

BOOK REVIEW

[Umbreit, M. & Armour, M. P. \(2011\). *Restorative justice dialogue: An essential guide for research and practice*. New York: Springer Publishing.](#)

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Mark Umbreit is a professor at the University of Minnesota, School of Social Work, on the St. Paul Campus. He is the founding Director of the Center for Restorative Justice & Peacemaking, as well as the National Restorative Justice Training Institute. Mark has been active in the restorative justice movement since the 1970's. He has played a supportive role in the development of the first Victim Offender Reconciliation Program in the United States in Elkhart, Indiana. He has served as a mediator, a trainer of mediators, and has helped develop restorative justice programs in the United States and several other countries. He has been very active in researching the effects of restorative justice services having published more than 140 articles, books, chapters, and monographs on the topic.

Marilyn Peterson Armour is an associate professor at the School of Social Work, University of Texas at Austin. She was the founding Director of the Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue in Texas. Much of her research has focused on families of murder victims. She is a trainer in restorative justice.

Restorative Justice Dialogue presents a thorough and comprehensive explanation and assessment of the current state of restorative justice in the world. It explains the restorative justice methods and presents the most recent research supporting this approach. The opening chapter presents the basic philosophy of restorative justice, its antecedents, and its historical development. Restorative justice

critiques the current justice system for dehumanizing both victims and perpetrators. It proposes to engage victims, perpetrators, and the community in resolving the conflict and developing appropriate restitution. The antecedents of restorative justice are historical approaches to justice in the Western world and community approaches to justice in several tribal societies. Restorative justice began to emerge in the 1970s as a movement to reform the justice system. The book discusses four general types of restorative justice: victim offender mediation, group conferencing, circles, and various derivatives from its approaches. All of these approaches have in common the bringing together of victims and offenders in the presence of a third party facilitator. The goal is to restore the humanity of all parties. Chapter 2 links restorative justice values to core social work values. It persuasively argues that restorative justice enacts basic social work values. Along with the value and dignity of individuals, restorative justice is concerned with cultural sensitivity and empowerment.

Chapter 3 addresses the spirituality embedded in restorative justice. Because of its focus on humanity and healing, restorative justice is closely linked to many spiritual traditions. Many of the restorative justice techniques use rituals or adaptations of rituals to set aside the meeting as a healing place.

The authors do an outstanding job of presenting research from many countries to explain what we know and what we do not know about the effectiveness of restorative

justice practices. They present a very balanced summary of the research that has been done. Overall the research suggests that both victims and the wrongdoer are satisfied with the practices, and feel that they have received justice. The evidence on recidivism is less clear. More research is needed to determine under what conditions restorative justice will affect recidivism. It is clear that some of the impacts of restorative justice are not amenable to quantitative in linear research. Perhaps some of its most important impacts in terms of restoring dignity and respect are not measurable in usual quantitative data.

The book stresses the importance of the facilitator. The facilitator must be neutral, sensitive, nonjudgmental, and willing to deal with profound human pain. There is controversy as to whether the facilitator should be professional or a community volunteer. The authors include thought on the advantages and disadvantages of both approaches.

The chapter on cultural sensitivity is excellent. It provides a very balanced understanding of the many issues involved in mediating in multicultural situations. The restorative justice movement, according to the authors, has seen an over representation of white, middle-class males. A white, middle-class male mediator is highly likely to be seen as a power figure by persons from other cultures. The restorative justice movement and individual mediators must address all of the issues involved in race, class, sexual orientation, religion, and other factors that divide communities. Mediators must understand cultural differences, especially when the victim and the wrongdoer are from very different cultures. The book provides examples of how mediation failed because mediators failed to prepare participants for culturally different ways of communicating.

The book is rich in detail and thorough in its presentation of research evidence. I believe it would be useful in social work curricula both in helping students understand the value and utility of restorative justice, and in explicating core social work values. Many of the techniques reviewed would be useful in social work practice outside restorative justice. I strongly recommend the book to those who seek a deeper understanding of restorative justice, as well as to those who seek to improve their abilities to work in conflictual situations. Much social work practice involves conflictual situations and situations in which persons have suffered severe harm, emotional and physical. Restorative justice techniques would be very helpful in many of the situations. I would also recommend the book to policy makers. It could help them understand why current approaches to social justice are ineffective.

I want to stress how thorough and well balanced this book is in presenting what we know and what we do not know about restorative justice. One can derive several ideas about how we should move forward in understanding the conditions under which this approach can be useful, and for whom the approach can be useful. I believe as restorative justice develops and refines its techniques and approaches, it will make significant contributions to stronger communities and our just treatment of both victims and wrongdoers.