

Reviewing the Little Book of Restorative Justice: No Small Task

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The purpose of *The Little Book of Restorative Justice for Colleges and Universities* is not to determine how to fit restorative justice ('RJ') practices into student conduct programming. The purpose of this book is to expose the reader to RJ practices, the theory behind RJ, and to offer examples of how institutions with different student populations have successfully implemented RJ programming into their student conduct scheme. The author offers three different types of RJ models: conferencing, circles, and boards. These are all explained in detail in separate chapters. The audience for this book is clearly student conduct administrators. A student conduct administrator, who is interested in exploring RJ principles, though, would only find the first six chapters useful. That is because the author attempts to fit such a large amount of information into such a small text (only 82 pages). One might find it difficult to really become invested in any of the RJ processes that the author outlined because only a snapshot of each process is given. Further, one likely would find the chapter-by-chapter discussion of how to start an RJ program short and slight.

The Little Book reads more like a short story, at some points, than a user guide or manual on the examination of RJ practices on campuses. Much of the content is anecdotal and the only empirical research explored is research recently conducted by the author. The two exemplary examples of how RJ is effective in chapters one and eight are extreme examples that are

intriguing, but maybe not the best examples for student conduct administrators who are reading the book looking for more depth. The author likens RJ to mediation and model conduct hearings to criminal court proceedings, but does not go further into how mediation has changed court processes or how restorative practices are used in the criminal system. To really strengthen the argument on how RJ practices could enhance an institution's student conduct practice, it would have been useful if the author went further in his comparison of mediation to RJ and the model conduct hearings to criminal court proceedings. A substantial amount of literature exists on RJ practices in criminal court systems, and examining it briefly would help student conduct administrators see the origins of RJ practices and the utility of it in the context of higher education.

The Little Book can be broken down into two distinct parts. Chapters two through six engage the reader into the many positives of restorative justice, and how different types of restorative justice models look and work on different campuses. The seventh chapter is a transition chapter, which is a two-page summary of the author's empirical work at eighteen institutions, analyzing the effectiveness of restorative justice programs against non-restorative justice programs. The first and eighth chapters are strong anecdotal chapters that are meant to set the reader up for the following section. The second part, starting with chapter nine, is a chapter-

by-chapter guide on how to start, implement, and effectively run a restorative justice program on the reader's campus.

The author initially tries to distance himself and restorative justice from, what he calls, model code hearings, which are the hearings that the overwhelming majority of higher education institutions use for cases of alleged student misconduct. The author has a section titled the "Limits to Restorative Approaches," which only seems to be the case when the alleged student is "neither moral nor rational" (Karp, 2013, pg. 19). A couple pages later, the author's table further illustrates a negative attitude towards model code hearings, as he labels them "more like criminal court" (Karp, 2013, pg. 22). The Association for Student Conduct Administrators, the leading national organization on student conduct, states in its Bylaws, that

[T]he development and enforcement of standards of conduct and resolution of conflict for students is an educational endeavor which fosters students' personal and social development. Students must assume a significant role in developing and enforcing such regulations in order that they might be better prepared for the responsibilities of citizenship (Association for Student Conduct Administrators, 2012, pg. 1).

From reading the Little Book, one might not guess that the preamble to student conduct administration would focus on students' personal and social development, as well as students assuming an active and significant role in developing and enforcing institutions' regulations. The author's stance, at least from my perspective, is that model student conduct hearings are not as useful on college campuses for many student conduct violations as RJ practices are. He likens the model code hearings to criminal court practices as the national organizations on student conduct administration attempt to also distance student processes from criminal court proceedings.

Interestingly, one of the requirements of restorative justice is that the student has admitted fault. When do students admit fault? Through conversations with student conduct administrators from universities around the country, I have learned that students often admit fault in the earliest stage of student disciplinary proceedings. This first stage is where the student meets with a student conduct administrator to have a conversation about the accusations, evidence, and any sanctions involved. This process is the final stage of the student conduct process for many students. If a student does not appeal the sanction resulting from the first stage of the process, the student will receive a warning or probation, participate in some sort of

awareness or training program, and/or possibly have to pay a fine.¹

So where does restorative justice fit? The author cites a number of institutions that have implemented restorative justice programs as part of larger, more comprehensive student conduct programs. In chapter nine, the author suggests implementing restorative justice programming for conduct issues that cause reparable harm. The problem here is that for restorative justice to work, the student must admit fault. Generally, students either admit fault right away at the first stage of the disciplinary process, or the students appeal their sanctions to some sort of hearing board to decide their fates.² How does RJ fit within this scheme? How often does a student who admits a serious crime admit fault early on enough in the process for an RJ approach to be useful and not too resource draining? These are a few questions left unanswered by the author.

Overall, The Little Book is a good, short read that offers insight into three broad categories of RJ practices. The Little Book uses just twenty-four pages of text to explain to the reader how to start and implement an RJ program on his or her campus, which is not enough. The use of extreme anecdotes and an abundance of quotes take away from the theoretical

¹ Here, I am referring to minor violations such as alcohol violations, which make up the majority of student misconduct. For more serious offenses, other sanctions likely will be involved.

² This process is a general process outlined in the Model Hearing Code, which can be found at www.cas.org or www.acpa.org.

foundations that the author attempts to build upon throughout the book. The Little Book's organization feels fragmented, and it would have been useful if the author sectioned out the book describing the purpose of each section. At five dollars, though, the book is an excellent beginner's guide to building an RJ program at any higher education institution.

References

Association for Student Conduct Administrators. (2012). Bylaws. Retrieved from <http://101712h.membershipsoftware.org/files/Governing%20Documents/ASCA%20Bylaws%20Final%2011-2012.pdf>.

Karp, D.K. (2013). *The Little Book of Restorative Justice for Colleges and Universities*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.