skiba, Arrendondo, & Rausch, 2014; Karp & Sacks, 2014), identifying how educators come to understand and then, more importantly, come to practice RJE, is necessary.

A recent systematic review of research on pd for RJE in schools concludes that “empirical evidence or even conceptual guidance for pd in RJ is rare in peer-reviewed journals.” (Mayworm, Sharkey, Hun Mayworm, Sharkey, Hunnicutt, & Schiedel, 2016). In response, Song & Swearer (2016) acknowledging the strong philosophical perspective of humanity present in RJ, ask two questions: (1) “how important is it that RJ is delivered in a manner that maintains its integrity?” and (2) when integrating RJ into “models that operate inherently from a top-down, hierarchical perspective of discipline in contrast to an empowering and collaborative model like RJ ... [how might this] inhibit or dilute the power of RJ” (p. 320)?

In my own research of RJE implementation, I came to ask similar questions as I heard educators admit they were struggling to integrate their new understandings of RJE into practice and they were defaulting to what they were used to doing or ways they had been taught themselves. I began to question the pedagogy and content of the pd they had experienced as well as the origin of hierarchical structures of discipline that educators took for granted. This led to research (Vaandering, 2009, 2013) where I provide evidence that responds to both questions posed by Song & Swearer, affirming that pd grounded in a strong adherence to RJ philosophy and principles is crucial for understanding and practicing RJE if it is not to be inhibited, diluted or co-opted by hegemonic, top-down institutional governance. In this paper, I provide further evidence and conceptual guidance for the implementation of RJE holistically by reporting on a study that explores the question: What is the impact on the personal philosophical stance of

educators participating in a pd experience that explicitly engages with the core values of RJ? To understand such a personal experience and its impact I chose the phenomenological methodology of poetic inquiry because phenomenology is designed to explore the essence and wonder of a particular lived experience (Van Manen, 2007). As such it allowed for in-depth analysis of personal descriptions by the 17 participants of how the 2-week pd institute influenced their philosophical stance in a manner that tapped into the nuances of internal change.

The pd institute<sup>2</sup>, explicitly designed to integrate the relational, normative values of RJ into its pedagogy, did so by (a) creating spaces for circle dialogue that was guided by norms the group created on the first day; (b) providing activity-based opportunities to identify and assess one's personal core beliefs and values and then comparing and contrasting them those inherent to RJ; (c) reinforcing key concepts through artistic responses and group activities; (d) role-playing skills in contexts the participants described as their own; (e) debriefing regularly in journals, small group dialogue, and whole group talking circles.

The findings indicate that professional development for restorative justice:

- can impact personal philosophical stance when it includes activities and opportunities for participants to explore epistemological and ontological ways of being/knowing. Participants describe change in terms of reconnecting with their personal core values, reconsidering their current practice as educators, and being ready to implement core concepts and practices of restorative justice into their personal and professional lives.
- is effective when it includes five key components: (1) explicit description of and activities engaging with what a paradigm shift is; (2) space for examining core beliefs

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<sup>2</sup> For a full description of the design of this pd institute see Vaandering (2014).

and values; (3) a clear explanation and experience of foundational elements of RJ and how this compares to dominant social thought; (4) opportunity to personally create connections between one's own current thinking and RJ; (5) direct practice facilitating dialogue and integrating RJ principles into daily educator experience.

Examining philosophical stance and change is complex. This article seeks to provide a glimpse into that complexity by using critical, relational theories and arts-based poetic inquiry to allow readers to engage in the life experience of the study's participants. What follows is a description of this framework and method, then insights provided by the participants, and finally a discussion that provides significant conceptual guidance for pd in the field of RJE.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Normative and explanatory theories grounded in relationality shaped both the design of the pd experience and the research study. Freire (1970, 2005) and Buber's (1958) deep respect for humanity as having potential to thrive through dialogue and connection supports current RJ theorists who profess that human beings are relational and interconnected (Pranis, 2007; Zehr, 2005; Ross, 2014). Llewellyn's (2012) relational theory clarifies this further by differentiating between relationality for the sake of individual thriving and relationality for the sake of creating more cohesive communities where mutual respect, concern, and dignity are sought. These particular theories provide a reference point<sup>3</sup> for a view of humanity as worthy and interconnected as well as a means for critically reflecting on and exposing current perceptions and actions. This is the root structure of a restorative justice paradigm that can then be contrasted with the root structure of the dominant retributive paradigm.

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<sup>3</sup> For a full explanation of this reference point see Vaandering (2011).

Zehr (1997, 2005) popularized this concept of a RJ paradigm in his seminal work, *Changing Lenses*. He describes how our judicial practices are grounded in paradigms-- paradigms being the manner in which our definitions of reality are ways of constructing our reality. They represent our beliefs and values and shape our approach to the world (worldview) including how problems are defined and resolved (Zehr, 2005, p. 86-87; Schwandt, 2001; Kuhn, 1970). Zehr applies this to the field of justice indicating that a shift in paradigms is required if restorative justice is to become a reality in Western society. Rather than the dominant retributive paradigm which is reflected in the belief that the more one is punished the less likely they are to reoffend, a restorative paradigm embodies the belief that the stronger one's relationships are, the less likely they are to cause harm (IIRP, n.d.). This shift from emphasizing social control to social engagement (Morrison, 2012) is also at the core of integrating RJ in education holistically (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). The challenge often ignored in the field, is explicitly grappling with the manner in which one comes to commit to and live within a restorative justice paradigm. Simply describing its components or foundation is most often not enough and will result in co-opting as current non-relational practices are tweaked and renamed as restorative in nature (Morris, 1998; Vaandering, 2010). To make the shift, one needs to expose, explore, and reconsider the root structures of the old paradigm as well as the root structures of the new one (Bangerter, et al .) When these are identified, the path to change is clarified and explicit action can be taken.

In the context of RJ these structures are rooted in perspectives of humanity. Knowing who we are and being aware of what makes us thrive as human beings is often assumed. After all, to be human is to know these things, is it not? How else do we survive? Freire (1970, 2005) and Buber (1958) in their seminal works reveal the danger of such assumptions in terms of their

potential for objectification and manipulation of people especially those already marginalized by those more powerful. To identify and address such oppression Freire challenges all people to recognize that our vocation as people is first and foremost to become more fully human and to take seriously our capacity for *praxis*-- to *name* what we experience, reflect, and then to change what is oppressive to enhance well-being for all (p. 125). Praxis challenges worldviews that undermine our well-being. In the field of RJ this allows us to confront what Llewellyn (2012) identifies as “liberal-inspired assumptions about the nature of self” that promote separation, individualization, and ultimately notions of survival of the fittest. These dominant Western neo-liberal perspectives that presume individualism, continue to thrive indicating the success of institutional change prompted by the Industrial Revolution where human beings were (de)valued for their ability to be but one small part of a greater economic machine. This dehumanization is currently exemplified in the reality that the vast majority of people still see themselves as separate from and unable to change the governing structures of their cultures and societies. Schools are no exception to this. Education theorist, Maxine Greene (1998) highlights this reality. She states, “There is, however, no orientation to bringing something into being if there is no awareness of something lacking in a situation” and then concludes, “Instead of reaching out, along with others, toward open possibilities... individuals accept existing structures as given” (p. 22). Questioning who we are and what we value is not only relevant, but crucial if change is to occur.

Early contemporary RJ theorists have explicitly articulated the belief that people are worthy and relational. Pranis, Stuart & Wedge (2003), who join many others in embracing Indigenous foundations of RJ, highlight that,



we treat each other in respectful and ultimately sacred ways, because we see each person as part of the whole and indispensable to it. We also see ourselves as connected to all other beings, and so what happens to them affects us too. Our connectedness gives us the responsibility to care for each other and to help mend the webs that hold us. (p. 68)

Zehr (2005) and Bianchi (1994), are joined by others who embrace a Judeo-Christian stance and identify that restorative justice seeks covenantal *shalom* (may peace be between us) amongst people with each other and their environments as all are worthy and to be honoured. These perspectives are grounded more firmly through Llewellyn's (2012) relational theory of differentiating between relationality for the sake of the individual or for the sake of creating more comprehensive communities and Morrison's (2012) call for institutions to replace mandates of social control with mandates for social engagement where people take responsibility for who they are and what they do individually and collectively rather than rely solely on external forces to manage interaction.

In my own work (Vaandering, 2011), informed by Zehr (2005) and Wolterstorff (2008), these perspectives are synthesized and represented in the term *justice* when it is understood in both a primary and secondary manner. Primary justice being the "condition of respect, dignity, and the protection of right and opportunities for all, existing in relationships when no one is wronged"; and secondary justice being the "response to harm or crime" (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p. 7). Thus, restorative *justice* through honouring the worth and working relationally for the well-being of all, seeks to uphold and restore the worth, dignity and interconnectedness of all people allowing them to be fully contributing members of their various communities and RJE becomes holistic in its efforts to cultivate this by creating just and equitable learning

environments, nurture healthy relationships, and repair harm and transform conflict (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p. xiii)

Few studies have examined pd experiences that are rooted explicitly in such normative theories (Mayworm, et al, 2016). Toews, (2013) in analysing her own experience with pedagogy grounded in restorative justice values, identifies that transformation results for participants in her courses when she intentionally incorporates restorative justice values. Cremin (2012), in critiquing the simplistic uni-dimensional perspectives of schooling taken by many proponents of restorative justice who evangelistically promote its principles and practices, clearly identifies that without considering the underlying theory and nature of the field, participants are ill-prepared, unsupported, and limited so that practice results in counterproductive consequences (p. 109). She goes on to identify that change in schooling is very complex and education stakeholders (directors, administrators, teachers) must be able to examine the social norms and socio-political context of schools, as these constitute what we teach and learn. Change in schools lies in rethinking the root structures that create perceptions of the nature of teaching and learning and the interplay between teachers and students (108). This can only happen when “teacher preparation... is rooted in the ethical formation of selves and history” (Freire, 1998, p. 23) and when educators (which includes administrators and directors) nurture self-regulation by connecting with and activating their own internal values (Morrison, 2012). In this way educators put on critical relational lenses that allow them to examine and question policies, structures, or curriculum in the context of their beliefs and values (Picower, 2013, p. 173). When this occurs, then many current approaches that use behaviorial techniques for the purpose of social control, can be exposed and generic individualistic rewards/punishment-based responses that often result

in cultures of fear will gradually be replaced by relational, restorative justice that creates spaces of belonging and hope.

### **Methodology**

This narrative, critical case study involved 17 participants in a two-week professional development experience (Table 1). In summary, the pd was designed so participants would *experience* RJE and not just learn *about* RJE. They were invited to engage with key principles and practices including: (1) a variety of talking circle processes (2) on-going identification of how all relationships are impacted by the belief that all people are worthy and interconnected; (3) relational reflection questions that encouraged deeper engagement with their understanding of and concerns regarding what they were experiencing. Of critical importance were the beginning activities, reflections, and dialogue that challenged participants to uncover and articulate their own core beliefs regarding humanity and how this impacted their view of and relationship with themselves, others, their vocations, and the world. RJE values of respect, dignity, and mutual concern emerged and nurtured the group's capacity for connection and collaboration with each other and they began to imagine how this would deepen their relationships with children and youth so authentic learning would result<sup>4</sup> (Vaandering, 2014).

Near the end of this 2-week pd, each participant was invited to join in focus group interviews that would occur 6-9 months later, allowing them time to experience the impact of the pd in their own particular contexts. All agreed. A research assistant facilitated and recorded eight interview sessions, some in groups, some as individuals, based on their availability. The RJE questions that were introduced in the pd experience were used to frame each of the

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<sup>4</sup> See footnote 1.

interviews: What happened for you in the pd experience? What were/are you thinking and feeling? What impact has it had? What was the hardest thing for you? What do you need (to do) to move forward with this work?

As the designer and lead facilitator of the pd experience, I did not facilitate the interviews to ensure that participant responses were not influenced by my presence. The participants had the option of remaining anonymous to me. None accepted. Everyone indicated they had no concerns with me knowing what they said. The research assistant transcribed the interviews, then each of us separately read through the transcriptions to identify statements that indicated change. Separately again, we examined each more carefully and then organized them into themes. We then came together to discuss our decisions and rationale. A final read through was carried out until we were both comfortable with the themes and groupings.

[Insert Table 1 near here: Participant list]

It was in the analysis of the data collected that I was confronted over and over again with the need to understand how change in paradigms and philosophical stance would/could be expressed. Was it even reasonable to consider that a paradigm shift had occurred or could be identified through dialogue? Yet, as I read and reread each interview and began to gather what seemed to be significant statements, I found myself hearing a rhythm and wonder in the phrasing used that was saying more than just the words themselves.

Qualitative research, RJ, and artistic expression are not foreign entities<sup>5</sup>. Researchers have been encouraged to develop and use research methodology that is guided by RJ principles and values; arts-based methodologies have progressed rapidly since the mid 90's. The arts have contributed to the validity and credibility of RJ research deepening knowledge and experience considerably.

During analysis of the data in this study, I found myself repeatedly writing participant comments in poetic form. When I saw this visual representation as well as reread each poem aloud and to colleagues, I recognized that in writing them as poetry, I was capturing something of the phenomenon of a paradigm shift that had/was occurring. I began to explore the genre of *research found poetry* confirming my instinct that “the research found poem is used as a tool to investigate and represent the lived experience of participants (Patrick, 2016). Poetic inquiry has various iterations. It can include myself as researcher-poet choosing phrases and rearranging

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<sup>5</sup> Zehr's multidimensional work in the field of RJ is well known. His books (Zehr, 1996, 2001, 2010) of photographs of those harmed, those causing harm, as well as the children of incarcerated people, capture much more than their words about their experience. In a similar way, Sharon Daniel's installation *Inside the distance* (Pali, 2014) gives rise to critique and engagement in fresh ways. Drama/theatre productions as well as mainstream and documentary movies about RJ have also contributed much to understanding the complexity of what occurs in RJ. Finally, personal experience in creating and curating a collage/quilt experience (EVANS & Vaandering, 2013) was equally expressive and challenging and resulted in responses and insights that challenged viewers and participants to critique mainstream media and our complicity in allowing harm to continue.

them, writing my own poetry from the data and ideas collected, or as in this case, using participant words as spoken and arranging them as poetry.

Another reason for choosing found poetic inquiry for a study on RJ pd for a paradigm shift, is that both the fields of qualitative arts-based research and RJ confront conventionally accepted modes of being/working. Drawing on Patrick (2016), researchers and practitioners alike all find themselves at the “intersection of critical and creative discourses” (p. 393) challenging social norms that are often assumed “resist(ing) limitations imposed by taken for granted hegemonies” (p. 393). As the researcher reporting on my study, I believe my responsibility is to invite and engage the reader in the essence of what the participants experienced. As poetry theorist Abercrombie (1926 in Patrick, 2016) indicates, “poetry does not merely tell what a man (sic) has experienced, but it makes *his very experience itself live again* in our minds by means of the incantation of its language” (emphasis added).

RJ literature regularly acknowledges and promotes Zehr’s (2005) insights that RJ will require a paradigm shift. To *live* this reality as an academic, in this paper, I have challenged myself to resist the limitations I often feel are imposed on me to provide “empirical evidence”. Instead, along with qualitative description *about* participant experience and the shift in thinking brought about by the pd they attended, I include found poetry to let the very *experience live again* so that we might catch the essence of transformative, paradigmatic shifts.

To demonstrate the impact of this, I share with you a quote in both prose and ‘found poetry’ form by Alice, who reflects on her experience in the months following the pd. Read the prose first, then pause to consider what was said.

“Once you’ve been exposed to RJ and you’ve gone through and you’ve had time to think and try some of it and experiment and explore, I really don’t think that

you can go back even though you might walk away from it for a week or two and go, “ah, I’m not doing that anymore.” But you can’t... you can’t. Too much changing has happened to go back to that rules-based, punitive approach.”

~Alice

Next, read the same words in poetic form, pausing again to consider Alice’s ideas.

Once you’ve been exposed to RJ  
and you’ve gone through  
and you’ve had time to  
think  
and  
try  
some of it and  
experiment and explore,  
I really don’t think that you can go

back  
even though you might walk away from  
it  
for a week or two  
and go,  
“ah, I’m not doing that anymore.”

*But you can’t... you can’t.*

Too much changing has happened

to go back  
to that rules-based,  
punitive approach.

Finally, reflect: What do you notice? Is there a difference? How does it impact your thinking?

As I read and listened to the tapes several times in the context of paradigm shift, I was struck by Alice's expression of not being able to go back to her original way of thinking about a punitive approach. To portray this, I chose to justify text relating to change on the right, while former perspectives, I lined up on the left in the way readers are used to reading text. Then to show Alice's journey to her new way of thinking, I took specific phrases indicating action and gave each their own line. The tension of change is expressed in the line "but you can't... you can't" which is centred and italicized, illustrating that point of looking backwards and forwards.

After transposing a variety of statements in this way, like Wiggins (2011), I began to understand that my process of organizing participant insights in this way was a way of analysing data that conveyed more fully the experience participants were describing. I considered that both prose and poetry were processes of transcribing interviews that included interpretation and were ways, along with looking for key themes, and highlighting phrases, of gleaning insight. Trying to identify a shift in paradigms and being able to articulate this in speech, prose or poetry, is all a grappling with expressing what happens within us as human beings. For this work, it is Luce-Kapler (2009) who pinpoints the significance of poetry as an expression of shifting as it "has a way of drawing us toward a phenomenon so that we feel the emotional reverberations of a shared moment." What follows are key findings and themes that I trust will reverberate in ways that challenge RJ practitioners, advocates, and researchers to consider carefully the transformative experiences into which we are inviting people.

### **Findings**

What is the impact on the personal philosophical stance of participants in a pd experience that explicitly engages with the core values of RJ? Findings indicate that professional development for restorative justice can impact personal philosophical stance when it integrates



ontological and epistemological ways of being/knowing. All 17 participants indicate they are grappling with the root structures of both (or many) paradigms as they reconnect with their personal core values, reconsider their current practice as educators, and desire to implement core concepts and practices of restorative justice into their personal and professional lives. The tension that is created when presented with alternative perspectives comes from juxtaposing these with what was once taken for granted. As credibility of this ‘other way’ arises, a decision is required in terms of moving forward. Thus, themes of tension and discomfort, as Alice’s comment indicates—“you can’t, you can’t go back” -- are central to identifying if a paradigm shift is occurring.

Matt encapsulates the tension and the effort of “*trying to see*” that the pd experience initiated for him and that many of the others also shared.

I was able to begin *trying to see*  
where and how

RJ fit

with the other sets of ideas  
that organized my thinking  
and, hopefully,  
my actions –

where the intersecting points were  
and finding ways  
to make that connection  
even stronger  
and clearer  
for myself

trying to think how I would,

in my practice as a teacher,  
make that visible  
to other people.  
And becoming more and more aware  
that a lot of these ideas  
inform how  
I  
perceive the world,

but they have to be visible as traces in my actions  
to more than just  
me  
because then otherwise,  
  
are they even out there?

Such reflexivity is particularly evident in how participants consider their changing perspectives of (1) self; (2) others; (3) current practice (4) engaging with personal and professional communities. What is significant and surprising in this study is how each participant indicates change was occurring for them in *all* four of these areas. What follows are examples that best encapsulate this phenomenon of change.

### *Changing perspectives of self*

Participants' responses to the guiding questions were woven through with reflective statements pointing to or explaining the changing perspectives they had of themselves. Fay, who openly admitted to being resistant to engaging at the start zeroes in on the essence of the pd design:

This was a different kind of pd

It was recognizing  
    *who* you are,  
        recognizing  
            *where* you are,  
challenging yourself  
to go somewhere else,  
and understanding  
                *why*  
you were doing it.

Ian reflects this depth as well.

The way I feel about RJ is that  
it is a decision that  
you come to in your  
own soul  
and you try

to move it forward

in your own life.

Nathan and Owen are confronted by how their perspectives of self, impact  
opportunity for community to develop.

I'm proud of my competitiveness

But now when I step back from it I go, "Yeah, but that's an

individual

thing.

How is the community affected?

How are the people in my everyday life affected by this?"

I'm

in the process now of realizing  
that the glory of the

individual

in Western society is  
something  
that most of us aspire to

by default.

With students we say

**you** got a 95, *great job*,

**you** got a 70, *work harder*,

without looking at the idea of how a class succeeds.

I was so comfortable being a person that was comfortable with  
Competition  
and

Now

I'm not at all.

~Nathan\*<sup>6</sup>

Reflecting on a particularly challenging role he had in a role play, Owen states:

My non-chalance was replaced with

bordering on an intense desire to  
to br eak d o wn.

U n e a se,  
leave,

Anything!

It made me confront the  
Responsibility

an individual has within the larger community;

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<sup>6</sup> Names with \* indicate a quote that was used in Vaandering (2014) in prose form.

that community is buttressed by  
the relationships  
of a whole lot of individuals.

We, as individuals,  
must somehow negotiate/dialogue with one another to  
Create Community.

Not easy in these  
hyper-  
individualized  
times.

The depth of the impact of this pd on the personal philosophical stance is evident in how participants come to confront and examine what Llewellyn's relational theory lays out--the distinction between relationality for the sake of individual thriving and relationality for the sake of creating more cohesive communities where mutual respect, concern, and dignity are sought. Change in perspective of self is a continuum that begins with recognizing dissonance within that leads to action:

This is my life now,  
I'm doing this daily.  
(Karin)

### ***Changing perspectives of others***

Building on this deeper awareness of the relationality to support the growth of community, most participants, at one point or another, demonstrated that they were no longer satisfied to accept existing structures but were beginning to reach out personally toward open possibilities. This was evident first in their changing perspectives of others which would lay the groundwork for how they saw these relationships impact their perspectives of the institutions and

communities of which they were a part (Greene, p. 22). A dance (Fisher and Yury, 1983) comes to mind as participants described the movement between self and others that the pd experience initiated in terms of looking beyond self. Matt focuses on the personal:

It didn't happen at first.  
It was something I wanted to do  
but I would revert back to my way of being in a fight

with my wife  
or a disagreement  
with my sister.

Periodically I would remember to bring those RJ questions back.  
It always immediately changed the tenor  
of the disagreement.

It changed  
how *I* was;  
it changed  
how *they* were;  
and it changed  
how *we* were  
as a result,  
which was good...

there was a little bit more of a tenderness,  
around dealing with people  
who are in my life.

~Matt\*

Karin, a vice principal, bridges personal and professional, noticing her ability to think beyond herself:

even with my husband,  
with a parent,  
a bus driver,

now

i'm always aware of how  
They are feeling  
and how  
things are falling into place.

Betty captures how the pd approach initiated new relationships:

It was the community-building  
That was most important  
You got to know people so quickly,  
You could empathize—

The whole ability to  
Feel for one another,  
Put yourself in their place and not

Judge.

***Changing perspectives of their current practice and with what they know***

Not only were relationships with other people impacted, all participants spoke clearly and confidently of their relationship with their current practice and their desire to make change.

Karin and Matt illustrate this commitment and confidence.

It's a confirmation for me.

Stuff I had already been using with students and colleagues.

I always wanted to build relationships

with my staff and the community and parents

This pd really said

that's a good thing to continue in my life;

(Karin)

I need to refocus my relationship  
between the curriculum and RJ  
at the junior and especially the senior high level  
where what I am doing in class  
has to match up  
with restorative philosophy.  
In RJ, the students have a voice. It's about

asking them what they need  
and  
creating experiences together.

(Matt)

***Changing perspectives of their relationship within a group/institution--***

A clear indication that the participants' personal philosophical stances had been impacted was that they were able to critically reflect on their current situation and were no longer satisfied with the existing systemic structures of which they were a part. The pd experience had broken through their assumptions that the institutional structure was static and that they could not have an impact. As their stance was solidified they began to envision possibilities and their ability to work to change the system. Several explained how they had taken their new understanding into different spaces.

It's encouraged me to bring it to



other aspects of my life.

In a community organization I am a part of, we have started doing circles  
as a way of relationship building  
to improve our effectiveness.

...this coming from the

TOP

*down*

and then punishing and rewarding of behaviours,

it just doesn't work.

(Lori)

Others expressed hope that they could be instrumental in moving things forward:

I want to get it through

to the Department,

into every school

to make it a

viable thing.

I want to get the word out

to everybody!

~Karin

Still others indicated their dependence on collective relationality.

I need

to be part of a

community,

founded on

respect,

love

and  
understanding.

I need

to be able to  
dialogue,  
to speak my truth.  
And be willing  
to accord the same  
to others ...

It's what we all need  
as human beings.

~Owen\*

### **Discussion**

What do these poignant participant responses mean? In examining the impact of this pd on the personal philosophical stance of participants, it is clear that pd grounded in core values of RJ initiated change in participant perceptions broadly and deeply. Their insights identify that pd engaging with core values of RJ can have a substantial impact and can at least serve as an impetus for a paradigm shift. In returning to Song and Swearer's (2016) question: "How important is it that RJ is delivered *in a manner* that maintains its integrity?" this study identifies that the explicit manner employed in this particular experience challenged participants to grapple with, experience, and respond to the essence of RJ. How important is this?

Imagine for a moment what would happen if the pd was delivered in a manner that did *not* reflect or engage with the essence of RJ? Given the dominant liberal-individualistic expectations of school systems and approaches that govern school practices through

standardization, this is a significant reality and the reason why the findings reported on in this article are important. It is not unusual for educators to accept without question the current approaches and paradigms in which they are immersed (like a fish in water or a human in air) (Amabile & Stubbs, 2016, p. 33; Hall & Simeral, 2008), approaches that rely on rewards and punishments, that encourage manipulation of students to comply, or that honour those who 'succeed' and dismiss those who are 'average' or outside of the norm. As RJ requires a paradigm shift away from this dominant way of being that encourages individualism and reinforces corporate, consumer agendas, RJ pd that is transmissive rather than transformative risks perpetuating adherence to these paradigms and might likely encourage participants to employ RJ strategies as another means for controlling humanity. It also takes up the dominant view that change can be dictated and enforced through hierarchical institutional structures. Song and Swearer (2016) rightly point out what Morris (1998) identified in the early years of contemporary RJ, that RJ will be inhibited or diluted in these contexts. They identify clearly the need for educators to be capable of critical assessment of implementation processes that consciously or unconsciously co-opt its potential for education.

The significance of pd for RJ needing to impact personal philosophical stance cannot be underestimated. Pd for RJ cannot dictate what the philosophical stance needs to be, however, it does need to create space for critical reflection and an invitation to engage with a RJ paradigm. This particular pd experience was designed primarily by integrating the core beliefs and values of RJ (i.e. honouring the worth and interconnectedness of all; engaging values of dignity, worth, & mutual concern) into a Freirean critical pedagogy and Llewellyn's (2012) relational theory. As such it was invitational and experiential rather than prescriptive and dogmatic. Its end goal was to invite participants from the eight different educational institutions to continue their

exploration of and begin to implement RJ principles and practices into their unique contexts if they were comfortable doing so and as such begin building awareness of RJE in this province.

### *Cohesion with other studies*

It is encouraging to observe how the findings of this research are similar to those studies of professional development approaches embedded in other theories as well. Of note are:

(a) feminist theories and black feminist theories (hooks, 2004) that highlight the complexity of converging multiple identities that challenge the opportunities possible for nurturing authentic relationship, collaboration, and interdependence within communities. The findings of this research begins to expose the complexity of political and social expression counteracting power imbalances that continually marginalize some for maintaining the status (and oppression) of a few (Smith, 1999; hooks, 1984).

(b) care theory (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1999) that highlights the challenge of developing trust amongst educators within notions of the cared and the cared-for in reciprocal relationship.

In the context of this paper, however, I will only to elaborate briefly on Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory because of its focus on adult learning in particular and how it supports and illuminates this pd grounded in RJ. Much like Freire's (1970/2005) call for reflexivity leading to conscientization and Kuhn's (1970) challenge to expose, explore, and reconsider the root structures of the old paradigm, Mezirow (1991) indicates that transformative learning for adults requires "reflection [that] involves a critique of assumptions to determine whether the belief, often acquired through cultural assimilation in childhood, remains functional for us as adults" (Mezirow, 1991). He identifies the need for both experience and open communication to bring this to light, which were also central components for the RJ pd

experience studied. Mezirow's transformative learning theory has been employed widely for decades. It has been combined with or birthed other theories that continue to dig deeply into learning of all kinds.

Deepening our understanding of how it is that RJ can inform and guide pd, Lysaker & Furuness (2011) in drawing on Mezirow emphasize one's relationships with self as being fundamental<sup>7</sup>. They state, "professional development aimed at skill building and knowledge-banking distances teachers from their own acts of knowing and perpetuates a dichotomous relationship between teachers and their developing knowledge as well as a compliant stance in the face of more authoritative 'knowers'" (p. 184). They describe a relational, dialogic pedagogy that brings their students into contact with their beliefs through journal writing and in-class discussions that is followed by "an exploration of alternative understandings of how they see the world and their roles within it" (Cranton, 1996 in Lysaker & Furuness, 2011, p. 186). This sets the context for transformation to occur in their relationships with their subject, peers, and their experience of dissonance.

Lange (2007) reports on another interesting development regarding transformative learning that she unexpectedly discovered in her work. She identifies *restorative learning* as a necessary companion to transformative learning. In a study she conducted from 2000-2004, she discovered that rather than a transformation, students articulated that "their ethics of honesty, integrity, fairness, respect, loyalty, and community service did not require transformation but a restoration to their rightful place in their lives" (p. 232). Together they named this *restorative*

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<sup>7</sup> See Vaandering, 2014 for a full description of the centrality of relationship with self in developing and growing into a full understanding of RJ.

*learning* and identified that it led to a deeper transformation over time in terms of responsible individual and community relationships. Though Lange works outside the field of restorative justice, this discovery of restorative learning dovetails with RJ very well. In the context of the pd experience, many of the participants I worked with, expressed similar sentiments as they recognized that what they were learning and experiencing was *not* new but rather a reminder of what they believed at their core, before being absorbed into a constricting system characterized more and more by standardization and individual success. Restorative justice education included reconnecting with what they knew inherently would lead to their own well-being and that of those they served.

### ***Implications of a paradigm shift***

Unique to this pd was its dependence on both the principles and practices of RJ so that participants experienced critical relational ways of being. In particular there was a predominant use of dialogue circles as pedagogy wherein every participant was invited to be involved as a listener, a speaker, or both. Using a talking piece and proceeding around the circle one by one, there was no competition for time to share. Those more reserved participants found it easy to contribute, and those used to dominating, learned to wait for and hear from others. Lange (2007) and Lysaker & Furerer (2016) relied heavily on reflective journal writing in their approaches. Though this was a component of our experience, the talking circle was more dominant. The experience of creating space for all voices as well as authentically listening and sharing, brought

participants to that space of communal critical reflection leading to decisions regarding restoration and/or transformation<sup>8</sup> of philosophical stance.

To further consider the impact on personal philosophical stance of pd grounded in RJ beliefs and values, I turn briefly to what implications resulted from the paradigm shift that took place and if participants' philosophical shift was sustained. Nine months after the pd took place, woven throughout their comments/poetry are hints of the challenges they now face. Alice's comment that it was impossible to go back was evidenced in various ways as most identified that their shift in perspective resulted in complexities that they both welcomed and found challenging. Owen and Nathan identified the challenge it is to remember to live out of a RJ paradigm in personal relationships. Matt and Nathan described times they needed to choose between what they might have done in the past and suddenly remembering a different way. Helen (in a comment not included in this article) identified how she was able to understand what was contributing to what she experienced as a dysfunctional relationship and was able to make some clear decisions. Professionally, though many were ready to initiate change in their contexts, they discovered what it meant to personally confront a whole system that was not grounded in a relational way of being. They were excited by the impact of RF practices on their classroom practices but found it difficult to generate sustained interest amongst colleagues and administration. Though they all had at least one person from their school who had done the pd with them as someone they could share their experiences with, most expressed loneliness and

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<sup>8</sup> Talking circles are a process that is used through all aspects of RJ and RJE. They can be used for informal, friendly dialogue, curriculum learning, and/or resolving disputes. See Vaandering, 2016.

discouragement at how challenging it was to implement RJE more substantively in their schools. As a result, a clear majority wanted regular meetings as a group so they could ‘be back in that supportive, creative space’ of the summer. Yet in spite of opportunities, they were not able to prioritize meeting because of an overload of work.

In spite of these challenges, all participants also describe a sense of confidence and peace they did not have prior to the pd that motivates them to continue to live out of their restored/transformed philosophical convictions. And now, five years hence, this is evident in the reality that the seeds of RJ have not disappeared or rotted in the ground, but have begun to grow. Several schools, the school district, the government departments of education and justice, as well as the university are engaging with or considering engagement because of the shifts in thinking of these participants and their ability to suggest and encourage program change. As pd facilitator and researcher, I continue to rely on these participants for insight and guidance for moving forward. To measure such growth is challenging as philosophical stance is personal and its impact can be nuanced and glossed over as having little significance in a system that relies on standardization, numbers, and hard evidence. The pd experience was an invitation to engage. Instead of spelling out expectations or long-term goals, it was designed to empower participants to make their own decisions as they were the experts of their own personal and professional contexts.

### ***Implications for professional development practice***

What does this study reveal about the practical design elements of the pd experience? What can researchers, educators, and practitioners do to replicate the opportunity to restore or



transform one's paradigm? First and foremost is the need to integrate the core values/beliefs into the talking circle and activity-based pedagogy, ensuring that participants experience living the relational paradigm to which they are invited to shift. Then, the following five components emerged from participant and facilitator reflections as necessary if pd is to result in a paradigm shift:

1. Space, time, and active opportunities to hear about what a paradigm and/or philosophical stance is. It cannot be assumed that people are aware of what this means or that they realize they see the world through a particular frame of reference. In facilitating these pd sessions, I am always intrigued by how enlightening this seems to be and how participants express their 'ah-ha' both physically and verbally.
2. Space, time, and active opportunities for examining personal core beliefs and values. In following up on being introduced to the concepts of paradigm and philosophical stance, nothing can change until participants identify the beliefs and values that shape their personal decisions and actions. Individual activities and reflection time are critical for this, but sharing their ideas and listening to others brings this experience out of an individualized relationality into a communal one.
3. Space, time, and active opportunities to engage with a clear introduction to the foundational elements of RJ and how this is a shift away from dominant social thought becomes the substance with which participants grapple. If this is presented simply as information and if it is assumed that participants agree with its importance, then RJ risks becoming formulaic and engagement with it personally is limited or skewed.
4. Space, time, and active opportunities to create connections between one's unconscious and conscious thoughts and how these relate to new possibilities. Participants are then

invited to make decisions about how they will proceed and engage. Identifying their personal framework then allows them to assess and decide how to move forward.

5. Space, time, and active opportunities to experience and practice facilitated dialogue.

Actively participating in theory guided practice allows for deepened understanding that all action is grounded in theory of some sort. Reflexivity leads to empowerment and a level of autonomy and trust that many educators feel has been stripped from them.

### *Implications for research*

The knowledge gained from this research reiterates what Mayworm et al (2016) conclude. There is a clear need for studying the different pd designs used in the field of RJ. Research identifying impact of RJ on students or participants in RJ conferences in the criminal justice contexts is not uncommon. However, few studies have examined what elements of pd impact practice. Some more robust research is emerging that questions the responsibilities of proponents in the field itself for perpetuating misunderstandings (Gavrielides, 2013; Cremin, 2012; Wadhwa, 2015; Vaandering, 2013). However, emphasis remains on successes and potential of RJ. The field of RJ has been in existence long enough now to critically reflect on its limitations and failures. Though there are many possible routes to take in terms of further research, comparative studies of the various pd designs and approaches and their impact on those who participate would help to identify more clearly the reasons for authentic or co-opted practice.

This study also highlights that there is a lack of information available on the various ways research can illustrate the impact of RJ professional development. In using poetic inquiry, change and growth is articulated in a way that shares the complexity of lived experience. This uncovers the challenges that reside at the core of implementation and informs how we move

away from static hierarchical structures relying on statistics to support practice to more organic, holistic way of organizing society that can be nurtured and sustained.

### ***Implications for theory***

Critical theory & relational theory are lenses that have exposed aspects of RJ that were not visible in earlier days of contemporary RJ approaches. As RJ becomes more prominent in society, researchers and practitioners need to boldly examine RJ through various other theories to deepen our understanding of what is happening. In addition to the revelations evident in this study, Lange's discovery of restorative learning theory is an example of how the nuances of transformative learning theory were uncovered. In a similar way, applying the insights of key education theorists (i.e. Dewey, Vygotsky, Bruner, Piaget, etc.) may in time, give birth to and solidify RJ as a theory in its own right.

Since its contemporary inception into society, RJ has been critiqued for theory lagging behind practice (Braithwaite, 2006; Hopkins, 2016). Though evidence indicates there is now a focus on theory, we must continue along this path for robust growth to occur.

### **Final thoughts**

This article set out to highlight how knowledge deepens when we focus on an ignored aspect of the RJ field, that of examining professional development that intends to invite people into becoming active agents of social change. In examining the personal philosophical stance of those involved through their poetic voices, as participants, researcher, and readers we all enter into the sacred space of the heart and soul of who we are. Moving forward reflexively, perhaps this work exemplifies a beginning growth towards maturity that Rumi (13<sup>th</sup> C) expresses succinctly:

*Yesterday*  
*I was clever, so*  
*I wanted*  
*to change the world.*  
*Today*  
*I am wise, so*  
*I am changing*  
*myself.*

This manuscript has not been published elsewhere and that has not been submitted simultaneously for publication elsewhere.

With thanks to each participant in professional development institute reported on here. This inaugural event to which each brought the reality of themselves has resulted in learning that has touched and changed the lives of so many.

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Participant (pseudonym) (years of experience)	Place of employment	Role
Alice (+15)	High school-A	Vice principal
Betty (+10)	High school-A	Special education teacher
Cathy (+5)	High school-A	Librarian/teacher
Donna (+10)	Highschool-A	Classroom teacher
Eva (+15)	Junior high-A	Classroom teacher
Fay (+20)	Junior high-A	Guidance counselor
Ian (+15)	Junior high-B	Vice principal
Greg (+15)	Primary-elementary-A	Guidance counselor

Helen (+5)	Primary elementary-A	Grade 2
Jolene (+10)	Primary elementary-B	Classroom teacher
Karin (+15)	Primary school	Vice Principal
Lori (+5)	Primary Elementary E & F	Itinerant music teacher
Matt (+10)	Independent school K-12	High school teacher
Nathan (+10)	Independent school K-12	School chaplain
Owen (+10)	Independent school K-12	Jr. high teacher
Peter (+5)	Social service agency	Program facilitators for youth absent from regular school
Roy (+5)	Social service agency	

Table 1: Participant List