



Social Psychology

Meanings about participation in a formation of restorative practices

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Abstract

Restorative Justice (JR) involves ethical, philosophical and political principles in understanding human conflicts in different contexts. Considering the importance and scarcity of studies related to the training processes of facilitators in restorative practices, the objective of this study was to understand the meanings produced about participation in these formations. Representatives of each social group enrolled in a training in restorative practices were interviewed. From the thematic analysis of the interviews, the analytical axes “for what,” “who” and “how” were created. The results showed that the participants had changes in the quality of listening, communication, and understanding of conflict and punishment. However, the participants were unsure of facilitating restorative circles, which demonstrates the need for more practical exercises. Building the group’s conversational context can help align expectations and decrease anxiety levels and dropout rates during the training process.

Keywords: restorative justice; restorative practices; social constructionism; training; dialogue facilitation.

SENTIDOS SOBRE A PARTICIPAÇÃO EM UMA CAPACITAÇÃO EM PRÁTICAS RESTAURATIVAS

Resumo

A Justiça Restaurativa (JR) envolve princípios éticos, filosóficos e políticos na compreensão dos conflitos humanos em diferentes contextos. Considerando a importância e escassez de estudos referentes a processos formativos de facilitadores em práticas restaurativas, o objetivo deste estudo foi compreender os sentidos produzidos sobre a participação nessas formações. Entrevistaram-se representantes de cada grupo social inscrito em uma capacitação de práticas restaurativas. A partir da análise temática das entrevistas, foram criados os eixos analíticos “para que”, “quem” e “como”. Os resultados mostraram que os participantes tiveram mudanças na qualidade da escuta, da comunicação e do entendimento de conflito e punição. Entretanto, os participantes se mostraram inseguros para facilitar os círculos restaurativos, o que demonstra a necessidade de mais exercícios práticos. Realizar a construção do contexto conversacional do grupo pode colaborar para alinhar expectativas e diminuir os níveis de ansiedade e taxa de abandono no decorrer do processo formativo.

Palavras-chave: Justiça Restaurativa; práticas restaurativas; construcionismo social; capacitação; facilitação de diálogos.

SENTIDOS SOBRE LA PARTICIPACIÓN EN UNA FORMACIÓN DE PRÁCTICAS RESTAURATIVAS

Resumen

La Justicia Restaurativa (JR) involucra principios éticos, filosóficos y políticos en la comprensión de los conflictos humanos en diferentes contextos. Teniendo en cuenta la importancia y la escasez de los estudios relacionados con los procesos de capacitación de los facilitadores en las prácticas restaurativas, el objetivo de este estudio fue comprender los sentidos producidos sobre la participación en estas formaciones. Se entrevistó a representantes de cada grupo social inscrito en una capacitación en prácticas restaurativas. A partir del análisis temático de las entrevistas, se crearon los ejes analíticos “para qué”, “quién” y “cómo”. Los resultados mostraron que los participantes tuvieron cambios en la calidad de la escucha, la comunicación y la comprensión del conflicto y el castigo. Sin embargo, los participantes no estaban seguros de facilitar los círculos restaurativos, lo que demuestra la necesidad de ejercicios más prácticos. Construir el contexto conversacional del grupo puede ayudar a alinear las expectativas y disminuir los niveles de ansiedad y las tasas de abandono durante el proceso de capacitación.

Palabras clave: justicia restaurativa; prácticas restaurativas; construccionismo social; capacitación; facilitación de diálogos.

1. Introduction

Restorative Justice (RJ) arose from different experiences, with different nomenclatures and contexts, which, despite the diversity of methodologies, have characteristics in common. The first more formal definition was proposed by Tony Marshall (1999, p. 5): “Restorative justice is a process whereby all the parties with a stake in a particular offense come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offense and its implications for the future.” This definition was adopted by the Resolution 12/2002 of the United Nations’ Economic and Social Council and, from this, several others were proposed. Therefore, RJ can be considered an open and fluid concept, as it has been a lot of changes since the first studies and experiences, so that it is not possible to establish a single definition (Palamolla, 2009).

The expansion of RJ in Brazil and abroad is strongly linked to the crisis of legitimacy of the penal system and to the crisis of the modalities of social regulation, such as the failure of public policies to contain violence, and the lack of efficiency and credibility of the judicial system (Sica, 2007), among other factors. It is from

this context that, in 2005, RJ began to have greater prominence and to spread throughout the country. In that year, the project Promoting Restorative Practices in the Brazilian Justice System was developed, and three national pilot projects were implemented in the cities of São Caetano do Sul, Porto Alegre and Brasília, with funding from the Judiciary Reform Department and the United Nations Development Program (Pallamolla, 2009; Penido, 2009 as cited in Salmaso, 2016). Restorative justice in the country gained even more prominence with the institution of Resolution 225 of the National Justice Council – *Conselho Nacional de Justiça* (CNJ) (2016), which, among several considerations, highlighted the importance of establishing flows and procedures that consider the community, institutional and social aspects that contribute to the emergence of the conflict phenomena and violence. This resolution also presented some of the guiding principles of RJ, including the repair of harm, co-responsibility, meeting the needs of all involved, and empowerment (CNJ, 2016).

In addition to the legal framework, RJ can be applied in different situations and contexts, such as in the resolution of conflicts in communities, schools and companies. This provides a wide use of restorative procedures. However, it can hinder attempts at delimitation or definition (Walgrave, 2008). For this reason, innumerable initiatives of its use have appeared and developed simultaneously in different places of the country, being reproduced in different projects of courts, schools, and communities.

The three RJ methodologies most widely recognized in different countries are family group conference, victim-offender mediation, and restorative circles (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001). These methodologies have specific characteristics in relation to the participants, the format, and the guiding questions of the process. In Brazil, one of the most widespread methodologies is that of restorative circles (Andrade, 2018). For Pallamolla (2009), the restorative circles' methodology is also known as community circles, sentencing circles or peacemaking circles, with them differing in relation to their purposes. Depending on the objective, people directly or indirectly involved in a conflict participate in the restoration circles, which may also include professionals related to public policies in a given location and community representatives. These circles may or may not be used to reach restorative agreements and include, as needed, preparatory meetings with the parties involved in the conflict and a post-circle restorative meeting to monitor the action plan outlined (Pallamolla, 2009).

Although the training process of restorative practice facilitators is one of the main phases to be analyzed in order to study the efficacy of its implementation, there is little scientific production on this topic. Only Gomes (2013), Boonen (2011), Vieira (2014), and Yabase (2015) focused on the training processes in RJ in their studies, the last three of which analyzed the same training course for facilitators, of the Center of Human Rights and Popular Education of Campo Limpo (*Centro de Direitos Humanos e Educação Popular de Campo Limpo* [CDHEP]). This training program used the basis of the Schools of Forgiveness and Reconciliation (ESPERE) methodology, which aims to reach the cognitive, emotional, behavioral and spiritual dimensions of the participants, so that they go through personal restorative experiences to understand their own conflicts and how they can be worked on through the philosophy of RJ, to subsequently facilitate conflicts. While Gomes (2013) analyzed his own experience in the training of socio-educators in detention centers, using peace circles as a methodology in order to mobilize displacements in the ideological perspective of the employees of these centers. Although the training process had not been completed, the author suggested that RJ could qualify socio-educational actions, improving the possibility and availability of listening and the approach to the youths.

Considering the lack of studies that address RJ training and, in line with research in the area indicating that the training process of facilitators of restorative practices is a fundamental moment for the success of its establishment, the aim of this study was to understand the meanings produced about participation in the training process for facilitating restorative practices, based on the discursive practices of its participants.

2. Method

2.1 Theoretical methodological design

This study is based on the social constructionist perspective (Spink, Brigagão, Nascimento & Cordeiro, 2014). For social constructionism, language is taken as a social practice and joint actions among people are understood as the locus for making meanings about the world (Souza, 2014).

The study of discursive practices is understood as a way of analyzing the making of meanings. The expression discursive practices is “used to demarcate and

distinguish the focus of interest of research directed toward the role of language in the social interaction” (Spink et al., 2014, p. 327). Here, meanings are understood as “a collective enterprise through which people, in the dynamics of historically dated and localized social relationships, construct the terms from which they comprehend and position themselves in everyday situations” (Spink et al., 2014, p. 329). Therefore, in this study, the meanings produced about the participation in the training process of facilitators of restorative practices in schools will be explored based on the terms used by the participants in the conversation regarding this participation.

2.2 Research context

This study was based on the analysis of a pilot project that aimed to promote RJ in a medium-sized city of the state of São Paulo, in 2015. This was proposed and coordinated by a team of professionals specialized in conflict mediation and legal-criminal sciences with a private foundation that financed the initiative. Through a partnership with the city council, four municipal schools were invited as the starting point for the proposal to disseminate RJ in the city. Training courses in RJ would first be provided in these schools, followed by the implementation and supervision of restorative circles. The participants were invited to take part in the project during awareness-raising lectures in each of the four schools and in the Brazilian Bar Association of the city. The school community was the target public of this project, including different social actors that could collaborate with the construction of flows from the needs that could arise in the meetings, as well as anyone who was interested in voluntarily carrying out restorative circles in schools.

The expected training period was one year, with six months of theoretical workshops and simulations of practices and six months of supervision and monitoring of the implementation of restorative circles in the schools. The theoretical part was carried out as planned. However, the training did not proceed to the second phase due to a lack of adherence by the participants, therefore, the coordination interrupted the project's continuity in this format.

The theoretical part of the training consisted of ten to 11 meetings of three hours duration in each of the four selected schools, over the course of six months, with pairs of coordinators. In one of the schools, there was little adherence, and for that reason, the project coordination decided to cancel their participation, redistributing the people who took part in one of the other schools. There was a

high fluctuation in the presence of the participants, in addition to the entry of new participants throughout the entire process.

The programmatic content was the same for all schools, addressing the principles and values of RJ, the differences between the retributive and restorative models and reflections on the concept of justice and conflict. The format of the meetings was inspired by Kay Pranis' circle process methodology (2010), particularly peacemaking circles, with the participants sitting in a circle, with objects and books in the center and using a "talking stick," which organizes the discourses and allows everyone to contribute something. In addition, the participants started and ended the meetings by sharing how they felt. The content also included elements of non-violent communication (NVC), the methodology used by Belinda Hopkins in schools, as well as theoretical elements from the book *Restorative justice (Justiça restaurativa)*, by Howard Zehr (2012).

All meetings started with a relaxation or warm-up activity that lasted from five to ten minutes and included an interval of up to 30 minutes.

2.3 Study participants

In this study, we proposed the reporting of meanings about the process of participation in the training through the use of semi-structured interviews. For these interviews, it was necessary to focus on the universe of the participants in the meetings in the four schools. Seeking to guarantee the representation of the diversity of opinions and social places occupied in the studied context, it was decided to randomly select one participant to represent each of the social groups that were enrolled in the training, namely: 1. a representative of the Judiciary; 2. a representative of the Public Ministry; 3. a public security agent; 4. a social welfare professional; 5. an education professional; 6. a health professional; 7. a member the Rights and Guardianship Council (*Conselho Tutelar*); 8. a member of the socio-educational probation team; 9. members of the school communities involved (a teacher, a principal, a mediator, a pedagogical coordinator, a student, and a family member); 10. a member of the local community surrounding the schools.

The only person related to public security that had attended the training did not agree to participate in the study. The family member that agreed to participate (mother) was also a member of the local community surrounding the school. No pedagogical coordinators took part in the training, and the only principal involved

left the school at the end of the school year, and it was not possible to contact her. All of the people linked to the Public Ministry only participated in the first meeting. However, it was considered important to conduct the interview with one of them to understand the meanings produced in relation to the withdrawal from the process. Therefore, a total of ten interviews were conducted.

2.4 Data production instrument and strategies

The construction of the interview script was inspired by some of the parameters mentioned by Melo, Ednir and Yazbek (2008) in their publication related to the project “Justice, Education, Community: partnerships for citizenship,” implemented in São Caetano do Sul, São Paulo, in 2005. This publication detailed the development and strategies used in the training and implementation of the project that was part of one of the pilots carried out in Brazil, with the participation of different social actors. Some of the parameters were related to the aspects of constructing referral flows, incorporating techniques for the work quotidian, and identifying forms of self-sustainability in maintaining and improving the knowledge acquired.

The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and two hours and were audio-recorded in Mp3 format. The researcher followed all the theoretical part of the training in one of the schools in order to contextualize the production of meanings of the participants in the interviews. These were carried out at the end of the theoretical part, when the coordinators decided that the project implementation phase would not occur.

2.5 Data analysis procedure

The corpus of analysis of this study was constituted by the complete transcription of the ten interviews, with the thematic analysis carried out on this material. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is understood as a self-contained method, independent of a theoretical approach, capable of providing useful analytical tools that show in detail the experiences, meanings, and reality of people, without losing the idea of their complexity. Aspects of the text were considered that captured something significant in relation to the aims of the study and that showed a certain response pattern of the participants or, by contrast, showed the uniqueness of some opinions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Accordingly, in each of the transcripts, we highlighted different themes based on the agreement of

at least two researchers regarding the coherence of these delimitations, understanding the necessary active attitude of the researcher in these choices, but seeking a certain consensus and intelligibility in the organization of the material. These themes were highlighted in each interview with different colors. Different word documents were then created for each of the selected topics, and the entire content of all interviews was distributed among these documents. In the end, this organization allowed us to view all the topics by interview and the entire content of all interviews by topic.

From the social constructionist literature on group processes, the themes were organized into three analytical axes: one axis was denominated the “for what” of the training, referring to the evaluation of the purposes of the training; another axis was called the “who,” referring to the assessment of the adherence to the group and the target audience of the training; and the other was named “how,” referring to the evaluation of the format and content of the process. The inspiration for naming these axes came from the social constructionist bibliography that thinks of group processes as social constructions and values reflection on these elements (for what, who, and how) as fundamental to the success of the group interventions (Rasera & Japur, 2007). This literature, together with the literature on RJ, served as the basis for discussing these axes.

2.6 Ethical aspects

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters of Ribeirão Preto. All the study participants signed a consent form. The coordinators of the pilot project gave their consent to the presence of the researcher in the observed meetings and the performance of the study. The identities of the participants were kept confidential, and all names were replaced with fictitious ones.

3. Results

3.1 The “for what” of the RJ training

The participants' reports highlighted different expectations that brought them to the training, from their different social places and their understandings about what this training would provide for them. Some understood that the aim of the training was to train professionals that would collaborate with the

implementation of the pilot project in the city, through a new model of justice. Accordingly, they sought to participate in this project to work from the professional locations where they already were. These participants showed frustration in their reports, as they hoped that, in addition to training to conduct restorative circles, the referral flows and the definition of roles would be clarified so that they could comprehend how they could articulate themselves in a conflict situation that arose from the school:

Valéria (teacher): So, at first, I found it interesting because there would be alternatives for us to try to work on the conflict issue in the classroom better, and that was my expectation. I thought that there would be a different way for us to be... differentiated, that I could use it in my practice as a teacher.

Lucília (mother of a student): I thought this course would be an opportunity to integrate the community within the school, this part frustrates me a little, because it is difficult to integrate [...]. But the course... made me learn a lot about how to cope, how to talk [...] I learned a lot, a lot, a lot, with all those texts, with all those videos of experiences. A lot. I learned a lot and it will serve me well.

The participants that did not know RJ and sought training only for this purpose had expectations that were covered as, in this process, they could find enough information to understand the theme, as stated by Luiza:

Luiza (member of the socio-educational service team): In my mind, I thought that Restorative Justice was a work that could, let's say, make some agreement, right, to restore. But I didn't imagine it the way I came to know it. So my expectation was to know, to get to know what was unknown to me.

3.2 The “who” of the RJ training

Some of the participants highlighted questions about the audience present in the training, as the case with Lucília, mother of a student, who believed that, for the continuity of the practices in the place, the presence of members of the school community was essential:

Lucília (mother of a student): When they put this project inside the school, I really thought that everyone would be there [coordinators, teachers, students, and family members] and people who were not from the community, who do not know the reality of the community itself were there. Only parents and students were there, and that's not the project's fault.

Other participants demonstrated confusion about the training proposal and what types of conflicts would be dealt with, which consequently generated doubts about who the expected public was and how the referral flows between schools, communities and public services would take place:

Renato (representative of the Judiciary): We ended up not going back to the other sessions, because we were not the target audience, the target audience looked like adolescents, children, family members, people from the school environment, there from everyday life.

Evalda (social welfare professional): Weren't they inviting the network? CRAS [Social Assistance Reference Center – Centro de Referência de Assistência Social], health, everything else? I thought it was going to be more integrated, you know? I thought it would be more integrated with the public services. Including the worst cases.

In addition to these, other participants also raised questions about the public and also the fluctuation in the presence of the participants during the training process:

Evalda (social welfare professional): So, for example, I was going to explain something, but I couldn't go too far because the students were there.

Maria (mediation Professional): There weren't always the same children, the same people, the school staff started to miss a lot. There was a class that had more people from outside the school than from the school.

Renato (representative of the Judiciary): So, then we got there, we saw a training that was not... it is not that it was not what we expected, we felt, Dr.

João and me, me mainly, that it was aimed at another audience. She wanted to integrate students, raise awareness among students and others in the school environment, the tutelary counselors who were there, parents etc., about what that proposal was, you know, to solve school conflicts in another way than the police report etc., and that she wanted to sensitize these students and show what that proposal was. But all in one, in a way of presenting that and in a way of working aimed at this audience, for children, for adolescents, for people who did not have the technical knowledge. And we thought it would have a slightly more technical view.

Being a representative of the judiciary and having been invited to participate in the training, Renato reported that he had hoped for training made up of professionals that also had technical training. When faced with a group made up of children and adolescents, parents of students, and the community, he did not understand how the training could reach all this audience in the same conversation. Therefore, he did not feel involved in the activities proposed, as these were carried out in a way that would serve the entire diverse audience present.

3.3 The “how” of the RJ training

In regard to making positive meanings about the training, many participants mentioned the qualification in their way of communicating, both in their personal and professional relationships:

Patrícia (member of the Rights and Guardianship Council): For me, what really stood out, what made me think a lot was non-violent communication. That way of stopping, thinking, reevaluating, thinking about what you are going to say, the way you are going to speak, it was more difficult for me, but... it was very relevant [...]. It made me think more on a daily basis, the way of speaking, the time when a person arrived with a story, of me not already attacking and speaking in a softer way, walking in the person's shoes, you know?

Valéria (teacher): Often in the classroom we say: “do” [in the sense of a command], but sometimes the person does not have that structure, that

autonomy [...]. We have to take another view [...] what is missing for this student? What does he need?

Artur (student): [...] Then something happened at home, that I sat and talked about it... I told my mother about the talking stick, so as not to speak over everyone...

Some participants reported effects on their lives related to a new understanding of conflict and the punitive culture, central themes for understanding the paradigm shift in Restorative Justice:

Lucília (mother of a student): As a member of the school board, I often made decisions against what the course teaches, because I did not know this method. Even so, it goes against the grain, being honest, participating in the transfer of a student [...] because it's very easy to get the rotten apple out of here and send him there, right?

Eugraci (professional of the Public Prosecutor's office): We look at the conflict only as something negative, it makes you stagnant, but if you look at it on the positive side, the transforming side of it, in which you propose to change, to see what you did that could be better, I think that is the point.

Patrícia (member of the Rights and Guardianship Council): What made the most difference to me was more the communication. I always had a hard time expressing myself, talking about what I really wanted... I talked, talked... I do this, you see, I talk, talk, talk... to stop a little and think "no, but wait a minute," and to stop, wait and think, what do I really want, what do I want to say.

Evalda (social welfare professional): The issue of the language... to think about the issue of non-violence. Taking away some of that punishment, punishment, punishment, thinking in a different way too, it helps, it helped a lot.

Regarding what the training left to be desired or what they would change in the process, some participants highlighted the need to change the format, duration and times, so that more teachers could participate, integrating this audience.

Maria and Evalda mentioned the importance of better aligning the project's implementation with the schools to ensure its success:

Maria (mediation professional): It can have a negative result if we are unable to involve the people of the school to show that it works.

Evalda (social welfare professional): Fundamental figures of the school were not present at all, the principal, teachers, there were very few, and they left all the time. The principal, for example, came and went. The vice principal was there a few times, there was only a history teacher, who was really cool...

Some participants detailed the insufficiency of the practical part and how it produced feelings of insecurity in facilitating restorative circles:

Maria (mediation professional): There was an opportunity to do a simulation, and it was a very precarious situation in which it was proposed, because it was the final meeting. It was done at the end of the period and with 15 minutes remaining, after the evaluation, including in writing, of the theoretical part.

Patrícia (member of the Rights and Guardianship Council): There was one simulation, it was good, but I think I needed more. The course was complete, but... I don't know if it was just me, but I felt insecure when making the circle.

Despite the reported difficulties throughout the training process, several elements used in the restorative circles were reported by the interviewed participants as important learning aspects. Among them: the talking stick, which organizes and gives voice to all the participants; the horizontality that enables the equal participation of all without favoring power relations; and the active listening, that is, being open and attentive to what others also have to share.

4. Discussion

It is possible to perceive, from the interviews carried out, different meanings produced about the “for what” of the RJ, not only in relation to the training studied, but also to the aims of its application in a certain place, ranging from promoting the principles and values of RJ in a community to articulating the most different levels of service, so that the practical implementation of these processes occurs throughout the entire city. These different meanings produced seem to be related to the difficulties in defining RJ. For Larrauri (2004), the lack of a single definition and the variety of its objectives can lead to the risk that there are practices that do not respect its original principles, producing negative evaluations of the model. Therefore, the absence of a consensus in its definition hinders the clarity of its aims and the lack of parameters for evaluating its results.

In addition, the meanings made in relation to the types of conflict, which also seems to us related to the nomenclature and idea of justice for each person, linked again to the understanding of RJ itself and what its scope is. Some participants understood that the aim of the training was the articulation of public services to resolve school conflicts, in order to avoid the judicialization of these problems. This seems to be related to the popular understanding that conflict resolution within the school contributes to non-judicialization, which can decrease the saturation of processes in this area and increase the channels of access to justice (Pranis, 2010). However, some authors comprehend the discourse of alleviating the justice system to be a myth (CNJ, 2018), in addition to the lack of consensus regarding the severity and type of conflicts that can be used, whether in criminal justice or outside it (Zehr, 2012).

Regarding the types of conflicts and the expansion of RJ to contexts other than legal ones, Hopkins (2004) highlights the importance of these practices also being developed in schools. She proposes the use of an approach in which the processes reach new levels as the complexity of conflicts increases, being necessary to involve a larger number of people in the resolution according to this complexity. The author suggests a continuity of restorative processes that begin with what she calls “restorative enquiry and discussion in challenging situations,” increasing to “mediation,” “victim/offender mediation,” “community conferences” and “problem-solving circles,” “restorative conferences” and “family group conferences.” To illustrate this understanding, Hopkins constructed a pyramid, in which the base consists of actions that construct a sense of community, the middle, informal

actions to resolve less serious conflicts, and the top, formal actions to resolve serious conflicts. The author also states that we must strengthen the base to reduce the need for practical intervention at the top of the pyramid.

Also, in relation to the “for what,” some participants saw this training as a free opportunity to learn techniques and tools, from recognized professionals in the area, that could be applied in their particular contexts. Training in this sense is not necessarily bad. However, it does make one think that the “what for” of these participants is different to that proposed by the project. This meant that some of these people did not necessarily have a commitment to the school in the implementation and self-management phase of this project as a goal, as their interests were related to other aspects.

Understanding the “for what” as a training program in RJ helps to clarify “who” should compose this group to achieve the proposed objectives. Some authors understand that, in order for restorative practices to be more effective in an environment, it is necessary that all people related to the place are sensitized by the work that will take place in that environment (Penido, 2009 as cited in Salmaso, 2016; Hopkins, 2004; Pranis, 2010). The methodology developed by Hopkins (2004), for example, invites all segments of the school community, that is, managers, students, support teams, and family members, to be trained in restorative practices. She understands that in this way everyone can be responsible for constructing a safe and fair coexistence, based on the values and principles of RJ.

Mumme and Penido (2014) also emphasized the need for people linked to the institutions to be trained so that they can actually take care of the transformation proposed by RJ in that environment, making sure that the structure and culture of the institution, often hierarchical and excluding, does not feedback the situation of conflict and violence and maintain the power relations in the institution. Pranis (2010), when promoting work in schools, proposed circles of interaction with the institution's employees prior to implementing preventive or conflicting circles with students, introducing restorative principles into the relationship among employees. The implementation, therefore, is transversal in the institution, so that all people involved with the environment can experience the restorative circle, aligning the understandings and practices resulting from a conflict that may arise.

Some authors emphasize the importance of articulating the network to support the restorative practices, as in the case of Mumme and Penido (2014), who

pointed out that the secondary support network in RJ is composed of the institutions that make up the rights guarantee system. These institutions can be represented by professionals, in order to support the action plans resulting from the restorative process.

In the case of the training process studied here, the training was carried out with the purpose of implementing the practices in the city. The diversity of the audience present seems to have produced confusion among the participants as to what the aim of the training was and who should participate in it. The lack of clarity about the “who” seems to have led the participants to question what their role as a municipal worker was and how the work to be developed in the school could be articulated with the city’s service network. Having a clear flow of procedures involving restorative care is a basic condition for the application of RJ (Melo et al., 2008). However, up to the end of the training, these aspects had not become apparent.

Regarding the making of positive meanings about the “how” of the training, the participants highlighted some content and techniques learned, in addition to changes in the way of thinking about aspects related to violence and conflict. The process analyzed by this study, as well as other training programs and practices developed in Brazil, used Howard Zehr’s work as the predominant theoretical reference (with the release of the book *Changing lenses*, 2008), and as methodological reference the studies of Kay Pranis (peacemaking circles) and Dominic Barter (who collaborated with the dissemination of non-violent communication in the country) as methodological references (Andrade, 2018).

The training process researched was mainly inspired by the methodology developed by Kay Pranis. The coordinators proposed the establishment of agreements among the training participants, similar to what the author proposes as the construction of values and guidelines in a peacemaking circle (Pranis, 2010), that is, demonstrating a practice of the restorative circle in the group process itself. However, the combinations established at that time did not necessarily work and were not taken up in depth during the process. Furthermore, no preparatory conversation, with the aim of aligning expectations, was held, which seems to have contributed to the confusion and questions reported by the participants.

When considering the group as a social construction, as Rasera and Japur (2007) do, we understand that the reality of a group is given by the way we describe it. In this sense, there is a continuous negotiation of meanings in relation to what we say and how we speak. These negotiations are exercises of tension among

perspectives and differences, with the creation and restriction of possibilities. Some social constructionist authors propose that, at the beginning of a group practice, through a meta-conversation, the group should talk about the group itself, in a technique called “construction of the conversational context.” In other words, the group begins by inviting all participants to talk about how they want to construct themselves as a group, which includes negotiating differences between the participants and coordinators. This allows an alignment of ideas, therefore, the “for what,” “who” and “how” can be negotiated at that moment, this being an instrument that can help to construct good training.

To collaborate in constructing a common understanding, questions such as “why did you choose to participate in this training?,” “What do you expect to happen during the training?,” and “How do you think you and the group can contribute to this?” are possibilities for constructing groups (Rasera & Japur, 2007) and can be adapted for training in RJ. Other questions that may be useful to anticipate what may cause these people to lose interest in continuing the training and/or participating in the implementation phase of the practice is to ask about what could happen that might incite the person to discontinue the process and how new people could be included in the group.

Also, in relation to the group composition, it is suggested that different teaching strategies could be used for different audiences, reflecting on the flexibility of the group to be formed and the need to maintain the presence of the same people from the beginning to the end of the process. In other words, we suggest the possibility that different formats can be developed with different target audiences, considering when it might be useful to bring them together.

The “how” of a formative process is constructed from the “for what” and the “who.” It is necessary for the aims and target audience of the training to be aligned, considering the program content, activities, and format. There is a lack of literature that details the “how” of RJ training, as there is a valorization, consistent with the philosophy of RJ, of it being a co-constructed space that takes into account each context, so that relevant and appropriate procedures are adopted taking into account the circumstances of the location. At the same time, as stated by Zehr (2012), the planning and contents of RJ programs need to consider the guiding principles, in order to keep the origin and philosophy of these practices aligned.

There is no regulation of how the training should take place in relation to the duration, workload, and format. A study conducted by the CNJ (2018) discussed what they call the “myth of instant training,” criticizing the view that a single, instant training is enough to prepare facilitators. For the researchers, continuing education is required, supported by interdisciplinary courses, with permanent self-assessment and monitoring. Andrade (2018), reflecting on the RJ programs developed in the country, suggested that the priority of the programs seems to be making, implementing, applying, training, radiating and multiplying, instead of conceptualizing and elaborating, which demonstrate a deficit in the theoretical development of the field and, consequently, lead to short training sessions with little depth.

All the study participants expressed meanings of insecurity regarding the performance of the restorative process, from the preparatory dialogues to the monitoring of the action plan. The lack of simulations prevented practicing what was theoretically learned. However, considering one of the methodological references used in this training, some circular processes are thought to be less complex than a restorative circle directed toward transforming a conflict, such as celebration circles, learning circles, and community-building circles (Pranis, 2010).

It seems that the participants in this study acquired important skills for some of these processes. These types of circles fulfill a preventive “for what,” but are not necessarily sufficient for conflict resolution. However, these different possibilities were not clear, and the lack of a practical part in the training seems to have led to the participants not developing the confidence to conduct more complex circles. The expressed meanings suggest that the participants were more involved with the position of learning about the possibilities of RJ than with that of preparation to become facilitators of restorative circles. A training program that allows experimentation of the practice, in addition to more in-depth reflections on real cases with examples of successful processes and complicated or even flawed processes, could help to form critical facilitators.

It should be highlighted that the training studied was part of a pilot project and, therefore, had an experimental character, with successes and errors. The different ways of conceptualizing the RJ, the different existing methodologies, understandings about restorative practices and their modes of practical application, and understandings about Justice ran through the making of meanings about the

RJ training researched here. In other words, some of the confusion perceived in this training seems to be a reflection of how JR has been disseminated in Brazil.

It is necessary to recognize the limits related to decision-making that involve material, organizational and institutional issues, taking into account the complexity of the broader power relationships that may encompass the implementation of RJ in a city. Considering that the participants' adherence process is constructed even before the meetings take place, this training showed that joint decisions with financiers and institutions related to the process influence the success of the training. In addition, training that has the intention of preparing professionals in restorative practices and implementing those practices in a given institution needs to take into account strategies for the adherence and engagement of the managers of that institution.

This work suggests that the process of training restorative practice facilitators is a moment of fundamental importance for the successful settlement of RJ, and for this reason, further studies must be carried out to produce critical assessments.

Considering the limits of this study, the importance of studies that accompany complete training programs can be highlighted, including training that contemplates the phase of practical implementation. We expect that this study can contribute to critical reflections on the construction of new training processes, reflecting on formations that are coherent and committed to the paradigm and social transformation proposed by RJ.

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