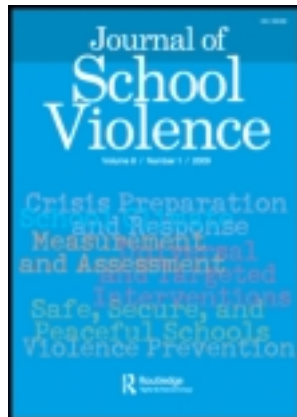


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### Restorative Justice: Pedagogy, Praxis, and Discipline

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## **Restorative Justice: Pedagogy, Praxis, and Discipline**

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*In the ongoing effort of designing school contexts in support of proactive discipline, a range of practices and theoretical frameworks have been advanced, from behaviorist approaches to social and emotional learning. This article describes the theory and practice of restorative justice with the aim of defining this distinctive paradigm, in comparison to other forms of discipline, as one that uniquely emphasizes social engagement over social control. In so doing, a responsive regulatory framework supports pedagogy, praxis, and discipline such that relational school cultures are nurtured; wherein, behavior is understood in social context, individuals are recognized as being part of a social web of relations, and building, maintaining, and repairing relationships become priorities. This focus on developing rich and embedded relational ecologies finds its strength through nurturing motivational bonds of belonging that support individual development and social responsibility. This is distinct from formal institutional responses that rely on systems of institutional sanctions to leverage compliance.*

**KEYWORDS** *restorative justice, school discipline, social engagement, social responsibility, motivation, responsive regulation, relational ecologies*

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Violence is most often framed and regulated in moral and legal terms, asking: How evil is this action, and how much punishment does it deserve? (Gilligan, 2001; Zehr, 2002a). This response to violence has intensified and become the normative paradigm for a wide variety of disruptive incidents across a range of institutions, including schools (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Employing finely tuned, prescribed levels of punishment for a range of harmful incidents has resulted in little understanding of the root causes of the harmful behaviors, and their far-reaching effects.

In the context of schools, this punitive regulatory framework has been employed in the form of exclusionary practices (e.g., office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions) for decades (Children's Defense Fund, 1975) but has escalated through zero tolerance policies implemented by local, state, and federal levels of regulatory bodies in the United States. In particular, school shootings and the events of 9/11 led to significant policy development that ramped up the use of exclusion in schools. In making no mention of preventative programming, the U.S. Gun Free School Zones Act (Gregory & Cornell, 2009), encouraged the growth of school discipline codes that prescribed the use of suspensions and expulsions as the primary way to maintain orderly schools. As a result, zero tolerance became the *de facto* policy for dealing with school discipline in the United States (Blumenson & Nilson, 2002; Gregory & Cornell, 2009; Gregory et al., 2010). Though evidence indicates clearly the ineffectiveness and damaging impact of these exclusionary practices (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Gregory & Cornell, 2009; Martinez, 2009), they continue to be used in many schools—at all levels and to varying degrees—as a means for social control (Gregory et al., 2010).

Alternatively, a restorative justice (RJ) framework, grounded in relational pedagogy, praxis, and discipline, employs a responsive regulatory approach that identifies social engagement as the key element for creating rich motivational ecologies that nurture bonds of belonging. Using this framework, violence (and other behaviors having negative results) is considered in the context of understanding what happened, listening to the needs of those who have been most affected, and responding to the harm done (Zehr, 2002b). This article details RJ as a means for developing relational, engaged institutional cultures, which early research indicates as a promising praxis for safe and caring schools.

## WHAT IS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE?

Restorative justice is best understood as a distinct praxis for sustaining safe and just school communities, grounded in the premise that human beings are relational and thrive in contexts of social engagement over control (Morrison, 2011; Pranis, 2007). This foundation supports three broad

leverage points that allow for improved relational interaction in general and more specifically when injustice/harm occurs. Rather than focusing on external sanctioning systems (rewards and punishment) as a motivational lever, RJ focuses on the motivational lever of relational ecologies, embedded in the value base of internal sanctioning systems. Thus, the power dynamics of institutional cultures are reversed, rather than relying on the “hard” power of the institution as a motivational lever, the “soft” power of relational ecologies affords the power of influence. Traditionally, institutions maintain their power base by investigating what law and/or code of conduct has been broken, who did it, and what punishment is deserved. Relational ecologies examine what happened, who has been affected and their needs, and how to repair the harm done to the extent possible (Zehr, 2002b). The process necessarily includes those closest to the harm and those closest to the community affected. This is distinct to current institutional practice, wherein the decision-making is often left to third parties; typically, the problem, and the person, is sent down the hall, away from the relational dynamics in which the problem arose. This process robs students of a rich opportunity for collective problem solving, learning, and growth. Instead they learn that other “people of power” solve problems. In the context of courts, the justice system has been characterized as stealing conflict from those most affected (Christie, 1977). A key component of RJ is emotional engagement, such that there is reason for emotion. This contrasts with the suppression of emotion, that typifies courts and schools (Morrison, 2007; Sherman, 2003). The aim is to build positive affect (empathy, interest, and excitement) and discharge negative affect (anger, humiliation, fear, and disgust). This is distinct from most institutional responses, which focus on establishing the facts, with little focus on the social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions that make up the rich motivational ecologies within the lives of individuals and communities.

The broad aim of RJ is for educational policy and practice to be more responsive and restorative to the needs and concerns of the school community (Morrison, 2007). The approach creates school communities that move beyond the predominant paradigm of regulatory formalism, to a paradigm that is more responsive because it entails giving back the harm or wrongdoing to the community most affected and enables a process for the community to address the harm, through nurturing the human capacity for *restitution*, *resolution*, and *reconciliation*. Through restitution the harm is repaired; through resolution the community reduces the risk of the harm reoccurring; through reconciliation comes emotional healing. These three restorative actions mirror the defining premises of RJ, which differentiate it from conventional regulatory practices (see Table 1).

This paradigm shift requires a willingness to disturb the traditional institutional dynamic of schools, moving from a one-size-fits-all regulatory framework to one that recognizes a range of motivational postures in schools: commitment, capitulation, resistance, disengagement, and game

**TABLE 1** Juxtaposition of Punitive and Restorative Regulatory Practices

Regulatory practice	Punitive	Restorative justice
Outcome sought	Punishment of offender (retribution)	Reparation of harm (restitution)
Decision-making process	Third-party (prescriptive)	First-party (resolution)
Regulatory mechanism	Reason over emotion (adversarial)	Reason for emotion (reconciliation)
Motivating source	External (control; rule based)	Internal (engagement; values based)

playing (Braithwaite, 2009). These postures reveal that traditional institutional practices can generate defiance, undermining an individual's capacity and willingness to cooperate in core facets of social life, from family and school to work and governance. Within a formalized regulatory system of social control, the implicit belief is that clear rules and laws within the architecture of the system, backed up by clear and consistent sanctions, will elicit the desired behavior. The basic assumption is that students are rational actors, who will uniformly respond to codes of conduct and laws; yet, there is now clear evidence that traditional sanction-based rational actor models ignore the science of how individuals, groups, and society function (Braithwaite, 2009). In contrast, the deeper social and emotional foundation of relational ecologies moves the application of RJ away from a disciplinary measure of control to a pedagogy and praxis of engagement, development, and integrity at both individual and institutional levels.

### RJ VALUES AND PROCESSES

RJ has been defined in terms of a range of *processes* and *values*. In terms of values, RJ is “about healing rather than hurting, moral learning, community participation and community caring, respectful dialogue, forgiveness, responsibility, apology, and making amends” (Nicholl, 1998, p. 7). In terms of a process, a Delphi method of agreement defined RJ as “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 implication for the future” (Marshall, 1997, as cited in McCold, 1998, p. 19). It has been conceived as a third model, or new “lens” (Zehr, 1990)—a way of getting off the seesaw between welfare and punishment, incorporating virtues of both. Like the welfare model, RJ is strong on support; like the punishment model, RJ is strong on accountability. It is the relational process of marrying support with accountability that differentiates RJ from the other models. As summarized by Tyler's (2006) research on rule breaking:

Sanctioning-based models, which dominate current thinking about managing criminals, have negative consequences for the individual wrongdoer and for society. It is argued that greater focus needs to be placed on psychological approaches whose goal is to connect with and activate internal values within wrongdoers with the goal of encouraging self-regulatory law-related behavior in the future. (p. 307)

The value base can generally be described as promoting values of harmony, while not sacrificing security; indeed, the foundation of healthy communities and RJ is security with care (Elliott, 2011).

Braithwaite (2002) organized RJ values into three categories: constraining values (e.g., respectful listening, equal concern for all stakeholders, accountability, respect for the fundamental human rights); maximizing values (e.g., restoration of human dignity, relationships and communities, emotional restoration and the restoration of freedom, compassion, peace, a sense of duty as a citizen); and emergent values (e.g., remorse, apology, censure of the act, forgiveness and mercy). At an operational level, it is the strength of the process to draw out the values that is the foundational core of restorative praxis; in that, values are those goods that our theories, rules, and decisions work to bring about in the world (Brincat & Wike, 2000).

The most common processes of RJ include victim offender mediation, community/restorative conferences, and peacemaking circles. While each process emerged in a different ontological context, each is grounded in relational values and ecologies. As these practices took root in schools, whole school models have developed that recognize RJ as being a paradigm for nurturing relational school cultures impacting all aspects of pedagogy, praxis, and discipline (Hopkins, 2011; Morrison, 2007; Vaandering, 2009).

### Victim–Offender Mediation/Reconciliation

The mediation/reconciliation tradition of RJ influenced a range of practices within schools, and is rooted in community-based Mennonite initiatives that emerged in the early 1970s in Canada (Peachey, 1989). Within this tradition, a range of practice has emerged in schools: *Discipline That Restores* (Classen & Classen, 2008), *Restorative Discipline in Schools* (Stutzman-Amstutz & Mullet, 2005), and *Educating for Peacebuilding* (Bargen, 2010). This tradition builds on the principles of RJ as described by Zehr (1990, 2002). This wide-ranging process focuses on (a) harms and consequent needs; (b) addresses obligations resulting from those harms; (c) uses inclusive, collaborative processes; (d) involves those with a legitimate stake in the situation; and (e) seeks to put right the wrongs (Stutzman-Amstutz & Mullet, 2005, pp. 25–26). A distinctive aspect of this process has been its influence on peer mediation programs, such that the RJ facilitator is often a peer within the school.



## Community/Restorative Conferencing

A restorative conference is a process whereby all parties to a harm (including support people and professionals) come together (with the support of a facilitator) to talk about what happened, the impact, and how to make things right. Emerging in the late 1980s in New Zealand, the process is loosely based on Maori tradition of families gathering to address conflict and harm between families. From New Zealand, this process was adapted further into a scripted model when it was adopted by the New South Wales police service in Australia (McDonald, Hyndman, Moore, O'Connell, & Thorsborne, 1995). While the facilitators were initially police officers, this evolved into use by other professionals, such as school counselors. Since the 1990s, RJ conferencing in schools has been developed in many different countries to address a wide range of behaviors from property damage, drug-related incidents, persistent class disruption, assaults, and bullying (Morrison, 2007). Based on the conferencing framework, Wachtel (2004) developed a continuum of responses that move from informal to formal restorative practices: affective statements, affective questions, small impromptu conferences, large group circles, and formal conferences. Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel (2010) subsequently developed their model to include classroom management.

## Peacemaking Circles

Grounded in traditional indigenous practice in North America, Circles are used in a variety of contexts. Peacemaking circles developed from talking circles, and include intentional structural elements: ceremony, a talking piece, a facilitator or keeper, guidelines, and consensus decision-making. Circles aim to create a space where participants are safe to be their most authentic self, share stories, and develop understanding of self and others (Pranis, 2005; Pranis, Stuart, & Wedge, 2003). Circles can be used for a range of activities in schools: lessons, morning meetings, community building, developing emotional literacy, promoting healing, peacemaking, and peace-building (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2011; Reistenberg, 2011). The use of circles shifts RJ from a reactive process to a proactive process. Unique to this model, a circle process explicitly includes participants defining the values at the beginning of the process. The values that emerge most consistently are: respect, honesty, trust, humility, sharing, inclusivity, empathy, courage, forgiveness, and love (Pranis et al., 2003). Boyes-Watson (2008) noted that the ritual and ceremony of circle are important and that there are "non-verbal, almost unconscious forms of collective communication through which we develop and affirm shared understanding . . . [as] ways of acting out the structure of our relationships with one another" (p. 80). Circles have emerged as an effective process to lever the rich social and emotional ecologies of individuals and communities.

## Whole-School Models

While the aforementioned processes first began to be used as a disciplinary response, whole-school approaches followed, often drawing on the framework of a public health triangle characterized by *primary* (universal), *secondary* (targeted to specific individuals and groups), and *tertiary* (intensive) practices (see Morrison, 2007, for review). Primary restorative practices involve the entire school community and aim at establishing a values ethic, as well as skill base, for developing relational ecologies and resolving differences in respectful and caring ways. Secondary restorative practices address specific behaviors that disrupt the harmony and social relations of classrooms (e.g., problem-solving circles), hallways (e.g., corridor conferences) and playgrounds (e.g., peer mediations). Tertiary restorative practices are the most intensive, often responding to serious harm, and involve all those affected (including families, professionals, fellow students, and others affected) in a face-to-face restorative justice process.

A whole-school relational framework has been developed based on these three leverage points outlined by the healthcare model (Morrison, 2007). The primary or universal practices—the broad base of the triangle—involve reaffirming relationships through developing a value-based ethos that builds social and emotional skills. The secondary or targeted practices, forming the middle layer of the triangle, involve repairing relationships through facilitated and supported dialogue. The tertiary or intensive practices that respond to a specific case—the small top of the triangle—involve rebuilding relationships through intensive facilitated dialogue that includes a broad social network. Morrison (2007) concludes with a broader vision that characterizes RJ and responsive regulation, not just as a mechanism for discipline but also as a mechanism to achieve social justice across all school outcomes, including safety, health, and academic.

Thus, what has evolved in schools adopting a restorative justice framework is a clearer awareness of the social and emotional foundation of the paradigm, specifically that human beings are relational and justice is understood broadly as “honoring the inherent worth of all and is enacted through relationship” (Vaandering, 2011, p. 324). This is in line with other social justice definitions such as that of Shriberg, Wynne, Briggs, Bartucci, and Lombardi (2011), who applied social justice to school psychology and identified it as an overarching framework centered around: (a) ensuring that all individuals are treated with respect and dignity and (b) protecting the rights and opportunities for all. This foundation has been further developed as a framework for identifying and building the links behind key (educational) ideas (McClutsky, 2011) and democratic citizenship (Bickmore, 2011). Specifically, RJ values, skills, and practices create a distinct institutional space that respond not just to incidents of aggression and harm, but to all relationships occurring in schools, such as an administrator’s interactions, policy decisions, a teacher’s pedagogy and curriculum, as well as professional and institutional



development (see Hopkins, 2011; Morrison, 2007). The praxis of RJ engages the rich ecologies of individuals' lives, at the social and emotional level of a community of care, be it the classroom, playground, school, or neighborhood. This is a significant paradigm change that can be characterized as a shift away from being a rule-based institution to a relationship-based institution, or from being an institution whose purpose is social control to being an institution that nurtures social engagement (Elliott, 2011; Morrison, 2011; Zehr, 2005).

## THEORETICAL PARADIGM

At a conceptual level, early proponents of RJ in the judicial context recognized the paradigmatic change required in a reconceptualization of justice, human nature, and behavior. Early RJ theorists, such as Bianchi (1994) and Zehr (1990, 2005), examined what it is to be human within social spheres of life, as defined by institutions. For example, Bianchi (1994) encapsulated the need to rethink the use of rules within institutions, when he stated: "Rules are like water. We cannot live without them, but they do not constitute life to us" (p. 28). In the development of his theory, Bianchi (1994) stated that justice, like truth, is not just there, but must be "made effectual" (p. 26). In this way, justice is not a noun, but a verb, an action that recognizes people as humans to be honored rather than objects to be controlled (Buber, 1958; Freire, 2005). Zehr (2005) reiterated this and highlighted justice as a state of "right relationship" and RJ as a "journey to belonging" (Zehr, 2002a). Bianchi (1994) and Zehr (1990, 2002a) defined laws and rules as serving people to protect and encourage relationships and relational cultures. This contrasts with the more predominant view that positions justice as people serving rules and laws in order to create desirable behavior (see also Downie & Llewelyn, 2008).

In the context of schooling and education, this premise can be understood when students are valued as human beings to be honored rather than objects to be controlled, and underpins the shift from social control to social engagement. Though this may appear to be a logical starting point and the desired starting point of contemporary education in general, the institutional reality is much different. For example, Harber and Sakade (2009) concluded that globally schools are predominantly authoritarian institutions whose original purpose of control and compliance are deeply embedded in schooling and are highly resistant to change. They drew on Green's (1990) comprehensive historical study of the origins of formal schooling in which he argued that across the Western world "the task of public schooling was not so much to develop new skills for the industrial sector as to inculcate habits of conformity, discipline, and morality that would counter the widespread problems of social disorder" (p. 59). Thus, approaches employed as responses to behavior reinforce social control and education as compliance.

Restorative justice, through its focus on reconnecting people to each other and highlighting inherent relational qualities, emphasizes social engagement, which also includes addressing violence and aggression in schools. When this occurs, education becomes a practice of freedom and hope (Freire, 1998; Giroux, 1988; Greene, 1988; Hooks, 2003) and discipline regains its original meaning and is understood as a means for nurturing human capacity rather than a method of managing others. Thus, a relational ecology has emerged as the normative theoretical framework for understanding and practicing restorative justice, with early models of practice driving further theoretical development.

Underpinning this normative theoretical framework are a number of explanatory theories, with no one theory solely explaining the causal mechanisms by which RJ processes are intended to work. These included reintegrative shaming theory (Ahmed, Harris, Braithwaite, & Braithwaite, 2001; Braithwaite, 1989), procedural justice theory (Tyler, 2006), defiance theory (Sherman, 1993), and self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). For example, Tyler's (2006) work indicates that individuals care about justice because of concern over social status, in that justice communicates a message about status. Employing Tyler's model, high levels of cooperative relations within institutions have been found when individuals feel a high level of pride in being a member of the collective and a high level of respect within the collective. Thus, status is important for understanding the social dynamics of conflict and cooperation within schools. These findings resonate with the National Research Council's report (Moore, Petrie, Braga, & McLaughlin, 2002), which concluded that concerns over social status are central to understanding and preventing deadly school violence. The Council recommended that: "Young people need some places where they feel valued and powerful and needed—this is part of the journey from childhood to adulthood . . . Holding spaces and pathways open for them may be an important way of preventing violence" (Moore et al., 2002, p. 336).

RJ shows itself to be a promising practice in creating spaces where the pathway that defines a young person's life can be reopened through addressing the power and status imbalances that affect young people's lives, including the aftermath of violence (Boyes-Watson, 2008; Morrison, 2007, 2011).

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: EVIDENCE WITHIN A SAFE SCHOOL FRAMEWORK

Educators across the globe have been and are currently engaged in the praxis of RJ—the action and reflection of people upon their world in order to transform it (Freire, 2005). Such praxis requires a long-term commitment

and regular assessment of changes in order to confirm that a paradigm shift is actually taking place, and in what form. The evidence base emerging out of this shift, in its many forms, is gradually influencing policy and practice in a range of countries such that RJ is becoming more widely known (Morrison, 2007, 2011).

Since the emergence of RJ in schools in the 1990s, a variety of studies have been conducted in various locations internationally to substantiate the evidence base of RJ in schools (see Morrison, 2007, for review). For example, one of the first studies to emerge examined the use of RJ conferences to address serious incidents in schools, such as assaults, on a case-by-case basis. The findings showed that participants (victims, offenders, supporters, and administrators) were generally satisfied with the process and outcomes achieved, including the reduction of repeat offending behavior (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). Subsequently, with the emergence of whole-school approaches, studies measured school-wide outcomes, such as the reduction of exclusionary practices, including office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. For example, in Minnesota, Stinchcomb, Bazemore, and Riestenberg (2006) found that in one school district, over a 3-year period (1997/98–2000/01), behavior referrals for physical aggression in an elementary school were reduced from 773 to 153, suspensions in a junior high school were reduced from 110 to 55, and in a senior high school suspensions dropped from 132 to 95. A large-scale study in Scotland beginning in 2004 (McCluskey et al., 2008) focused on RJ as a means for improving social relationships, respect, responsibility, and mutual engagement. The qualitative findings, through observations and interviews, showed that when implementing RJ, schools had very different starting points, aims, and strategies. Despite these differences, in elementary schools the perception from members of the school community was that RJ helped to create a calmer, more positive atmosphere, and helped students develop conflict resolutions skills. In secondary schools the impact was more sporadic and varied, and institutional change happened more slowly.

McCluskey and colleagues (2011) carried out a systematic review of the Scottish findings, identifying three operational approaches to the use of RJ in schools. The first, and most successful, were approaches that emphasized “whole school ethos building, encompassing preventative and educative aims at all levels, but also operating as a response to wrongdoing, conflict or when relationships have broken down” (McCluskey et al., 2011, p. 109). A second approach, with a limited range of success, occurred when RJ was implemented by “particular individuals responsible for student behavior (e.g., guidance counselors, behavior support educators, etc.) as a response to wrongdoing, conflict or when relationships have broken down” (McCluskey et al., 2011, p. 109). A third approach uses RJ solely as a response for serious incidents that typically would result in criminal charges. This approach results in “positive outcomes for participants involved in the RJ process, but

has little impact on the school as a whole, including the reduction of future crises” (McCluskey et al., 2011, p. 109).

More recently, RJ has been included in systematic comparative studies examining a range of antibullying strategies (Howard et al., 2010). Restorative justice was identified as both a proactive and reactive strategy and was rated by educators as a moderately to highly effective strategy for developing a restorative ethos to address bullying behavior in schools.

While these studies and others have found that RJ does address a range of behaviors that compromise the experience of safety at school, and helps to build a positive school ethos and climate, the sustained development of engaged institutional praxis is piecemeal, inconsistent, and often ad hoc (McCluskey et al., 2011; Morrison, 2007; Vaandering, 2009). Much more research and development is needed in all areas of praxis, from defining the paradigm shift to ongoing formative, processes, and outcome evaluation, using both qualitative and quantitative data at micro- and macro-levels of analysis.

Underlying the need for systematic research and development, there is a pressing need for conceptual clarity in characterizing and operationalizing the paradigm shift that RJ embodies within schools. Early RJ pioneers (Bianchi, 1998; Braithwaite, 1989; Zehr, 1998) identified the need to shift attention from a focus of an individual’s aberrant behavior within institutions to addressing relational needs within communities; however, this has not been an easy shift for institutions entrenched in policies and practices that value control and compliance over relational ecologies that nurture growth and well-being. As a result, while many schools are seeing and experiencing the value of RJ, conflicting philosophies and theories readily co-opt, or hinder it from taking hold. While educators readily embrace the RJ premise that relationship is more important than the behavioral incident, they are reluctant to let go of the option to punish and exclude. McCluskey et al. (2011) identified this reluctance to let go of the power to punish as the “default setting” that is “still pervasive and powerful . . . [as] punishment is an essential symbol of power and teacher ‘strength’” (p. 112). In identifying the paradox of the success of RJ alongside the reality that exclusionary practices are maintained, they asked, “is it possible that restorative approaches represent at one and the same time . . . both a threat and a potential solution?” (McCluskey et al., 2011, p. 115). Bickmore (2011) echoed this in her peace-building dialogue study that examines RJ approaches as well as other dialogic approaches to addressing conflict, in the question, “Why in spite of research supporting democratic, peacebuilding pedagogies, are they so rarely employed?” (p. 15).

If social engagement is key to the success of designing school contexts in support of proactive RJ discipline, what needs to be done to further this agenda? Recent reviews continue to emphasize the call of early RJ advocates. For example, it is important to facilitate clear discussion amongst students,

parents, educators, support personnel, academics, and researchers regarding the deep foundational principles of RJ that provide conceptual clarity and a recognition of the inherent worth of all people (Reistenberg, 2011; Vaandering, 2009). A commitment to whole-school implementation must be embedded within a framework that honors the well-being and interconnected nature of all (Hopkins, 2011; Morrison, 2007; Vaandering, 2011). Morrison (2007) outlined the paradigm shift required in her responsive and restorative regulatory pyramid that includes four faces: (a) institutional vision to empower responsive policy development, (b) relational practices to empower individual change and development, (c) behavioral evidence to empower response decision-making, and (d) professional bridging to empower institutional change and development (Morrison, 2007). Hopkins (2004, 2011) exemplified this in practice through her restorative classroom and just school activities that highlight the role of relationship. When this whole-school philosophical context is acknowledged, then pedagogy, praxis, and discipline can be assessed for enacting these socially engaging principles. As more of these explicit practices are identified, employed, and understood within such a framework, social control that seeks to support a past educational agenda of control and compliance may lose its grip and social engagement that supports an educational agenda of democratic freedom and community responsiveness may emerge more fully.

In navigating this paradigm shift, RJ advocates and practitioners must be able to clearly differentiate RJ from other safe school initiatives that have been found to be effective, or risk that RJ be co-opted or sidelined by dominant institutional frameworks (Elliott, 2011). Of particular significance is the ability to differentiate RJ from school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS) and social and emotional learning (SEL), two evidence-based approaches identified in the 2010 U.S. Capitol Hill briefing on safe schools (AERA, 2010), both of which have similarities and differences to the practice of RJ.

The SWPBS framework is similar to RJ in that it aims to develop integrated systems of support for students and adults at the school-wide, classroom, and individual student/family levels (Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2005). However, RJ differs because SWPBS is a behaviorist, rule-based approach, with a focus on external sanctioning systems. While traditional sanctioning-based systems focus on the balance between benefits and burdens (rewards and punishments), SWPBS favors rewards over punishment in bringing about behavioral compliance. At the proactive level, a whole-school system communicates behavioral expectation and rules, rewarding compliance. When intervention is required, a function-based strategy is employed (Crone, Hawken, & Bergstrom, 2007; Horner et al., 2005). "The goal is to establish a positive school and classroom climate in which expectations for students are predictable, directly taught, consistently acknowledged, and actively monitored" (Osher, Bear, Sprague, &

Doyle, 2010, p. 50). Such behaviorist approaches are rooted in paradigms of social control and order, derived from basic assumptions of human behavior. Clark (2005) explained that, “a society’s conceptualization of ‘human nature’ determines both how its people behave and their perceptions about justice” (p. 163). She illustrated how societies that see humans as naturally competitive, selfish, and requiring behavioral training, rely mainly on rewards and punishment. Societies that see humans as naturally prosocial, cooperative, and striving to contribute rely more on apology, forgiveness, and restitution. While behavioral strategies focus on the development of fair and just external sanctioning systems, RJ strategies focus on the development of internal sanctioning systems, leveraging the rich value-based ecologies of individuals and communities that minimizes harm and maximizes reparation. The former values social control and order, while the latter values social harmony and engagement.

SEL with its emphasis on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (see Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2003) may appear to be more closely aligned with RJ. However, responsibility for behavior continues to lay with the individual student outside of their social context, potentially ignoring and displacing institutional and communal responsibilities for change. This positioning emphasizes the self and self-discipline for the purpose of personal gain as indicated by Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011), who stated that the foundation of SEL rests on the premise that competent people have the ability “to generate and coordinate flexible, adaptive response to demands and to generate and capitalize on opportunities in the environment” (Waters & Sroufe, 1983, p. 80, as cited in Durlak et al., 2011, p. 406). This individual, adaptive emphasis assumes the need to comply with social demands and capitalize on environmental opportunity for personal growth and development. In so doing, the values of harmony and engagement are once again displaced.

Osher et al. (2010) indicated that the next generation of evidence-based disciplinary systems should include a blend of elements of SWPBS and SEL in hopes of being more beneficial. They stated, “[SEL] provides few interventions to help educators manage disruptive behavior. Conversely, SWPBS programs . . . are less likely to help students develop social and emotional competencies related to self-discipline” (Osher et al., 2010, p. 53). When combined, however, we contend that the negative impact of social control policies, handed down by institutional authorities, on students will not be addressed, and in the long run will not provide the solution desired. Restorative justice, with its emphasis on engagement, provides interventions, while encouraging the development of social and emotional competencies. At its core it honors individual self-worth, but also nurtures relational, classroom ecologies that provide spaces for students to gain appropriate status



within a web of relationships that exists amongst all participants in a school community. This more comprehensive approach does not ignore harmful behavior, but shifts the focus from managing behavior to honoring dignity and humanity, through relational practices that focus concurrently on individual and community well-being and responsibility.

## CONCLUSION

Educators eager to see young people thrive have worked long and hard at creating school contexts that are safe and caring in order to provide students with environments that are conducive to learning. Though some progress has been made, an individualistic perspective set on controlling the behavior of others has been reinforced because of a focus on individuals, specific incidents, and responding at the abstract level of the institution. Restorative justice in its development in schools over the past two decades seeks a significantly different purpose for education and practice of schooling, one that moves away from education as training to one that is much closer to the Latin root of education—*educere* (to lead out). Social engagement with its emphasis on human beings as worthy, interconnected, and relational creates a school context where students are respected within the institution's main practices of pedagogy and praxis. Discipline within this social and emotional ecology then draws on the leverage points of internal sanctioning, personal and community ownership for harmful incidents, and finding reason for emotion. This distinctive RJ approach encapsulates the benefits for individuals that Osher et al. (2010) identified as important elements of SWPBS and SEL, but achieves much more by cultivating connections, reconnecting broken lines of communication, and providing a space for individuals to discover who they are within a nurturing relational community.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to disclose.

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