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## Review of The Little Book of Restorative Teaching Tools: Games, Activities, and Simulations for Understanding Restorative Justice Practices

Olivia Engling  
*UN Mandated University for Peace*, oengling@master.upeace.org

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***The Little Book of Restorative Teaching Tools: Games, Activities, and Simulations for Understanding Restorative Justice Practices.* Lindsey Pointer, Kathleen McGoey, and Haley Farrar. New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2020, paper, 126 pp., \$5.99, ISBN: 9781680995886.**

**Olivia Engling**  
**UN Mandated University for Peace**  
[oengling@master.upeace.org](mailto:oengling@master.upeace.org)

The use of games in restorative justice, while popular as ice breakers and fun community builders, can be so much more as described in *The Little Book of Restorative Teaching Tools*. This volume is a valuable addition to the “Little Books of Justice & Peacebuilding” series, providing practical guidance for increasing the transformative potential of games and activities, developing this tool in the box.

Pointer, McGoey, and Farrar recognize the important role of games and activities within restorative justice practices and education as a whole. They discuss how social institutions often perpetuate existing power structures, amplifying the voices of the already heard while marginalizing others. The restorative justice movement disrupts this hierarchy, providing a social space where each participant's voice, story, and perspective are equally valued, offering a potentially liberatory experience (p. 3). Games build upon this concept, intentionally creating spaces for all voices to be heard, lowering the obstacles for participation, and making people more comfortable sharing, which can lead to openness and insights otherwise unlikely to occur. The authors also identify two major obstacles to transformative teaching: an inadequate focus on trust and relationship building, as well as a lack of well-structured and intentional framework for dialogue. Games can help address both and “deliver the connected, courageous, honest, and empowering learning experience we need” (p. 2).

The book is divided into two main sections: the first provides a theoretical framework for incorporating games into a learning environment, while the second outlines practical guidance. The first chapter introduces notes on language, the authors’ backgrounds, purpose, and the blueprint going forward while the second addresses restorative pedagogy as a way of teaching that aligns with restorative thinking and values. In essence, a restorative worldview “sees humans as fundamentally relational beings, intricately connected to one another and to their environment” (p. 14). This means that how teachers think, behave, and present themselves matter, not just the content of the lesson, a prevailing theme throughout the volume.

The third chapter explores the important role of experiential learning in restorative teaching, of which games are a particularly valuable form. They are fun, less intimidating, and can help students take healthy risks, which can lead to engagement, community building, and a drive to learn. Experiential learning is touted as “encourag[ing] a more complete integration of what has been learned with the learner’s perception of self, thoughts, and actions moving forward” (p. 23). Chapter 4 centers on building a restorative learning community, including contributing philosophies like ubuntu and shalom. Interestingly and unexpectedly, it also briefly touches upon potential explanations as to why restorative approaches are transformative.

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Chapter 5 is about self-reflection and mentally preparing to teach as a facilitator. This section would be valuable for review again and again as it leads the reader through a critical self-reflection and provides tools to develop, which result in a thought-provoking evaluation of personal beliefs, areas of growth, and teaching practices. It is a great blend of explicit instructions for reflection activities and a discussion on values and ways of being as a facilitator. The chapter inspires thought about, commitment to, and growth of important traits like empathy, authenticity, vulnerability, and humor.

Chapters 6 and 7 provide instruction and practical guidance on how to design experiential activities and activity-based classes, respectively. Both provide useful recommendations on how to actualize all the ideas and conceptual frameworks that were discussed earlier in the book. The final chapter concludes with several in-depth descriptions of and instructions for games that can be implemented in a restorative classroom. These games are well-thought-out for a variety of purposes, including building relationships, helping learners understand restorative pedagogy, and developing skills like asking good questions, reframing, and generating creative ideas to repair harm. These games are ready to implement into a training or build upon as the situation requires!

The book is clear, understandable, and provides steps for easy implementation. The authors are obviously educators - restorative pedagogy reigns in this volume, in terms of content, organization, and writing style. They want the reader to understand and internalize all their points, so they thoughtfully and strategically lay out the plans for the chapters, weave a consistent narrative, building upon previous material, and highlight main ideas throughout, making this a book a reader can pick up and read cover-to-cover or easily reference while preparing for a training. It is also remarkably clear and covers a wide range of material for its short length, including pulling key concepts from seminal authors in the restorative justice field and beyond. It artfully weaves theory, advice for implementation, and examples from the authors' practice. Related anecdotes are shared throughout the volume, each chapter begins with a vignette introducing key concepts, and the final one provides several examples of games to play.

The authors understand that many readers may have discovered the restorative justice field through criminal justice reform. They thus place ideas like restorative pedagogy in context, explaining how the movement and more specifically their teachings have grown out of, but are distinct from, that classic understanding. Through addressing and relating to the criminal justice reform component of restorative justice, the authors build upon the readers' prior knowledge and assist them in orienting this book and its teachings within the broader "Little Books" universe and RJ movement. While positioning this knowledge, the book remains quite open. The authors' expansive and inclusive view of education means that the knowledge found within this book is easily adapted to different situations and can be utilized by people working in a variety of different contexts. It is not contained by or expecting any one type of restorative education, which will empower readers to apply their learnings more broadly and creatively.

Vulnerability is key to restorative approaches and there is plenty of guidance on how to build a "brave space" and hold students at the edge of their comfort zone, so they feel empowered to and are supported by an atmosphere where they can share, learn, and grow. This all flows from the facilitators, who are modeling vulnerability and reflection for the learners, a concept explored in the book and supported by thought-provoking prompts for the readers' own reflection and growth.

In a meta-version of education, the authors share their own limitations and mistakes, modeling vulnerability for the reader, so they can apply those principles to their own work. Despite the emphasis on the intra- and inter-personal, the volume doesn't shy away from the need for structural transformation, something that it mentions as a main critique of restorative justice, though it doesn't have the scope to fully explore structural reform.

The authors gracefully touch upon a wide variety of topics, providing a framework and background briefly but thoroughly. With a basic understanding of restorative justice, a reader can pick up this book and implement some of its suggestions and activities into their work. However, this book is even more valuable for practiced facilitators who can engage more deeply with the material, which can be utilized as a catalyst for reflection about both themselves and their class material, an introduction to new ideas and activities, and a process for continual growth and improvement of their teaching. Their ability to condense so much crucial information into just over a hundred pages is impressive. However, I believe the section describing education as a liberatory practice and how they view restorative pedagogy as diverging from the traditional paradigm of education would benefit from a bit more elucidation. Additionally, since this book serves as a short introduction to many different ideas, frameworks, and theories, suggested resources for further exploration would be useful, either at the end of each chapter or at the conclusion of the volume.

Finally, the authors position themselves and explicitly state their identities as white, cisgender, heterosexual women of US American nationality and that their restorative justice experiences primarily took place within relatively affluent, white communities (p. 7). This self-reflection is commendable, but it would have been wonderful if the authors had continued to explicitly address issues of identity, for example, having short sections about working with cross-cultural groups, sharing more incidents about how their identities impact their ability to do their work, and tips for relating with people who have different identities. Additionally, having a few vignettes, boxes, or short features written by restorative justice experts from different backgrounds, or even another coauthor, could help to address the limitations the authors noted and provide a different perspective.

This book is compelling, practical, and a quick read that can serve as both a handbook for implementing activities and a catalyst for deep reflection. It has a pointed focus which is best understood by those with a preliminary understanding of the restorative justice field as a whole but is valuable for any restorative practitioner or person who desires to be so.