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When Physical Interaction Becomes Dialogue: Rethinking Communication, Participation, and Community Restoration in Restorative Justice through Japan's *WIND BREAKER*

ABSTRACT

Restorative justice (RJ) places considerable emphasis on dialogue. Yet when dialogue is understood primarily as spoken exchange, the potential of the body as a medium of expression, response, and understanding can be overlooked. Taking the Japanese work WIND BREAKER, first serialized in 2021, as a cultural text, this article examines how bodily confrontation functions in place of spoken dialogue, enabling emotions, lived experiences, and needs for recognition that are difficult to articulate to become intelligible through physical encounters and reciprocal responses. It argues that when the understanding emerging from these encounters receives support from the groups concerned and develops into accountability, the rebuilding of relationships, and the renewal of communal life, the narrative's restorative orientation aligns substantially with RJ's emphasis on community participation and reintegration. Community is understood here both as a network of relationships affected by conflict and as an active participant in witnessing change, supporting acceptance, and sustaining restoration. To extend this argument, the article draws on sign language to demonstrate that dialogue does not require speech and considers international accounts of persons with disabilities participating in restorative processes. These accounts inform an examination of the potential of augmentative and alternative communication tools and artificial intelligence to support autonomous expression. Grounded in conceptual textual interpretation and a discussion of relevant literature, the article neither treats bodily confrontation as evidence of restorative effectiveness in practice nor advocates adopting fighting as an RJ intervention. Whether bodily interaction has restorative significance depends on voluntary and safe participation, opportunities to verify intended meanings, meaningful responses to harm, and the acceptance of responsibility. Group acceptance cannot substitute for the individual wishes of those affected. By examining the narrative substitution of bodily confrontation for spoken dialogue, the article reconsiders the conceptual boundaries of dialogue in RJ and proposes directions for research into how multiple modes of communication can support understanding, relational restoration, and community integration.

KEYWORDS

Restorative Justice; Bodily Interaction; Dialogue; Communication Accessibility; Community Restoration

I. BACKGROUND

Restorative justice (RJ) processes encompass elements such as truth-telling, face-to-face encounters, the protection of rights, agreements and outcomes, and evaluation [1]. Dialogue lies at the heart of these processes. It enables the parties and communities involved to articulate their needs and experiences of harm, understand the effects of the conduct in question, and jointly explore responsibility, reparation, and the restoration of relationships. Dialogue, however, is often conceived as a spoken exchange: participants sit in a circle, share their experiences, listen, and respond verbally. This familiar setting invites further reflection. Must dialogue depend on speech, or be confined to it? Can bodily movement serve the functions of expression and understanding? How can RJ ensure meaningful participation when individuals are reluctant to speak out of shyness or are unable to do so because of speech or language difficulties?

The Japanese manga *WIND BREAKER* offers a starting point for reconsidering these questions. Created by Satoru Nii（にいさとる）, the work began serialization on Kodansha's *Magazine Pocket* platform on January 13, 2021[2]. Drawing inspiration from its portrayal of bodily interaction, this study brings sign language, the participation of persons with disabilities, and international practice into the discussion to explore multiple forms of dialogue and their implications for group acceptance and community restoration.

II. FROM BODILY CONFRONTATION TO UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

WIND BREAKER follows Sakura Haruka（さくら はるか）, a high school student who initially seeks to reach the top of Furin High School through his fighting prowess. He discovers, however, that its students have formed Bofurin（ボウフウリン）, an organization dedicated to protecting the town and its residents. As Sakura develops relationships with his peers, local residents, and adversaries, strength becomes increasingly associated with protection, trust, and responsibility.

[1] Chuen-Jim Sheu (2022). Humanistic Criminology, San Min Book Co., Ltd.,531–532.
[2] Wind Breaker(a), available at: https://pocket.shonenmagazine.com/title/01310/episode/316131, visited on: Oct.30,2026.

Through these relationships, he also begins to redefine and regain his sense of self-worth[3].

In the narrative examined here, fighting also serves a communicative function. Characters bring into their confrontations feelings of loneliness, frustration, deeply held attachments, and a desire for recognition that they struggle to articulate directly. Through their responses to one another, they begin to perceive each other's inner conflicts and circumstances. Bodily interaction thus becomes an entry point to understanding, offering an alternative means of creating the conditions for subsequent conversation, reflection, and relational change. Such understanding does not necessarily entail agreement or forgiveness. Rather, it begins with a shift in how the other is perceived: an opponent to be defeated gradually comes to be recognized as a person with experiences, needs, and vulnerabilities. This shift resonates with the concerns of restorative justice, which offers those involved an opportunity to move beyond established labels, understand what an incident means to one another, and confront the harm caused by their actions. The work's contribution here is conceptual. Character development, bodily movement, speech, and recollection are interwoven to foster understanding, offering an expanded interpretation of how dialogue may be enacted in restorative justice.

III. FROM GROUP ACCEPTANCE TO COMMUNITY RESTORATION

The restorative significance of the work can also be understood through its portrayal of group and community relationships. Following some conflicts, previously antagonistic characters and groups begin to converse, share meals, and establish new connections. These narrative developments extend understanding beyond an individual's internal transformation, making it part of a relational change that others can witness and support. This article interprets this process as a narrative representation of community restoration. Community here encompasses both the town's residents and the characters' peer groups, together with their interwoven networks of relationships. Conflict affects not only individuals but also trust, feelings of safety, and a sense of belonging within these groups. When the members concerned acknowledge changes in relationships and are willing to accept former adversaries, understanding may contribute to the rebuilding of communal life.

This process aligns with RJ's emphasis on community participation, accountability, and reintegration. Restorative processes can foster the restoration of damaged relationships and renew opportunities for those

[3] Wind Breaker(b), available at: https://windbreaker-anime.com/, visited on: Oct.30,2026.

involved to participate in community life. They can also support victims' recovery and the reintegration of those who have caused harm, while reducing stigma and strengthening community engagement[4]. Viewed in this light, the progression in the work from bodily confrontation to understanding, and from understanding to group acceptance, reflects a restorative orientation consistent with that of RJ. Bodily interaction may initiate communication, while the recognition, accountability, and acceptance that follow give this process broader significance for the community. Nevertheless, residents' approval of Bofurin's protective role cannot be equated with approval of every instance or form of fighting. Nor does a group's acceptance of a conflict's resolution necessarily mean that everyone affected has voluntarily accepted the outcome. Assessing the extent to which this process aligns with RJ principles therefore requires attention to whether harm is acknowledged, needs are addressed, and dissent and refusal remain possible. Community restoration should not require either party to accept an agreement for the sake of maintaining group harmony.

IV. HOW BODILY INTERACTION CAN FUNCTION AS DIALOGUE

Conventional, speech-centered restorative processes tend to expect all parties to articulate their experiences verbally. Sign language, however, offers a direct starting point for reconsidering this expectation. Through hand movements, facial expressions, and body positioning, people can express experiences, ask questions, and negotiate meaning, demonstrating that dialogue does not require sound. Sign languages nevertheless possess fully developed linguistic structures and should not be reduced to ordinary gestures or bodily expressions of emotion. Accordingly, "non-spoken" communication, as used in this article, refers to communication that does not depend on speech; it does not necessarily mean non-linguistic communication. Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) explicitly includes signed languages within its definition of language and recognizes communication through text, tactile modes, and augmentative and alternative means[5]. This distinction allows the forms of dialogue to be

[4] Törzs, E., & Hein, L. (2022). UN model strategies on reducing reoffending: Input on the potential role of restorative justice in reducing reoffending. European Forum for Restorative Justice, available at:https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/ReducingReoffending/European_Forum_for_Restorative_Justice_-_UN_model_strategies_on_reducing_reoffending_contribution_on_restorative_justice_by_EFRJ.pdf, visited on: Oct.31,2026.

[5] "Communication" includes languages, display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as written, audio, plain-language, human-reader and augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of

differentiated from its functions: spoken and signed languages constitute different linguistic forms, while expression, response, clarification, and the revision of understanding are functions that dialogue can serve.

Although sign language supports the proposition that dialogue need not rely on sound, whether bodily activity more broadly has a dialogic quality depends on how meaning is constituted through interaction. Participants might, for example, voluntarily convey their feelings through posture, interpersonal distance, or dramatic enactment, with the other party then responding by explaining their understanding. The person expressing those feelings must have an opportunity to confirm, revise, or reject that interpretation. Silence cannot automatically be taken as consent, nor does a handshake necessarily signify forgiveness. Facilitators should support mutual understanding rather than assign meanings to bodily actions on participants' behalf, thereby reducing the risk of misinterpretation.

V. INSIGHTS FROM INTERNATIONAL RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

International RJ practices have already accommodated diverse communication needs, reflecting the principle that accessibility barriers should not prevent anyone from participating in Restorative Justice. In 2024, Restorative Justice Merseyside in the United Kingdom described how its service team adapted the process for a Deaf participant who preferred email correspondence and required a sign language interpreter during meetings[6]. This account provides direct evidence that written communication and sign language have been incorporated into RJ practice. Although it does not provide a comprehensive account of the case or its outcomes, it demonstrates that these modes of communication can form part of restorative services.

The Restorative Justice Council in the United Kingdom also published a case involving an autistic adult. Taking the participant's communication needs into account, the facilitator prepared illustrated materials explaining the process, ground rules, and arrangements for

communication, including accessible information and communication technology; "Language" includes spoken and signed languages and other forms of non-spoken languages. United Nations. (2006). Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, available at: https://static.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/convtexte.htm, visited on: Oct.31,2026.

[6] Restorative Justice Merseyside (2024). Making Restorative Justice Accessible, available at:https://www.rjmerseyside.org.uk/news/making-restorative-justice-accessible, visited on: Oct.31,2026.

participation, together with appropriately tailored questions[7]. Because the participant could communicate through speech, this was not an entirely non-spoken process. Its significance lies in demonstrating how visual supports and advance preparation can reduce communication barriers. Appropriate adjustments can therefore help remove obstacles to understanding the procedure and provide support for participation in dialogue. Similarly, in the United States, Ramirez-Stapleton and Duarte (2021) used a personal narrative approach to examine how a hearing faculty member and a Deaf+ student drew on restorative practices to address difficult classroom experiences together[8]. By bringing disability and educational power relations into the discussion, the study illustrates the potential application of restorative practices to harms arising in these contexts. It also reminds us that barriers to participation may stem from institutional arrangements and others' limited understanding of the person concerned.

These sources, which include service accounts, case narratives, and personal narrative research, do not establish effectiveness across contexts. Nevertheless, they collectively support a practical approach: identifying participants' communication needs first and then adapting the arrangements for their participation, rather than treating the conventional spoken meeting as the only available option.

VI. PROCEDURAL RESPONSES WHEN SPEECH IS UNAVAILABLE

1. The Technological Development of Communication Aids

Being unable to hear, being unable to speak, and being unable to understand are distinct circumstances. It should not be assumed that all people who are Deaf or unable to speak use sign language, nor should an inability to communicate through speech be equated with an unwillingness to participate or an inability to make decisions. The process should begin by identifying participants' customary modes of communication, their needs in understanding information, and the support they require. Possible arrangements within restorative processes include sign language interpretation, real-time captioning, written exchanges, easy-read information, picture communication boards, and

[7] Jones, C. (n.d.). Case study - I didn't feel like myself, I felt out of control. Restorative Justice Council, available at:https://restorativejustice.org.uk/resources/case-study-i-didn%E2%80%99t-feel-myself-i-felt-out-control, visited on: Oct.31,2026.

[8] Ramirez-Stapleton, L. D., & Duarte, D. L. (2021). When you think you know: Restorative justice between a hearing faculty member and a Deaf+ student. New Directions for Student Services, 2021(173), 11–26. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20374Digital Object Identifier.

speech-generating devices. For individuals with limited hand movement, alternative access methods, such as eye-gaze input, may also be considered. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) offers a range of options consistent with the aim of "Making effective communication, a human right, accessible and achievable for all." The selection of these options must nevertheless reflect each individual's abilities, needs, and preferences[9]. These communication aids have an established professional foundation. As AI technologies develop, their integration into RJ processes is likely to become an increasingly important area of practice and research.

2. Applications of AI

Building on these developments, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into communication support tools may broaden the possibilities for communication and participation in restorative justice. Future applications could combine AI with real-time captioning, speech synthesis, the conversion of complex text into easy-read formats, and AAC systems. Such applications could help participants understand the process and express their experiences of harm, needs, and expectations for restoration in ways suited to them. For example, converting complex procedural explanations into more accessible text, or helping participants who use communication boards and eye-gaze devices organize their messages, may lower barriers to dialogue. Restorative dialogue, however, involves emotions, relationships, and responsibility. AI-generated content must therefore be confirmed by the participant concerned. Meanings inferred by a system must not be treated as expressions of that person's wishes, nor should remorse, consent, or forgiveness be inferred solely from facial expressions or bodily movements. These applications require evaluation of their accuracy, privacy protections, and implications for participants' autonomy, while retaining the support of professional interpreters and facilitators. The central value of integrating AI into restorative justice thus lies in expanding opportunities for autonomous expression and mutual understanding. Technology can serve as a medium that supports dialogue, creating more inclusive conditions for accountability, relational restoration, and community integration.

3. Complementary Support for Participation

Support extends beyond the provision of tools. Participants need sufficient time to respond, opportunities to take breaks, and space to

[9] American Speech-Language-Hearing Association(ASHA) (2026). Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC),available at: https://www.asha.org/Practice-Portal/Professional-Issues/Augmentative-and-Alternative-Communication, visited on: Oct.31,2026.

clarify or correct interpretations of what they communicate. Interpreters, family members, and support persons can assist, but they should not speak in place of participants or substitute their own views for those of the individuals concerned. Facilitators must continue to check understanding directly with participants and ensure that they can ask questions, express disagreement, and request a pause or withdraw from the process. Maitland's (2019) theoretical analysis of interpreting and RJ likewise draws attention to how meaning is conveyed and how communication arrangements affect participation and power[10]. If the available support remains insufficient to establish participants' wishes reliably, the process should be adjusted and, where necessary, the meeting postponed. Unsuccessful communication should not be interpreted as a refusal to engage in a restorative process, nor should others presume consent on a participant's behalf. The equal participation pursued by restorative justice requires that individuals participate voluntarily, genuinely understand what is taking place, and have a meaningful opportunity to influence both the dialogue and its outcomes.

VII. CONCLUSION

1. Preserving the Core Elements of Restorative Justice

The value of diverse forms of communication must ultimately be assessed in relation to harm and responsibility. Even when the parties and the community have visibly resumed shared activities or developed closer relationships, this does not necessarily mean that the underlying harm has been addressed. The process must continue to ask: Who has been affected? Which needs remain unmet? What responsibilities are those who caused harm willing to assume? Bodily activities must likewise adhere to the principles of voluntary participation, safety, and sensitivity to power imbalances[11]. Participants should not be required to demonstrate their willingness to engage in a restorative process through physical contact, cooperation, or gestures of goodwill. Although the bodily confrontations portrayed in the work may broaden our understanding of communication, they cannot serve as a direct justification for arranging fights between participants in practice.

[10] Maitland, S. (2019). Does interpreting 'steal' conflict? A translational perspective on power and restorative justice. Translation & Interpreting, 11(1),22-42, available at: https://www.trans-int.org/index.php/transint/article/view/662, visited on: Oct.31,2026. DOI:10.12807/ti.111201.2019.a02.

[11] UN. Economic and Social Council (2002). Basic principles on the use of restorative justice programmes in criminal matters (E/RES/2002/12), available at: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/475864, visited on: Oct.31,2026.

2. Insights from WIND BREAKER

The mutual understanding, group acceptance, and interpersonal reconnection portrayed in *WIND BREAKER* align substantially with the core ethos of RJ in their orientation toward restoring relationships. This alignment extends beyond understanding between individuals to encompass how a community acknowledges change, supports accountability, and enables previously antagonistic groups to regain opportunities for participation or participate on new terms. The work invites us to consider how restoration may begin through bodily interaction and acquire meaning within broader networks of social connection.

3. Options for Supporting Dialogue

The discussion of sign language and the participation of persons with disabilities translates this reflection into considerations for procedural design. Communities seeking to support restoration must also recognize their members' diverse modes of expression and provide appropriate conditions for communication. The value of restorative dialogue should be assessed by whether it enables harm to be addressed, supports meaningful participation, and improves the relationships through which people live together. Ensuring that everyone has opportunities to express themselves, respond, refuse, and negotiate gives concrete expression to the restorative ethos in communicative practice.

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