

ARTICLE

Restorative justice: a framework for examining issues of discipline in schools serving diverse populations

Carrie Ann Woods and Martha Lue Stewart*

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore the literature on restorative justice (RJ) as employed in educational settings and its relationship to student achievement and to present it as a model for working with high-needs populations. While there is no single measure to determine 'need' amongst students, the reference in this article is to particularly vulnerable populations of students, due to racial, linguistic, academic or other differences. Information sources utilised in this study were chosen based on their relevance to the application and assessment of RJ programmes implemented with youth in school systems, with a particular focus on its relevance in the context of the United States. This article points at the history of RJ and how particularly impactful such programmes can be with this target group, given the aims and desired outcomes of this philosophy.

Keywords: Restorative justice in U.S. schools, school-based discipline, discipline gap, social justice.

1. Introduction

Receiving a quality education in the United States implies that students must attend school consistently, be actively engaged in the learning process and be furnished with the opportunity to learn to work with their peers. Throughout the nation, educators bear the daunting responsibility of providing the most effective learning environments possible for all students, while maintaining safety at the same time. Studies by experts in this field have pointed to the correlation between academic achievement, regular school attendance and future success in life (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Ginsburg, Jordan & Chang, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). However, out-of-school suspension, a disciplinary practice where a student is removed from the school for a part of the day or for

* Carrie Ann Woods is a Doctoral Student, National Urban Special Education Leadership Initiative, University of Central Florida, Orlando, USA. Contact author: carrie.woods@ucf.edu. Martha Lue Stewart is a Professor at the Department of Child, Family and Community Sciences, University of Central Florida, Orlando, USA.

multiple days as a mode of punishment, is the most widely used form of discipline in the United States (Toldson, McGee & Lemmons, 2013). This is contrary to the view that suspension from school should be a last-resort measure:

[T]here is a consensus on this point among many of the nation's leading school administrators, representatives of national teachers' unions, law enforcement officers, juvenile justices, researchers, experts in child development and psychology, parent and community based organisations and civil rights advocates (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison & Belway, 2015: 31).

While the causes behind suspensions may vary across school districts, Vavrus and Cole (2002) found that many suspensions result from a build-up of non-violent events, where one student often carries the brunt of many students' misbehaviours. Other factors frequently reported include attitudinal, aggressive and delinquent behaviours, and notably, cultural expressions of certain aspects of personality, including movement and speech (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005).

The 'discipline gap' refers to the disproportionately higher rates of discipline referrals, suspension and expulsion experienced by non-whites, specifically urban African-American male adolescents (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, K-12¹ suspension rates have at least doubled since the 1970s for all non-whites (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Smith and Harper (2017), extrapolating information from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, reported that nationally, 1.2 million African-American students were suspended from K-12 public schools in a single academic year, with 55% of those suspensions occurring in thirteen Southern states. Additionally, districts in the South were responsible for 50% of African-American student expulsions from public schools in the U.S.; in 84 districts in the South, 100% of all students suspended were African-American.

This disproportionality in discipline, between whites and non-whites, jeopardises the opportunity for acquiring quality education and hinders the future potential of non-white students, predominantly urban African-American males. As stated succinctly by Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2005), 'If education functions as the great equaliser, then educational prospects for African-American adolescents must improve' (p. 237). Restorative justice (RJ) as a school-based philosophy may allow for such improvement.

As a more recent trend in school-based disciplinary methods, numerous studies have addressed the implementation and results of RJ that focus on school climate, community engagement and academic achievement. However, much of the existing literature consists of RJ programme descriptions and case studies rather than evaluative reports (Fronius et al., 2016). This article examines the history of RJ, leading to its application in U.S. schools, various schools and student experiences and perspectives on RJ programmes, and ultimately, the impact of RJ when

1 K-12 refers to publically supported primary and secondary school grade education in the United States.

employed as an alternative to traditional disciplinary methods within schools, particularly those serving diverse student populations.

2. Discipline disparities

According to the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, African-American students are suspended at nearly three times the rate and expelled at 3.5 times the rate at which white students are suspended and expelled, respectively. Latino students are almost 1.5 times as likely to be suspended and almost twice as likely to be expelled as their white peers. On the other hand, white students are referred to the office at a higher rate than students of colour for offences that are more objectively proven. Some examples of these offences include *smoking, vandalising, leaving school premises without permission and using obscene language*. Conversely, African-American and Latino students are referred for disciplinary behaviours at a higher rate than their white peers for issues such as *being disrespectful, making excessive noise and loitering* – behaviours that would seem to rely more on the subjective judgements of their educators.

Whether they are viewed as issues of disproportionality, discipline gap, lack of cultural competence or an effect of zero-tolerance policies, racial disparities do exist within the implementation of discipline in schools. Recommendations for addressing this incongruence include collaborating with community organisations, educators and like groups to identify alternative solutions. Within the U.S., there have been major shifts in how schools respond to youth behaviour, from healthy and manageable to criminalising. The zero-tolerance policies of the 1980s and 1990s, implemented to address safety and violence concerns, heightened the reliance on punitive and exclusionary practices within schools. Today, however, state departments of education, school districts and school-based leaders have 'passed resolutions and policies recommending and requiring restorative justice' as part of school discipline reform (Gonzalez, 2016: 267).

3. Restorative justice

The guiding principles of RJ address the issue of loss of instruction time due to exclusionary punishments, such as suspension and expulsion, which have been shown to be inequitably applied, with African-American, Latino and Native American students, as well as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning) populace and students with disabilities being more likely to be at the receiving end of such consequences (Knight & Wadhwa, 2014). According to Karp and Breslin (2001), 'Certain students are not deterred from engaging in misbehaviour because suspension or removal from school is an attractive option' (p. 262); simply removing a student who misbehaves requires much less effort and involvement than addressing the root of the problem. Traditional practices such as these have lasting effects on students and the educational system, and are 'credited as the single greatest contributing factor to the widening dropout rate between black and white students' (Fisher, Frey & Smith, 2016: 54); they perpet-

Carrie Ann Woods and Martha Lue Stewart

uate the 'school-to-prison pipeline' (Wadhwa, 2016)². In fact, Payne and Welch (2015) found that schools with proportionally more African-American students are less likely to use restorative techniques when responding to student behaviour. In the diverse communities of schools today, these discipline disparities indicate a need for a paradigm shift, where harm is not responded to based on biases and a lack of understanding, but through a range of responses that promote community-building and reparation (Burnett & Thorsborne, 2015).

4. Definition

While there is no clear definition or model of RJ within the school context, one can describe it as 'An approach to discipline that engages all parties in a balanced practice that brings together all people impacted by an issue or behavior' (Gonzalez, 2012: 281). Evans and Vaandering (2016) more broadly refer to RJ in education as schools and classrooms that

intentionally work at facilitating learning communities that nurture the capacity of people to engage with one another and their environment in a manner that supports and respects the inherent dignity and worth of everyone (p. 8).

RJ can take on a variety of formats and means of implementation in a school setting, ranging from restorative circles to integrity boards. Regardless of the approach used, 'there has to be a goodness-of-fit between a given community and the implementation of measure as part of a restorative justice practice' (Teasley, 2014: 132).

Viewed as a form of progressive discipline, RJ involves 'a whole-school approach that utilises a continuum of interventions, supports, and consequences to address student behavior' (Ryan & Ruddy, 2015: 254). This differs from traditional authoritarian discipline with its punitive consequences that follow zero-tolerance policies and 'an eye for an eye' mentality. The three core principles of RJ are addressing harm, fostering accountability and encouraging engagement under the guiding belief that 'harm to one is harm to all. Good for one is good for all' (Ogilvie & Fuller, 2016: 87-88). RJ, then, differs from other safe school initiatives with its focus on relationships and 'the inherent worth and well-being of all people' (Vaandering, 2014: 64).

RJ aims to change the current culture from one that appears to value war and violence, punishment, adversarial relationships and racism and privilege, to a culture of peace and nonviolence that builds trust, heals harms inflicted upon relationships, restores dignity, respects multiculturalism and creates an environment of safety (Cavanagh, 2009). Within schools, and society as a whole, this shift in values is necessary for society to thrive.

2 Note from the editors: see also the book review of Anita Wadhwa, *Restorative justice in urban schools: disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline* by Lyubansky in this issue of the journal.

The difference between traditional discipline and a restorative approach lies in the questions we ask after a transgression. Punitive discipline seeks answers to the questions pertaining to which laws/rules were broken, who did it and what punishment the offenders deserve. On the other hand, the guiding questions in restorative discipline include who was hurt, who needs to repair the harm and how will they accomplish that (Peters, 2016).

5. Origins

In actuality, most of the principles of RJ are part of human nature. Ryan and Ruddy (2015) highlight this with the example of a parent's instinctive discipline of a child who breaks the neighbour's window; the child is guided through the steps of victim-offender reconciliation, implemented through an apology and making amends to rebuild trust. This is the family model of crime control that focuses on the moral dimensions of behaviour (Karp & Breslin, 2001). Summarised by Guckenburg et al. (2015), 'RJ is a way of treating students the way we want our own child to be treated in any setting' (p. 6).

RJ, as a formal practice, was likely to have developed in pre-modern times as a cultural approach to conflict resolution, specific to the people of the South Pacific, where the emphasis is on 'the harm done rather than the act' (Fronius et al., 2016: 5). This formal concept was first documented in 1975 within the criminal justice system in Canada, and then spread to address similar issues in the United States and European countries in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Hopkins, 2004). It was further applied to a court case in 1989 in New Zealand, and was later implemented as an alternative programme in court trials in Australia in 1994, from where it gradually spread to other areas of society, including education (Ryan & Ruddy, 2015).

The historical roots of schooling, globally, show a design meant to encourage obedience and conformity (Vaandering, 2014). Thus, the adoption of a RJ philosophy, which contrasts with these historical underpinnings, as an alternative, has been slow. Yet, it is now a common practice not only in criminal justice systems but also in social systems, such as schools worldwide (Ryan & Ruddy, 2015). Proponents of RJ argue that it may prove to be even better applied to schools than the criminal justice system, 'due to the close nature of the relationships within schools, where school community members see each other daily and even minor encounters can easily turn dangerous if not handled adequately' (Payne & Welch, 2015: 540). Schools represent a smaller society within the larger community, where early disciplinary intervention through RJ can exert greater impact (Fronius et al., 2016). Schools are centres for learning, and 'discipline should be a teachable moment' (Guckenburg et al., 2015: 7).

Stutzman Amstutz and Mullet (2005) trace the application of restorative practice in schools to movements in conflict resolution, character education and emotional literacy, all of which tie into the concept of peaceable schools. In more recent trends, Morrison (2007) recognised the value of restorative techniques used to address school-based bullying. Noting that the traditional response of

shaming a bully, and the resulting shame shared by the victim, ultimately serves as a barrier to building a safe school community, evidence suggests that the basic need for a sense of belonging shared by both victims and offenders can be secured instead by using RJ to promote not just positive interactions, but a positive social identity (Riesterberg, 2012). While people have different values based on needs and experiences, recognition of the universal human desires for belonging and connectedness is the core of RJ philosophy (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

6. Programmes and approaches

RJ is not a set of practices or behaviour modification techniques, but it is a philosophy that is best implemented on a wider scale rather than solely at the classroom level. Models of RJ focus on specific practices, such as student conferencing, peer mediation, peace rooms, active listening, restitution and community service (Guckenburg et al., 2015; Payne & Welch, 2015). RJ looks and feels differently at different schools; it should not be 'rigidly imposed on a school but rather should be integrated to embody the values of the school community' (Hantzopoulos, 2013: 10). When adopting a RJ model, the most critical step in the entire process lies in identifying the particular need to be addressed so that the most appropriate intervention can be selected.

For many schools, RJ is initially adopted due to a specific serious incident, whereby it develops into an approach that engages all students and the community towards promoting and supporting healthy relationships (Vaandering, 2014). Other schools, affected by increasing numbers of suspensions and expulsions along with plummeting graduation rates, adopt RJ as an attempt to make changes. One New York City high school for at-risk youths created a Fairness Committee, a model that developed organically and internally to fit the needs of this school's demographics and dynamics (Hantzopoulos, 2013).

Many schools adopt RJ through the employment of a human rights framework, encouraging 'democratic and participatory practices' amongst the school community (Hantzopoulos, 2013: 7). In one New Orleans high school, for example, 'restorative circles are so common that walking into the school is a bit like entering a giant circle' (Shaw, 2017: 6). At this particular school, students need a safe haven where mediation is key; however, it is the small size of the school that many attribute to it being 'more conducive to the intensive restorative justice approach' (Shaw, 2017: 7).

Circles, whether they are referred to as peace-making circles, healing circles or restorative circles, are a key component of the process of empowering students and enhancing their accountability. Hansberry (2016) notes that

despite misconceptions, circles don't have a place on the restorative continuum as an approach for addressing particular incidents of conflict, harm, or disruption. Rather, circles work as an underpinning pedagogy that oils the wheels for restorative practices, teaching young people a range of important skills that equips them to work restoratively (p. 238).

Knight and Wadhwa (2014) recommend that these circles start small, yet Thorsborne and Vinegrad (2002) add that circles of up to 35 participants can achieve RJ goals through the use of scripts and assigned roles. Circles should use local resources proactively, include potential mentors and ensure safety; while this can be a slow process, the impact of circles on a RJ programme is promising (Knight & Wadhwa, 2014).

Some other common components of RJ include peer mediation, peer accountability boards and conferencing. While peer mediation is the most commonly used model for conflict resolution nationwide, accountability boards and conferencing, just like circles, require a larger presence of those affected by a particular situation, who share the goal of reparation and resolution (Pavelka, 2013). Peer accountability boards are unique in that they allow students to mentor each other through conflict resolution, reflecting on challenges and developing plans for improvement, all while holding each other accountable and emphasising personal responsibility in line with RJ principles.

Unlike punitive models, RJ allows for flexibility in resolving conflicts with a continuum of possible responses, from formal to informal and proactive to reactive (Gonzalez, 2012). Serious criminal offences, such as alcohol and drug use, may require a 'combination of RJ and traditional punitive responses', even though these models are based on incompatible principles (Karp & Breslin, 2001: 261).

With most of the attention on RJ localised within the domain of criminal justice and now K-12 settings, very few colleges and universities have implemented RJ to address campus disciplinary issues. Karp and Conrad (2005) looked at how Skidmore College in New York created a student-led Integrity Board, as an alternative to coercion and criminal law, to address student behaviour violations and to integrate moral education, introducing common sanctions for offenders, including apologies, restitution and community service.

RJ does not solely address behaviour, but it also entails moral education. Ogilvie and Fuller (2016) analysed the RJ framework as applied to classrooms with English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students in an attempt to dispel the perception that restorative principles do not have an influence on education beyond influencing behaviour. When students' cultures were integrated into the school community through restorative practices such as talking circles, the ESL classroom became a more caring environment. Similar to Delpit's (2012) notion of 'basic skills', those foundational academic skills that are typically evident in children from white, middle-class homes and considered lacking from those of other cultures and/or socioeconomic status, Ogilvie and Fuller (2016) noted the 'assumed needs' of ESL students, such as the language and skills needed to acculturate to the community, that are often prioritised in schools.

When students from diverse backgrounds do not bring these important skills to the classroom, their 'expressed needs' and individual assets, which are unique to each student and family, are ignored (Delpit, 2012; Ogilvie & Fuller, 2016). This lends itself to deficit thinking, which, according to Weiner (2006), derives from one's own personal biases and assumptions. RJ practices can be transformative with regard to this type of thinking, resulting in an 'increased sense of self-

efficacy for students, improved overall well-being of students, stronger sense of community, belonging, and self-confidence, a sense of resiliency and confidence in collective wisdom' (Guckenburg et al., 2015: 10).

Burnett and Thorsborne (2015) specifically address the application of restorative practices with students with special needs in light of communication, cognition and behaviour challenges, at both the individual and classroom levels. Data show that 'students with special needs are vulnerable to being both the target of bullying and one who may hurt others' (Burnett & Thorsborne, 2015: 9). Developing a restorative approach in settings with students with a range of special needs requires modelling, practice and rehearsal; specific attention must be given to self-regulation strategies, along with explicit instruction of socially acceptable behaviour and role-play, to allow for internalisation of such tools (Burnett & Thorsborne, 2015).

Regardless of the setting or type of programme implemented, Fisher et al. (2016) recommend the following four practices that are of primary importance to RJ: establishment of positive relationships, impromptu conversations in which students are allowed to voice their opinions, the opportunity to make amends, and plans for re-entry into the classroom. These principles address the importance of relationships and accountability. These practices align with the three pillars of RJ outlined by Zehr (2002), including repairing harm, obligations of the community and engagement and participation towards resolution. When an offender has the opportunity for restoration and a victim is allowed closure, it is much less likely for the same transgression to reoccur and more likely for the sense of community to be restored.

7. Impact

As previously stated, there is no standard definition of RJ, which makes it difficult to measure the related outcomes (Shaw, 2017). It is clear that RJ philosophies have permeated the education system, and that they exert a positive impact in many areas. Results of RJ include improved school climate, increased student connectedness, greater community and parent engagement, improved student academic achievement and decrease in fighting and suspensions (Fronius et al., 2016). With regard to bullying, which is a major problem for children in U.S. schools, RJ appears to be 'a more viable alternative to traditional peer mediation strategies' (Fronius et al., 2016: 15). Students develop practical life skills, such as conflict resolution, and they are furnished with leadership opportunities through RJ (Wadhwa, 2016). These results, while not obtained from formal experiments and evaluations, are observations made by those involved in implementing RJ in specific school settings.

Teachers' personal experiences have serious implications on how they implement RJ. For example, in a study by Vaandeering (2014), teachers who struggled with classroom management were more hesitant to employ RJ strategies and were more likely to dismiss them when students did not respond accordingly. In addition, many teachers who stated a commitment to RJ admitted that this com-

mitment was dependent on student compliance. It appears that 'rules, rather than relationship, continue to dominate even for individuals committed to the implementation of RJ' (p. 69). This indicates the need for teachers to reflect upon their personal and professional values and beliefs.

Once again, looking at characteristics of teachers, Fronius et al. (2016) believe it is 'possible that staff bias, such as implicit bias, lead to disproportionate discipline for certain groups of students' (p. 16). However, while looking at racial disparities in the application of discipline and punitive measures, Fronius et al. (2016) found that 'frequent use of restorative justice led to reductions in the racial discipline gap' (p. 17). This is likely due to the enhanced student–teacher relationships that develop through RJ, a stark contrast to zero tolerance, where, as noted by Black (2004),

the first casualties ... are the central and critical relationships between teachers and students and between schools and communities. The intolerance resulting from zero tolerance fails to teach students traits such as understanding, kindness, generosity, benevolence, and justice (p. 29).

The relationship aspect of RJ is a key element; 'the dramatic change in behavior among young people is largely the result of the loss of connectedness and community in modern society', and as such, RJ allows schools to re-connect and re-establish themselves as an important institution within the community (Mirsky, 2007: 5).

While there are many models of RJ, Mayworm, Sharkey, Hunnicutt and Schiedel (2016) focus on the need for training teachers to enable successful implementation. Not only teachers but social workers, paraprofessionals, juvenile justice systems and other professionals working with children should be involved in school-based RJ programmes, which ultimately require a community effort for successful implementation (Teasley, 2014). Regardless of the model or approach used, sustainability remains a challenge.

RJ in schools is about much more than simply lowering suspension/expulsion rates, yet some experts strongly emphasise that the fundamental purpose of implementing RJ in schools is to address the racial disparities within the disciplining modes (Hurley et al., 2015). Specifically looking at its impact on racial and ethnic minorities and students with disabilities, when implemented with high fidelity, RJ has the potential to positively impact racial disproportionality in discipline implementation. The principles of not just behaviour but also of moral education, which RJ programmes encompass, including fostering a sense of community and erosion of deficit thinking, allow for such a model to address the racial disparities that do exist. Other components of RJ, such as the mental shift in how misbehaviour and/or crime are viewed and responded to, can further impact the disproportionality in exclusionary discipline.

RJ addresses both individual and environmental factors that place youth at risk, specifically factors such as insecure relationships with parents, teachers and peers, and harsh discipline. At-risk students are particularly susceptible to low teacher efficacy, negative peer relationships and chaotic environments (Osher,

n.d.). RJ practices combat these issues by promoting positive conditions for learning and addressing the needs for safety, support and connection, challenge and engagement, and individual and peer social-emotional competency (Osher, n.d.). In fact, case studies have demonstrated the positive impact of a RJ approach on the social, emotional and educational outcomes for youth with special needs; the life skills developed through restorative techniques have promising implications far beyond the classroom (Burnett & Thorsborne, 2015).

In comparison to programmes such as Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS), Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), RJ may have greater potential to reduce the disproportionate use of exclusionary punishments amongst racial, ethnic and disability groups (Hurley et al., 2015). While these programmes address behaviour, and may also incorporate character education, RJ is unique due to its derivation from the criminal justice system; initially serving as an alternative to incarceration for criminal offenders, its application in schools is an even more pre-emptive approach to keeping youth out of the school-to-prison pipeline. Integration of RJ practices with these other programmes may have a profound impact on marginalised populations in schools. In fact, according to Osher (n.d.), the use of several approaches can together combat the fact that behavioural interventions do not generalise, nor is there a one-size-fits-all model or best practice – some contexts require behavioural and mental health interventions, while RJ works best to prevent problems and promotes problem-solving.

By aligning promising approaches, there is a greater sense of connectedness, which is of particular importance. Positive relationships with staff and peers are associated with intrinsic motivation, acceptance of authority, experience of autonomy, self-regulation and an overall positive orientation towards school, class work and teachers (Osher, n.d.). Consequently, dropouts feel estranged from teachers and peers. With the focus first on relationships, and second, on rules, restorative practices allow for the development of strategic plans to accomplish positive outcomes for everyone. As noted by Riestenberg (2012), violating a rule should not deny students the experience of positive youth development and the right to participate as a responsible member of the school community.

It is incorrectly assumed that schools with high suspension rates are more academically successful. Losen et al. (2015) noted a recent study of the Denver Public Schools, where a concerted effort was made to improve the school climate systemically by implementing restorative practices. They found that as suspension rates went down, the racial discipline gaps narrowed and test scores rose consistently at all grade levels in nearly every subject for six consecutive years (Gonzalez, 2015). RJ, then, is a viable alternative to suspension that addresses both discipline and achievement gaps.

8. Discussion

RJ allows for a collaborative and inquiry-based approach towards discipline that can end the cycle of harm that regulates our current school discipline paradigm

(Mullet, 2014). Rather than encouraging powerlessness, those who are harmed are given a voice and an opportunity for closure. Rather than being shunned and removed, offenders are held accountable and reintegrated. School is about teaching and learning, making it an effective place for the application of RJ. Beyond academics, RJ practices involve moral education, teaching conflict resolution and empathy and skills that permeate all facets of life and create character.

Critics of RJ question its practicality and simplicity. It is true that some students choose not to participate; however, the process itself involves the hard work of reconciliation and restitution (Mullet, 2014). Other sceptics question the merit of treating trouble makers and rule breakers with kindness and forgiveness, but this, again, is a frame of mind concerning discipline that requires a shift in thinking – an offender who internalises the harm he/she has caused and has a strengthened rapport with the community he/she has harmed is much less likely to repeat that same transgression (Ashworth, Van Bockern, Ailts, Donnelly, Erickson & Woltermann, 2008). In addition, while RJ, involving circles and mediation, certainly requires time away from academic instruction, ‘the hope is that restorative discipline will save time in the long run’ (Mullet, 2014: 161). Guckenburg et al. (2015) report that ‘every teacher who used circles somewhat regularly reported a 50 percent reduction in the time spent dealing with behavioural issues during class’ (10).

The group counselling and relationship components of RJ approaches ‘facilitate socioemotional well-being, self-management, empowerment, and academic achievement for youngsters at risk of engaging in maladaptive behaviors’ (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005: 239). While there may be cultural taboos and mistrust associated with such processes, ‘even youngsters who exhibit a tough veneer silently crave positive adult attention despite the fact that they have been socialized to act otherwise’ (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005: 239). According to Hansberry (2016), all human behaviour is motivated by what we care about, and this is what makes restorative practice work.

9. Limitations

While the literature overwhelmingly supports the use of RJ in schools, delineating the countless benefits and positive impact of implementation, these mostly consist of descriptive reports and case studies rather than research-based findings. Without a sound research design, it is unclear whether RJ is the causal factor behind significant changes or some other factor. And yet, even with a true experimental design, often the RJ techniques employed are unclear, difficult to measure or not used with fidelity, as there is no one clear definition or an accepted model of RJ.

There are limitations to the implementation of RJ itself. These programmes often face resistance; not only do they require time and training, they also require a shift in thinking from traditional school discipline (Karp & Breslin, 2001). In addition, teachers may see RJ as just another temporary initiative and refrain from full commitment (Ryan & Ruddy, 2015). While ‘students in schools with RJ

programs have shown decreased rates of suspension, expulsion, and referrals to the police', schools that take a reactive approach to student behaviour and only implement restorative practices at the classroom level 'had a more limited impact than in schools that have adopted more holistic, proactive approach and adhere more completely to the values of RJ throughout the entire school' (Hansen, 2005: 3).

Guckenburg et al. (2015) note that RJ is not a quick fix, taking five to six years to achieve 'buy-in' from everyone involved. Thus, there is a struggle to invest in RJ, which demands time away from academic instruction, in a setup where teachers are ultimately held accountable for test scores. Such objections must be countered with the fact that the alternative practices of disciplinary exclusion are 'detrimental to both students who fall behind in their work and teachers who must help them catch up' (Brown, 2007: 451). Emphasising the need for whole-school adoption of restorative practices, Hopkins (2011) notes that 'developing a restorative staffroom and staff team is likely to be a prerequisite for a successful, high-achieving school' (p. 225). Staff relationships create and contribute to the school culture that students model, and it is not only student behaviour that must be addressed; restorative practices involve a true culture change (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013).

10. Conclusions

While several studies have described practices, successes and challenges involved in the implementation of RJ in schools, more research is needed. Areas of future research within the field of RJ include implementation and readiness, impacts on racial and ethnic minorities and students with disabilities, leadership and training, data and measurement and sustainability (Hurley et al., 2015).

With regard to racial disparities in school discipline, it is noted that 'the main engines of the observed differences in suspension rates are school policies, practices, and leadership, rather than differences in student behavior'; thus, RJ has the potential to eliminate these large disparities by shifting from the norms prevalent in policies, practices and leadership (Losen et al., 2015: 31). As an alternative to policies and practices that sustain the school-to-prison pipeline, such as zero tolerance, that do not make schools safer, RJ practices hold schools accountable for racial injustice through vulnerable conversations amongst all parties involved, thereby confronting the implicit bias that leads to disproportionality in school discipline (Smith & Harper, 2017).

RJ may not be the answer to solving student behaviour problems and discipline issues in schools; however, it can serve as a flexible framework to guide programme design for particular settings. With particular emphasis on schools serving high-needs populations, RJ practices challenge traditional thinking and approaches towards misbehaviour by acknowledging the worth of both the victim and the offender as valuable members of the school community, and they have the capability of reversing the negative short- and long-term effects of racialised zero tolerance and closing the corresponding discipline gap (Fronius et al., 2016).

Illuminated by Ryan and Ruddy (2015), 'restorative justice is not a map, but the principles of restorative justice can be seen as a compass pointing a direction' (p. 259). That direction is towards social justice.

References

- Ashworth, J., Van Bockern, S., Ailts, J., Donnelly, J., Erickson, K. & Woltermann, J. (2008). The restorative justice center: an alternative to school detention. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 17(3), 22-26.
- Balfanz, R. & Byrnes, V. (2012). *Chronic absenteeism: summarizing what we know from nationally available data*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.
- Black, S. (2004). Safe schools don't need zero tolerance. *Education Digest: Essential Readings Condensed for Quick Review*, 70(2), 27-31.
- Brown, T.M. (2007). Lost and turned out: academic, social, and emotional experiences of students excluded from school. *Urban Education*, 42(5), 432-455.
- Burnett, N. & Thorsborne, M. (2015). *Restorative practice and special needs: a practical guide to working restoratively with young people*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Cavanagh, T. (2009). Creating schools of peace and nonviolence in a time of war and violence. *Journal of School Violence*, 8(1), 64-80.
- Day-Vines, N.L. & Day-Hairston, B.O. (2005). Culturally congruent strategies for addressing the behavioral needs of urban, African American male adolescents. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(3), 236-243.
- Delpit, L. (2012). Multiplication is for white people. Raising expectations for other people's children. New York: The New Press.
- Evans, K. & Vaandering, D. (2016). *The little book of restorative justice in education: fostering responsibility, healing, and hope in schools*. New York: Good Books.
- Fisher, D., Frey, N. & Smith, D. (2016). After sticks, stones, and hurtful words. *Educational Leadership*, 74(3), 54-58.
- Fronius, T., Persson, H., Guckenburger, S., Hurley, N. & Petrosino, A., & WestEd. (2016). Restorative justice in U. S. schools: A research review. Retrieved from https://jprc.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/RJ_Literature-Review_20160217.pdf (last accessed 1 February 2018).
- Ginsburg, A., Jordan, P. & Chang, H. (2014). Absences add up. How school attendance influences student success. *Attendance works*. Retrieved from www.attendanceworks.org/absences-add-up/ (last accessed 1 February 2018).
- Gonzalez, T. (2012). Keeping kids in schools: restorative justice, punitive discipline, and the school to prison pipeline. *Journal of Law & Education*, 41(2), 281-335.
- Gonzalez, T. (2015). Socializing schools: Addressing racial disparities in discipline through restorative justice. In D.J. Losen, (ed.), *Closing the school discipline gap: equitable remedies for excessive exclusion*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gonzalez, T. (2016). Restorative justice from the margins to the center: the emergence of a new norm in school discipline. *Howard Law Journal*, 60(1), 267.
- Gregory, A. & Weinstein, R.S. (2008). The discipline gap and African Americans: defiance or cooperation in the high school classroom. *Journal of School Psychology*, 46, 455-475.
- Guckenburger, S., Hurley, N., Persson, H., Fronius, T. & Petrosino, A. (2015). *Restorative justice in U.S. schools: summary findings from interviews with experts* [PDF File]. Retrieved from <https://jprc.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/>

Carrie Ann Woods and Martha Lue Stewart

- 1447101213resourcerestorativejusticeinusschoolssummaryfindingsfrominterviewswi
thexperts.pdf (last accessed 1 February 2018).
- Hansberry, B. (2016). *A practical introduction to restorative practices in schools*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Hansen, T. (2005). *Restorative justice practices and principles in schools*. Center for Restorative Justice & Peacemaking, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. Retrieved from http://cdpsdocs.state.co.us/safeschools/Resources/Restorative_Justice_in_Schools.pdf (last accessed 1 February 2018).
- Hantzopoulos, M. (2013). The fairness committee: restorative justice in a small urban public high school. *Prevention Researcher*, 20(1), 7-10.
- Hopkins, B. (2004). *Just schools: a whole school approach to restorative justice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Hopkins, B. (2011). *The restorative classroom: using restorative approaches to foster effective learning*. London: Teach to Inspire, a division of Optimus Publishing Ltd.
- Hurley, N., Guckenburg, S., Persson, H. Fronius, T. & Petrosino, A. (2015). *What further research is needed on restorative justice in schools?* Retrieved from https://jprc.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Restorative_Justice_Future_Research.pdf (last accessed 1 February 2018).
- Karp, D.R. & Breslin, B. (2001). Restorative justice in school communities. *Youth & Society*, 33(2), 249-272.
- Karp, D. & Conrad, S. (2005). Restorative justice and college student misconduct. *Public Organization Review*, 5(4), 315-333.
- Knight, D. & Wadhwa, A. (2014). Expanding opportunity through critical restorative justice portraits of resilience at the individual and school level. *Studies in Education*, 11(1), 11-33.
- Losen, D., Hodson, C., Keith, M.A., Morrison, K. & Belway, S. (2015). Are we closing the school discipline gap? *The Center for Civil Rights Remedies*. Retrieved from www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/are-we-closing-the-school-discipline-gap/AreWeClosingTheSchoolDisciplineGap_FINAL221.pdf (last accessed 1 February 2018).
- Losen, D.J. & Skiba, R.J. (2010). Suspended education: Urban middle schools in crisis. *Southern Poverty Law Center*. Retrieved from www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/d6_legacy_files/downloads/publication/Suspended_Education.pdf (last accessed 1 February 2018).
- Mayworm, A.M., Sharkey, J.D., Hunnicutt, K.L. & Schiedel, K.C. (2016). Teacher consultation to enhance implementation of school-based restorative justice. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, 26(4), 285-412.
- Mirsky, L. (2007). SaferSanerSchools: transforming school cultures with restorative practices. *Reclaiming Children and Youth: The Journal of Strength-Based Interventions*, 16(2), 5-12.
- Morrison, B. (2007). *Restoring safe school communities: a whole school response to bullying, violence, and alienation*. Sidney: The Federation Press.
- Mullet, J.H. (2014). Restorative discipline: from getting even to getting well. *Children & Schools*, 30(3), 157-162.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2009). *Every school day counts: the forum guide to collecting and using attendance data*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/attendancedata/chapter1a.asp> (last accessed 1 February 2018).

- Ogilvie, G. & Fuller, D. (2016). Restorative justice pedagogy in the ESL classroom: creating a caring environment to support refugee students. *TESL Canada Journal*, 33(10), 86-96.
- Osher, D. (n.d.) *How to align SEL, PBIS, and RJ to provide a coherent network of support for our students* [Powerpoint slides]. Retrieved from http://soundsupportsk12.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Presentation_Osher_AligningSELPBISandRJ-2.pdf (last accessed 1 February 2018).
- Pavelka, S. (2013). Practices and policies for implementing restorative justice within schools. *Prevention Researcher*, 20(1), 15-17.
- Payne, A.A. & Welch, K. (2015). Restorative justice in schools: the influence of race on restorative discipline. *Youth & Society*, 47(4), 539-564.
- Peters, M. (2016). *Making it right: building peace, settling conflict*. Toronto: Annick Press.
- Riestenberg, N. (2012). *Circle in the square: building community and repairing harm in school*. St. Paul: Living Justice Press.
- Ryan, T. & Ruddy, S. (2015). Restorative justice: a changing community response. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 7(2), 253-262.
- Shaw, J. (2017). New Orleans high school turbocharges restorative justice. *Education Digest*, 82(7), 4.
- Smith, E. & Harper, S. (2017). *Disproportionate impact of K-12 school suspension and expulsion on black students in southern states*. Center for the study of race and equity in education. Retrieved from <http://www.gse.upenn.edu/equity/SouthernStates> (last accessed 1 February 2018).
- Stutzman Amstutz, L. & Mullet, J.H. (2005). *The little book of restorative discipline for schools: teaching responsibility, creating caring climates*. Intercourse: Good Books
- Tasley, M.L. (2014). Shifting from zero tolerance to restorative justice in schools. *Children & Schools*, 36(3), 131-133.
- Thorsborne, M. & Blood, P. (2013). *Implementing restorative practices in schools*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Thorsborne, M. & Vinegrad, D. (2002). *Restorative practices in schools, rethinking behaviour management*. Milton Keynes: Incentive Publishing.
- Toldson, I.A., McGee, T. & Lemmons, B.P. (2013). Reducing suspension among academically disengaged black males. K-12 Racial Disparities in School Discipline. UCLA: The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles. Retrieved from <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/6n84676s> (last accessed 1 February 2018).
- Vaandering, D. (2014). Implementing restorative justice practice in schools: what pedagogy reveals. *Journal of Peace Education*, 11(1), 64-80.
- Vavrus, F. & Cole, K. (2002). 'I didn't do nothin': the discursive construction of school suspension. *Urban Review*, 34(2), 87-111.
- Wadhwa, A. (2016). *Restorative justice in urban schools: disrupting the school to prison pipeline*. New York: Routledge.
- Weiner, L. (2006). Challenging deficit thinking. *Educational Leadership*, 64(1), 42-45.
- Zehr, H. (2002). *The little book of restorative justice*. Intercourse: Good Books.