

Book review:

Restorative Justice Today – Practical Applications

Katherine S. van Wormer and Loren Walker
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The professor of Social Work Katherine van Wormer from the University of Northern Iowa and the lecturer and restorative justice practitioner Lorenn Walker from Hawaii Honolulu Community College has edited a collection of essays on practical applications of restorative justice. The book has a preface written by Shodd Maruna director Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice School of Law at Queens University of Belfast. In her preface she emphasize the long history of the restorative justice movement and that the radical hopes and dreams of the beginning of the restorative movement has faced reality and is now a force with limitations and shortcomings, yet a force which is still very much real. Maruna herself is uniquely positioned to give such an evaluation working in the conflict torn Belfast.

The collection of new empirical and theoretical essays in the book is collected by two of the most interesting thinkers, doers and well connected members of the restorative justice movement. They have background from a great variety of fields ranging from anthropology, , communication, correctional services, criminology, development studies, law, policy studies, social studies, social work and development studies. The diversity of the contributors illustrates the multi disciplinary character of the restorative justice field.

The contributors come from Australia, Canada, Greece, Hong Kong, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway and USA (Arizona, California, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Ohio, Vermont, and Wyoming). Even if most of the contributions are from the USA the diversity of states and perspectives represented gives examples of practices from very different perspectives and under legal systems with great differences. Minority perspectives, the situation of native groups and immigrants have been covered and one of the chapters gives insights into community restoration reconciliation in a number of African countries.

The chapter covering Africa reminds us of the far different situation that many countries in Africa, Asia and South America face compared to the better off and economically developed part of the world. At the same time the chapter is a reminder that we on the human level face the same challenges and can learn important lessons reconciliation processes in Rwanda, South Africa, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe.

Several of the chapters include references to literature and critical thinking questions making the book well adapted to scholarly studies and students within a range variety of fields from anthropology, criminology, law, social work and restorative justice. The book includes a well developed index and appendix of important resources ranging from addresses to knowledge bases to websites and films on restorative justice.

Many of the challenges of restorative justice consist of how to handle minor crimes and disturbances conducted by juveniles in local communities. Such crimes are easy to ignore in a world of large numbers of more serious crimes and sentences. Still, we all know that what starts as minor criminality might develop into a career of more serious criminality. Thus, restorative justice and the development of well developed reaction system is of crucial importance in order to avoid more serious criminality. The book gives good examples both of practice and law meeting that challenge.

However, the book also covers a number of other cases involving adults and serious crimes. One example is the serious crimes of ethnic and racial conflicts and another child sexual

abuse by clergy and the restorative justice option. In the case of the latter traditional justice processes has proved to do very little for victims as long as offenders can deny that they have done anything wrong. Thus restorative justice can, as pointed out by professor Theo Gavrielides ,open a window for those who have offended to admit what they have done wrong. In fact restorative justice might in such cases prove to be the only option for the legal system

We miss more perspectives and challenges from outside of the western world and do hope that another book will give us such insights. Still, even with that limitation, the book is a valuable contribution to the development both of restorative justice and legal thinking

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