Trainer’s Guide for Working with Schools to Implement Restorative Practices

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Introduction

The Minnesota Legislature passed the Safe and Supportive Schools Act in April 2014. Minnesota Statutes, section 121A.031, Subdivision 4(a) (1) indicates that school districts can include policies and procedures which support restorative practices (RP) as a means to respond to bullying behavior and to create and sustain safe and supportive school climates.

To support schools in implementing this act, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) established the School Safety Technical Assistance Center. The center is working to create synergistic linkages between Restorative Practices (RP) practitioners and school administrators, teachers and staff members who are considering ways to improve school climate.

This guide is an attempt to capture ideas, experiences and resources available to community-based RP trainers working with schools.

The guide is accompanied by the Restorative Practices Trainer’s Guide Example Activities booklet which includes training activities referenced in the guide. The guide is also accompanied by a checklist for school administrators, which includes benchmarks for moving toward a sustainable, school-wide, best practices RP program.

Rethinking Discipline

As school leaders consider ways to improve school climate, they often begin to rethink the use of some discipline practices. Suspension and other exclusionary discipline policies that many people once thought would solve problems in school can often do more harm than good. Studies show that such policies and practices can have several negative effects on students, including decreased academic achievement, increased behavior problems and an increased likelihood of substance abuse. In addition, data also shows that suspension and other exclusionary discipline policies disproportionately affect minority students.

Given those negative outcomes, educators have been looking for an alternative. Educators and school leaders are interested in comprehensive whole-school approaches to improve school climate. More and more educators and school leaders are turning to alternatives such as Restorative Practices and to you as a trainer to guide them in implementing it.

As a trainer, you will want to become familiar with what has prompted schools, organizations, agencies and the U.S. Department of Education to rethink discipline and what changes are being recommended. Appendix A. will give you resources to do this.
Partnering With Schools

Community-based RP practitioners who are new to working with schools can begin by building their understanding of the current context for schools. Schools in Minnesota face continued pressures to increase academic outcomes and reduce the racial achievement gap.

At the same time, more and more research is suggesting that students learn best in relationship. (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004) As such, school climate, connection and engagement also require focused attention.

Schools face a plethora of new programs and initiatives aimed at improving performance for all of these areas. In many ways, this simply continues long-standing cycles of new programs and initiatives, sometimes resulting in an attitude of “this too shall pass” for some teachers and staff who may resist new initiatives.

There may be fatigue due to seeing initiatives come and go while perceiving teachers are being trusted less and less to know and do what is best for the children and youth in their classrooms. RP may therefore be perceived as just another initiative.

While all schools experience these common elements, each school interacts with the larger structures and institutions of the U.S. education system in its own unique way, and has its own building-specific culture. Employees and community members will be in the best position to tell you about their school and some of the specific strengths and concerns related to school climate.
In summary, trainers considering new partnerships with schools or those encouraging schools to more widely embrace restorative practices should approach their work with humility, acknowledging the many competing pressures on their partners within the schools. Only a small but growing number of school personnel have had any real exposure to, much less training in, restorative practices. In fact, a restorative framework may be completely new to many people – this is not and has not been the way our culture naturally interacts or responds to harm whether in school or in the broader community.

“Remember that a restorative framework may be completely new to many people. This is not and has not been the way our culture naturally interacts or responds to harm.”

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**Ask Questions to Get to Know the School**

- What are you most proud of? What are your biggest challenges?
- What programs and initiatives are happening here?
- What are the school-wide positive behavior expectations?
- In what ways are the values of youth voice and equity integrated into the school environment?
- Do you talk about your school as a community? Why or why not?
- What are the school’s formal and informal rules regarding bullying and harassment?
- What are the norms and expectations about micro-aggressions (everyday intentional and unintentional verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to people based solely upon their marginalized group membership) and what to do with them?
This guide is aimed at community-based RP practitioners who want to transform the role they play in partnership with schools from outside expert practitioner to facilitator, trainer and coach. While many community-school partnerships exist related to RP, it is less common to find partnerships which are strategically focused on building the school’s capacity to improve all aspects of school climate via deeply embedded restorative practices.

For this reason, we refer to community-based RP trainers rather than practitioners and encourage trainers to approach this work as someone accompanying a school on a journey towards a more relational school climate, alternating between roles as a facilitator, trainer and professional development coach as needed. As such, community-based RP trainers should be regularly engaged in reflecting on their own knowledge, skills and practices, to ensure they are accurately representing what they can provide to their school partners and reaching out to the broader community of RP allies as needed to compliment skills or seek out additional resources.

Trainers working with schools for the first time, as well as those with extensive experience in schools, will find multiple useful resources in this guide. We divide this resource into five sections to guide you as you accompany schools on their journey to implement restorative practices.

**Section One: Implementation Science Overview**

The guide begins with a brief overview of Implementation Science. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) encourages school districts to use Implementation Science as a process to slow the cycle of new initiatives in schools which gives schools and districts sufficient time to fully consider which initiatives fit best for them. Using the Implementation Science process also helps schools and districts implement initiatives such as Restorative Practices in an intentional way to ensure sustainability.

Section Two: Training to Explore and Understand RP
Section two presents ideas for how practitioners can work with schools to help them fully explore and understand restorative practices. Many of these practices might be used with a group of key decision makers to explore whether restorative practices should be adopted, and again in training the broader school community once a decision is made to begin installation of RP throughout their building or district. A restorative framework can represent a large shift in the way people think about the roles of school, school climate and school discipline. Taking the time to fully understand the values and underpinning philosophy of restorative practices is essential for sustainable and school-wide adoption.

Section Three: Training Successful and Effective School-based RP Practitioners
Section three provides you with guidance for training successful and effective RP practitioners in schools. Rather than organizing this section by practice (e.g., circles, conferences), we organized the section based on two primary aims of RP in schools: building community and repairing harm. We organized the section in this way to emphasize the importance of sustainably establishing practices within each area. Many community-based RP experts begin their work with schools by being called in to repair harm. While doing this important work, we encourage both you and the schools you work with to find time to learn about and incorporate community building practices if there is a desire to effectively shift school climate. As more community building practices are effectively adopted, the need to repair harm should diminish. Key practices for each area are shared, along with specific guidance for training, ensuring all people feel supported and resources related to each practice.

Section Four: Evaluation
In this section, we offer ideas for districts or schools to consider when evaluating a community-based trainer’s work with schools as well as how to guide schools in planning for an evaluation of their restorative practices work. We do not offer a comprehensive guide for evaluating, as that has been published elsewhere by MDE.

Section 5: Conclusion
This section includes the conclusion, bibliography and Appendix A.
Community-based trainers should be familiar with implementation science as an important foundational concept that affects sustainability of new approaches, initiatives and programs with schools or other institutions.

While additional information is available in the implementation manual that accompanies this trainer’s guide, the basic framework is based on sustainability and the reality that, too often, new initiatives come and go before they are truly established and bear fruit.

This may happen for a variety of reasons such as when new approaches are championed by a single person who changes jobs or the new approaches depend on unstable funding streams. Implementation science is designed to support schools in implementing and sustaining evidence-based practices.

The Minnesota Department of Education encourages school districts to use implementation science as a process to slow the cycle of new initiatives and to spend sufficient time to fully consider which initiatives are the best fit for their school districts and then to implement the initiatives in an intentional way to ensure sustainability.
Table One gives a brief overview of the stages of implementation, a process which generally takes two to five years, and it includes the possible roles of the trainer at each stage. A key resource to learn more about implementation science is the Active Implementation Hub. ([http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/](http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/))

**Table One: Stages of Implementation and Related Roles of the Community-Based Trainer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Trainer Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Decision to commit to adopting and enacting the processes and procedures required to support implementation of restorative practices with fidelity.</td>
<td>Facilitator, Trainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation</td>
<td>Training staff and setting up infrastructure required to successfully implement restorative practices. Involvement of students, staff and families. Development of a core group or team to plan, implement and collect data.</td>
<td>Facilitator, Trainer, Coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Implementation</td>
<td>Adoption of restorative practices into all systems within the school. Staff members are actively engaged in the practices. Students and families are knowledgeable about practices and active participants. Clear evidence of restorative practices is visible. Data collection is ongoing.</td>
<td>Trainer, Coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Implementation</td>
<td>Data has been collected and reviewed with all stakeholders. Ongoing professional development for all staff. Benefits are present. Adjustments are made as needed.</td>
<td>Coach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Given that RP may represent a large shift in the school climate based on a new way of being in relationship, school-wide Restorative Practices’ implementation ideally includes modeling, vulnerability and willingness to change on the part of school administrators and all adults in the school.

Therefore, school administrators and staff will want to consider the importance of peer coaching and professional learning communities as a critical feature of implementation during the exploration phase. Ideas for incorporating ongoing professional learning communities are included throughout this guide.

Implementation also ideally includes engaging stakeholders such as students, families and other community members. Many resources are available for familiarizing and training families and community members on RP and what RP will look and feel like to their students in school.

Organizational resources are often already available in communities such as county Restorative Justice facilitators and cultural resources including elders, who have had experience with indigenous restorative processes. Students should be introduced to and taught about restorative practices so they understand what will happen, what new practices they will experience and why and how discipline responses will change at their school.

Beginning Where You Are
Despite the linear and logical process of implementation science, most community-based RP trainers won’t begin relationships with schools when the schools are considering school-wide adoption of RP. Rather, schools will call you in as an expert to repair harm or to address other crises and develop relationships with individuals in diverse roles. In such cases, you may end up training teachers or other school staff based on particular interests.

Richard Hendry with SACRO, a Scottish community justice organization, has developed tools to facilitate small-to-large scale RP adoption plans. While it is a slightly different model than implementation science, it represents a similar idea: using a strategic and intentional process aimed at enhancing the likelihood of sustainability.

Students should be introduced to and taught about restorative practices so they understand what will happen, what new practices they will experience and why and how discipline responses will change at their school.
Wherever and however you begin your work with schools, we encourage you to consider the implementation science stages and move intentionally toward school-wide adoption. The process may be cyclical in the same way Restorative Practices are, as seen in this figure. Restorative Practices to build community help prevent the need to repair harm and create the skills and relationship to be able to effectively repair harm. At the same time, using Restorative Practices to repair harm increases the sense of belonging to the school community. Similarly, small groups of school staff using restorative practices may go through a micro-level the process of implementation science. While they are mastering implementation, they may be engaging with a growing number of colleagues who are at the exploration stage and they all feed off each other’s efforts and help each other grow their restorative practices and engagement skills.

Figure 1
Two school-based RP trainers described how this approach might work:

“You being with organic pockets of [RP], plus a coordinator whose job it is to do the logistics, plus a building-level expert who can model it and be a first responder and a coach. But also then, from above, people who live in a restorative way and model board meetings and conversations in the elevator on RP, and that really builds the trust.”

“One thing that has worked: I just model it in my own classroom. Then my colleagues go for training because they see how it changed the kids in my room. It grew to my hallway and to two new grades. And then the kids start to demand it when they go into a new classroom that doesn’t use it, because it feels like they’ve lost their voice.

It’s not about adding one more thing to a teacher’s plate; it’s about how their kids are feeling. So kids are demanding it, and telling their teachers about it and then the teachers come and ask me.

The sustainability came when [our] equity [department] found the money to pay for a substitute teacher for me three times per year. You get that core going because it’s what’s best for kids, not because someone is making them do it.

And you almost have to have an expert in every building, not just a district-wide coordinator. You need an internal person who BELIEVES [RP] changes us. But it still takes years of modeling it. And the credibility comes from someone who does it within the building, not just from someone who comes in and trains staff.”

“I just model it in my own classroom. Then my colleagues go for training because they see how it changed the kids in my room. It grew to my hallway and to two new grades. And then the kids start to demand it when they go into a new classroom.”
Tracking Progress of RP Adoption
As you work with school partners to consider moving from individuals implementing RP to more wide-spread adoption, readiness assessments may help inform initial strategies for implementation. Assessments can provide evidence about the level of openness to cultural and relational change among different school stakeholders (Hendry, 2009; MDE, 2012).

In addition, learning communities of staff can track progress within their settings by using the following indicators of school-wide adoption:

• School expectations and values incorporate a restorative approach and are made explicit across the school as well as in the school’s policies.
• A clear system of RP is implemented and applied consistently across the school.
• Explicit links exist between implementation of RP and desired outcomes regarding student engagement and achievement.
• The compatibility of RP with other current developments and initiatives

As you work with school partners to consider moving from individuals implementing RP to more widespread adoption, readiness assessments may help inform initial strategies for implementation.
is analyzed.

• All adults in the school have a clear understanding of the principles and processes of RP and the relevance of RP to the learning community.

• Exploration activities with new groups include open and critical discussion of the effectiveness of traditional punitive models for dealing with misbehavior.

• All adults recognize that RP involves values, skills and processes, and is not just a set of intervention techniques.

• There is positive modeling, direction and commitment of RP by school management (Hendry, 2009)

• Team meetings are regularly conducted in circle.

• RP is used to build community and resolve conflict between staff members as well as between students and between students and staff (Hendry, 2009).

• Staff members recognize the effectiveness of RP in their school and actively work on developing their skills and understanding.

• Professional staff development is targeted to individual, department and school needs; resources and time are invested regularly to support RP.

• Staff members show a high level of competency and skill, actively seeking feedback to improve their confidence and practice.

• The school works toward achieving a critical mass of trained staff, including:
  • Staff that use community building practices
  • Staff that can facilitate restorative chats/conversations
  • Staff that can repair harm
  • Community experts/practitioners who we can call to repair harm
  • Restorative Practices are regularly assessed for quality and evaluated for effectiveness.

• The wider school community is introduced to RP and regularly informed of RP initiatives and developments.

• There is a well-developed consistent RP orientation and training process for staff, students and families.

• Students are actively involved in the restorative approach and understand their role in it. All indicators used in the previous list are adapted from Mark Corrigan (2014) except those otherwise noted.
Section Two: Training to Explore and Understand RP

When moving from being the expert community practitioner to a trainer and coach, who is helping schools create a restorative school climate, multiple stakeholders need to be introduced to and understand RP within the school context.

Next, we outline the key concepts to include in these facilitated conversations and trainings, along with relevant training ideas and guidance for ensuring people feel comfortable and supported. It’s important to take into account the identities, developmental stages and abilities of people during preparation for implementing RP. This section also includes additional resources related to each concept. When specific activities are named under training ideas, these activities can be found in Section Five. Practitioner stories are included after each key concept to provide applied illustrations of this work.

Key Concept: Understanding the School’s Current Context and Readiness to Change

- Assess current school climate and whether there is a desire for change
- Experience RP through being in circle.
- Build understanding of RP and of what it could do for a school.

Training Ideas: Possible Activities/Approaches

- Use circle to explore current school climate.
- Use circle to begin developing values important to RP at this school (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015).
- Conduct readiness assessment and/or school climate surveys (MDE, 2012; MDE, 2015). Then use circle to interpret and make decisions about needs.
Potential Questions to Explore in Circle

- How are we doing?
- How do we know?
- What are we going to do now?
- What is the purpose for learning about RP?
- What is the vision of this school and is RP an appropriate way to get there?
- Are there practices in place to build on?
- What are the most serious problems that need to be addressed?
- Does anything need to be addressed before RP can be introduced?
- What need is there to build and enhance relationships and connection between and among students and staff and between the school and the community/families?
Ensuring People Feel Comfortable and Supported

Be sure you are familiar with school vocabulary.

Ask someone from the school to inform you about common abbreviations used, recent initiatives and other history that might surface in discussions.

In preparation, gather information about the school’s hierarchy and relationships between the people who will be in circle. For circle to truly be effective, it is important that the participants are guided and allowed to “get real.”

Eventually, circle should elicit real values, real beliefs and make the connection between behavior and beliefs. This requires establishment of a safe space to allow the true self and the real issues to emerge so the solutions are real. That is a gradual process and doesn’t often happen in the first circle. Preparation helps you know how to get there.

Probe participants to ensure they are considering and collecting data from all students and all families when assessing current climate.

Trainer Role

As a community-based RP trainer, you serve as circle keeper and facilitator and help the school consider whether to do a full RP needs assessment.

When?

Use with Exploration Team.

Resources

- Multiple examples of circles for this stage in “Circle Forward” by Carolyn Boyes-Watson and Kay Pranis.

Practitioner Story

“In an early exploratory circle with a school, one participant said: “I don’t share my feelings.” As circle progressed, I was able to facilitate in a way that acknowledged that the participant did share feelings through this statement and other non-verbal communication. I was also able to thank that participant for engaging with the process while not requiring additional verbal articulation of feelings.”
Key Concept: Key Principles of RP

RP is a way of being in and restoring relationship with others. It allows values of youth voice and equity to be at the center of school climate. The approach is often described through guiding principles. Different authors have described these principles as:

- People are happier, more cooperative, more productive and more likely to make positive changes when those in positions of authority do things WITH them rather than TO them or FOR them (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2009)

- Human beings are relational and thrive in contexts of social engagement. (Morrison, 2007)

- Social justice and fair process (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2005)

- Misbehavior and harm can be addressed in a way that strengthens relationships (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2005)

Other examples of RP principles are:

- Seven Core Assumptions for circle including that the true self in everyone is good, wise and powerful.” (Watson & Pranis, 2015)

- Positive relationships are possible and essential, even with challenging students; there needs to be equal attention to students who are harmed and those who have harmed.

- Rather than a focus on which rule was broken, who is to blame and what the punishment should be, RP asks what happened, who was affected and how, and what needs to be done to put things right.

- Accountability is achieved not through punishment and isolation but through understanding impact, repairing harm and restoration. (Berkowitz, n.d.)
Training Ideas: Possible Activities/Approaches

• Share the principles and definitions of RP and then continue or begin developing values important to RP at this school in circle (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015, p. 62). Values need to come from the group and be organic to the group.

• “Welcome and Values Circle.”

• Read a list of values in circle and ask the group to respond with reactions/reflections. If group is having trouble defining values, use example lists of values included as a handout with “Welcome and Values Circle.”

• “Four-Corners” activity to assess level of agreement with principles.

• “Our Own Experiences” activity to reflect on own experience with school and whether RP principles would represent an improvement.

• “How Restorative Am I” activity to reflect on personal practice and communication skills.

• Mini circle with four rounds done quickly, and then explain how each one was a stage in circle. It shows participants that circle can be done quickly, makes the point of the four stages and shows how much bonding happens during circle.

Potential Questions to Explore in Circle

• Now that you have heard some about RP principles, what difference do you think it would make to adopt RP in this school?

• What questions do you have about RP? In what ways are you skeptical?

• Read the practitioner stories in this section aloud. Ask participants to reflect on what happened and what they identify with.

Ensuring People Feel Comfortable and Supported

Consider building into comfort with RP. For example, with the circle center, build the center piece slowly from day-to-day or week-to-week as work happens together.

Consider how to help school staff reflect on why they got into the field of education in the first place. Is it true that they:

• Like children/youth?
• Want to be in relationship with children/youth?
• Want to honor the whole child and not just the learner?
Spend additional time reflecting on this for high school teachers. The older the student, the more content-focused teaching is.

School staff might be better at talking about what they don’t want for their school than what they do want. As you get to know them, consider whether it might be helpful to introduce new ways of thinking. For example, ask: “can we put more focus on building values of respect, dignity, etc., and less focus on “bullying”? Can we talk about and model peace, and compassion, tolerance and thriving… what we WANT to experience and see?”

Teachers are often hungry for “nuts and bolts.” Remember to explain the why of the practices as you are modeling them.

**Trainer Role**
Circle keeper, facilitator, trainer and coach.

**Coaching strategy**
Create an exploratory professional learning community that does circles every month for one school year using this circle process: check-in; quick story based on last time; 10 minute reading about RP; 15 minute circle reflection on what stood out, what do you do, what do you want to do and close with one thing I will do.

**When?**
Use with Exploration Team and when doing introductory workshops for all staff.

**Resources and References**
- Multiple examples of circles for this stage and the seven core assumptions in “Circle Forward” by Carolyn Boyes-Watson and Kay Pranis.
- Other resources can be found on MDE’s Restorative Practices web pages.
Practitioners’ Stories

“I had a probation officer in a circle with two of the kids on his case load. He had been trained in RP and was a big supporter of it, but he didn’t “get” the power thing. After a couple circles, the two boys finally felt safe enough to be more real -- and though they were being a bit obnoxious -- they had presented a perfect teachable moment. Rather than using this teachable moment, the probation officer chose to kick them out of the circle. I have heard of teachers and principals having done things like this too. This PO understood some of the logistics involved in doing circle, but he didn’t get the “heart” of what it means to do circle.”

“Students in our school didn’t care about rules. So we focused on building community and they began to care if they harmed someone. So for us, it isn’t about the discipline, but changing the mindset with the kids and the staff, focusing on that we are a community and intervention is about repairing the harm. And forgiving is about you moving on, not about saying what they did was OK.”

“I’ve been challenged by staff about the harm part, with people telling me, “These kids are just saying this to get us off their back.” I tell them the kids have to be taught these skills. So that’s part of that relational mindset. Is it more important for students to be punished or to have a chance to try to identify their feelings, the actions that followed and be given a chance to repair harm? It may not be perfect every time but I do believe this is an ongoing process to build social emotional skills in young people based on real situations that they otherwise wouldn’t get.”

“I started this in my school as the lone champion. Little by little, teachers started asking me about it. Students who moved from a restorative classroom to a teacher who didn’t use circle in the classroom started to demand it, so the teachers would ask me and I’d work with them to model and build their skills. But, eventually, I realized the teachers and staff and everyone really needs that philosophy. They developed some skills but never looked at the principles of what does it mean, look like, sound like and feel like? It got to a point that I wouldn’t start any new strategies or skills until I knew everyone in the building understood that underlying philosophy. Because if I don’t do that, then if I leave, RP will fizzle out.”
Key Concept: Essential Elements of Restorative Practices in Schools

What RP is and Looks Like in Schools

Schools that implement RP incorporate practices to:

• Build community and healthy relationships.

• Reduce and prevent harmful behavior.

• Repair harm and resolve conflict in a way that restores positive relationships.

• Address and discuss the needs of the school community (National Opportunity to Learn Campaign, 2014).

Therefore, RP in schools:

• Is about nurturing community, not controlling behavior.

• Pays equal attention to person who did harm as person harmed; it becomes natural to express concern for person who does harm.

• Is about school climate, not just school discipline.

• Requires involvement and buy-in of both staff and students and ideally families and community.

• Results in improved classroom climate, fewer disciplinary referrals and more instructional time (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2009; Gregory A, under review).

Training Ideas: Possible Activities/Approaches

• Essential elements: Which practice? When? By Whom? For what purpose?

• Ask versus Tell: Developing effective questions.

• If there are several people present who are experienced in RP, do a “fishbowl” circle in which the experienced people discuss in circle how a traditional school climate compares to a restorative climate, including differences in the approach to discipline. Other participants stand behind and observe circle. Ask circle participants what RP looks like, feels like and sounds like.
Potential Questions to Explore in Circle

- What are the biggest ways this would shift how this school currently functions?

- Are there ways in which the school already functions restoratively? Is that the case for all students?

- How does this quote apply: “When human connections are solidly in place, it is always easier to transition to a state of social order?”

Some people will come at this comparing RP to other traditional school discipline approaches, but it must also be emphasized as a school climate approach.

Ensuring People Feel Comfortable and Supported

Remember to explain the why of the practices as you are modeling them. Ask teachers to begin thinking together about how these elements would look in first grade versus sixth grade versus ninth grade.

Respond to Early Misperceptions

**Myth #1: RP is Too Soft/Lets Person Who Harms Off Easy**

After initial training or exposure, some people may have the perception that the process is about bringing kids together, having a chat, forcing an apology and sending them away to do it again.

Dispel this myth by emphasizing the three elements of any fair process:

- Engagement
- Explanation
- Expectation Clarity

The third element (expectation clarity) is one we too often forget. Establishing the new standards clearly AND the agreement that will be deployed is critical.

This misperception is also based on the view that breaking rules is the offense and punishment and consequence is the necessary response. When harm is the offense and repair of harm is the response, follow-up can be actually much harder because emotions are engaged (Real Schools, 2015).
*Myth #2: It Takes too Long.*

No it doesn’t. Restorative responses are often guided by one of the many versions of Restorative questions. But they are not a script in 99 percent of the instances in which we address student behavior. They are a guide. Interventions can often happen more quickly than you think when carried out by skilled practitioners (Real Schools, 2015).

*Myth #3: RP is too ‘Touchy-Feely.’*

RP is actually touchy-feely in that real relationships are at the heart of everything that is a part of RP. But in many ways, RP is more developmentally appropriate for school settings with children as opposed to other approaches that focus on abstract concepts such as rules and right/wrong. An RP community and response is much more concrete in expressing how a specific action made someone feel and what can be done to repair harm.

**Trainer Role**

Circle keeper, facilitator, trainer and coach.

*Coaching strategy:* Create a professional learning community that does circles every month for one school year. Circle process: check-in; quick story based on last time; 10 minute reading about RP; 15 minute reflection on what stood out to you, what do you do, what do you want to do; close with one thing I will do.

**When?**

Use with Exploration Team and during introductory workshops for all staff

**Resources**

Multiple examples of circles for this stage in “Circle Forward” by Carolyn Boyes Watson and Kay Pranis.

**Practitioners’ Stories**

*Because RP comes from Restorative Justice, it has often moved into schools as a disciplinary practice. For example, RP often enters schools through partnerships with community practitioners who come in to respond to incidents and facilitate practices to repair harm. However, this process can fail to acknowledge that restorative approaches emerged from communities where identity and belonging to the community were of paramount importance.*
So, restorative practices would seem to work best within strong communities. When schools begin their engagement with RP by using it as a response to discipline incidents, it creates a risk that students will experience RP as a place where their voice is heard, but then return to a larger climate in which they still feel alienated. So schools may repair harm, but future harm is not prevented as effectively. Thus, community building really is an essential part of a school’s implementation of RP."

"I did a series of circles with a team of teachers at the request of the principal. The team had had a serious relationship breakdown amongst them centered mostly on one teacher ...

...The circles were successful and the following year the principal let me know they were a transformed team from the previous year."

"Thus, community building really is an essential part of a school’s implementation of RP.”
Other Key Information about RP in Schools

• Restorative practices are experiential and can be embedded into any context, including teaching content in a classroom, staff development, etc...

• RP is a process of ongoing learning. Practice is the best teacher. We do RP well when we have learned it deeply. After your initial training, get started and always keep assessing, learning and improving, ideally in partnership with an experienced practitioner.

• RP is traditionally done without concern for time. It takes as long as it takes. However, RP in schools brings the practices into a very time-bound system. Juggling this is an art, but strategies include knowing when a circle is not done and finding a time to continue it the next day or week.

• Assume RP is appropriate for everyone. There are many, many ways to make accommodations and adapt restorative practices. Until it is clear that you can’t make a safe space for a participant, keep exploring possibilities until you come to the right place.
Training Ideas: Possible Activities/Approaches

- Simple / Challenging / Outrageous.

- Share with participants and model that such simple practices as beginning a session with a slow breathing in to a count of four are easy to use anywhere.

- Training of RP should be experiential, but remember in a training of trainers to always clearly explain the thinking behind a given practice, either before or after you walk people through it. You might introduce an activity by saying, ‘here’s why we do this practice…’ (e.g., maybe for safety or comfort); or ‘this is important because people learn best in relationship.’

- Once group has fundamental concepts down, role playing is the best activity. Draw on your own experiences or the practitioner stories shared here, and practice with three to four scenarios that are likely to happen at a school. Come up with strategies about how to deal with time and timing.

- Identify sources of support and ongoing learning for each new practitioner.
Ensuring People Feel Comfortable and Supported

Teachers and other staff who will be building their own restorative practice repertoire need ongoing support meetings. Explore with school administration and staff how to incorporate peer coaching and Professional Learning Communities into the implementation process. If teachers meet regularly in circle, they are that much more comfortable using circle for diverse purposes in their classrooms.

Transforming whole-school culture to being restorative eventually must include administration support of the staff and engagement with both the staff and the students. Continue to explore whether and how to improve staff relationships.

Work to ensure humility in RP practitioners. Early adopters may think they have mastered skills but complete competence is unlikely for most people. Stories of people who have experienced crimes of severe violence may help re-establish how powerfully and deeply RP can be practiced.

Work to explore and build the belief that no matter who was harmed and who did the harm, you can consider RP for them. No one should assume a ‘no’ about anyone and you should explore ways of working until it is clear that you can’t make a safe space. For instance, the book “Restorative Practices and Special Needs” provides guidance on using Restorative Practices with people who have cognitive and other disabilities.
Trainer Role
Circle keeper, facilitator, coach, trainer

When?
Training and Preparation workshops. Ongoing Professional Learning Community.

Resources
“Circle in the Square” by Nancy Riestenberg

Consider having a Peace Room which serves as a hub for circles and other restorative practices, interventions and continual learning.

Consider having an informal circle request sheet, sometimes called a “Circle-up” form for students to ask for circles. These can be half sheets of paper that students fill out indicating 1) what circle will be about, 2) who should join and 3) when (today, tomorrow, or right now).

Practitioners’ Stories
“The lack of preparation and casual attitudes on the part of the facilitator/keeper can ruin a circle. A new colleague was called in to run a circle for a situation in which a class had treated a substitute teacher horribly and subsequently some kids were suspended and the whole thing had blown up. Although the circle keeper had been trained, they had never taken circle preparation seriously. They prepared only by gathering materials but had not met with any of the participants (students) parents, nor the teacher(s) or the admin and circle was going to be held over a 40-minute class period.

Students were arriving swaggering with attitudes, rude comments and gestures, and circle keeper had no idea who the kids were, or what the situation was. Circle keeper had no script but was going to simply open circle, do a values exercise, do guidelines and then pass the piece and let them talk.

I was there as an experienced circle keeper for support and sensed at once that it was going to be a very volatile situation. The substitute teacher arrived and the kids began to harass him. The administrator didn’t show up. I went in and dismissed the students back to class, talked at length with the substitute and the admin person who arrived late. We made a plan as to how it could be handled. I shudder to think what would have come down and the bad rap circle would have gotten. PREPARATION! So important! It is key! Especially if the purpose of the circle is dealing with harm!”
Section Three: Training Successful and Effective School-Based RP Practitioners

Once school personnel have a functional understanding of RP and how it can be incorporated into a school, they are ready to begin developing the skills to effectively facilitate Restorative Practices.

In many frameworks, these practices are divided into three tiers of support: Tier 1 as universal practices; Tier 2 as targeted interventions; and Tier 3 as intensive interventions. However, because we believe these practices are not only targeted at students and student behavior, but are applicable within and between all stakeholder groups in the school, we have instead chosen to categorize them into two main categories: building community and repairing harm.

This decision is also based on the premise that Restorative Practices work best when there is a strong and connected relationship to which people who have caused harm can be restored.

This section is not a comprehensive guide for training on all RP skills. It assumes trainers are already skilled in the practices. This section is intended to provide you with guidance for planning trainings and considering how best to incorporate the practices into a school setting.

Next we will outline key knowledge and practices for building community, along with relevant training ideas, guidance for ensuring people feel comfortable and supported, additional resources related to each concept. We also focus on practices for repairing harm. It’s important to take into account the identities, developmental stages and abilities of people during preparation for implementing RP. Anecdotes from experienced practitioners in Minnesota are included to provide applied examples.

Restorative Practices work best when there is a strong and connected relationship to which people who have caused harm can be restored.
Building Community: Key Knowledge and Practices

Key Concept: Community Building Circles

- **What?** A formal process which includes preparation, intentional seating arrangements and plan scripts facilitated by a trained adult in an appropriate setting with a sufficient amount of time.

- **When?** Morning ritual in class, staff meetings, teaching content, to deal with or process crises, integration/leaving circles, decision-making, dialogue, problem-solving circles

- **Why?** To build community, relationships, social emotional skills and relationship skills

- **Who?** Circle keeper and all those needed as participants.
Training Ideas: Possible Activities/Approaches

• “Talking Piece Circle”

• “Compassionate Schools Principles Circle”

• Model a circle, including four quadrants and explain each step before or after you do it, including the why of each component (talking piece, arrangement) and quadrant.

• Include some level of history of circles.

• Uses such as morning ritual, teaching, problem solving and how to use circle for each use.

Potential Community Building Circles:

• Continue working with values, encouraging teachers to do a values circle in each room, post values and teach them over and over again. Sometimes the circle is, ‘When did you do this today, what does it look like?’ or ‘Which of the values do you like the most today?’ or ‘Share a time when you had a teacher treat you in a manner that embodied or illustrated one of the values.’

• Pass the talking piece, holding it until you feel your silence is heard. It promotes quiet and calm. A good follow up is, “how did you know your silence was heard?” This circle helps teach the power of silence and the emotional connection to each other when listening and no one is speaking. You learn to quiet yourself.

• Build practice for everyday use. Everybody is present after a check-in circle, including students entering a class period, so the slow stuff has to be there.
Ensuring People Feel Comfortable and Supported

• Kindergarten can be a two-word circle or something like, “What is your favorite word that begins with the letter ‘J’?” The circle is about ensuring students know their voice is important.

• Circles for elementary: give students something to write on or squeeze to help with being fidgety – don’t expect them to sit and be quiet right away. They have to learn that.

• Peers begin to emerge as really important in early adolescence (about fifth grade). Prior to that, social development is very egocentric so circles should ask about own experiences, feelings, etc...

• When using circle in a middle school setting, stay open to students’ needs to respond to each other in circle such as allowing some measure of cross talk, as long as it stays positive because middle schoolers live in the moment and there are many cultural communication styles to consider. At the same time, work to reinforce honoring the talking piece, but do not worry too much when it doesn’t happen.

• Circles at culturally-specific and multi-cultural schools are working well, as the practices and core values are universal.

 Trainer Role
Circle keeper, facilitator, coach, trainer

 When?
Training and Preparation workshops. Ongoing professional learning community.

 Resources
Multiple examples of circles for teaching, building community, social and emotional learning, and more as described in in “Circle Forward” by Carolyn Boyes Watson and Kay Pranis.
Practitioners’ Stories

“One common circle exercise that I have done with both students and adults in ongoing training and in circles is the identifying your values exercise. But, I take it up a few notches.

Once we share the value(s) we’ve selected as being important, ways we wish to “show up” in our relationships, work, school, etc., I ask them to consider what they believe to be true that makes that value important to them. Sometimes they have a difficult time at first figuring out how to do this, or what it is that they believe. The value of coaxing them through this exercise is that it makes them consider more deeply and realistically why being “honest” or “nice” or “respectful” is important to them.

Too often we are simply parroting or spitting out the thing we are supposed to be like or want others to be like. But I don’t stop there—especially with adults. After they finally identify what they believe to be true about the world, or life, that makes their value important to them, I ask them to think of a time when they did NOT show up behaving in accordance with this value. I give them time to think of a situation. Then I ask them to consider what it is they believe(d) to be true in that situation that made it okay for them to not live by their own values. What was going on? What is so excellent about this part of the exercise is that it makes them be more realistic about their own behavior—and more compassionate about the ways others behave negatively.”
Key Concept: Communicating Restoratively in School

- **What?** An informal process which includes active listening, respectful non-verbal communication and restorative language through affective statements to convey unconditional respect in all interactions with students, taking care not to trigger shame or humiliation.

- **When?** As an immediate response to misbehavior and as a general way of being in relationship.

- **Why?** To teach empathy. Regular use of restorative communication is important because it builds the skills of students to recognize their feelings thereby increasing communication and social skills. Students who can describe how they are feeling can connect feelings with real life situations.

- **Who?** Adults and all who have learned restorative language. Students will also begin to use this language among each other which should be encouraged.

**Training Ideas: Possible Activities/Approaches**

Articulate the following process for talking restoratively:

- The invitation: “Can we talk?”

- The observation/see it, say it: “I see [the behavior] and I wonder what is going on.”

- Affective statement articulating how the behavior makes a person feel.
Continue with Asking the Restorative Questions

**Questions for person who did harm:**

- “What happened?”
- “What were you thinking about/feeling at the time?”
- “What have you thought about/felt since the incident?”
- “Who do you think has been affected by your actions?”
- “How have they been affected?”

**Questions for person harmed:**

- “What was your reaction at the time of the incident?”
- “How do you feel about what happened?”
- “What has been the hardest thing for you?”
- “How did your family and friends react when they heard about the incident?”

**Assess stress level of student as needed**

- “Simple / Challenging / Outrageous” Simple Challenging Outrageous is a training activity designed to prompt discussions about the seriousness of behavior in schools, the possible range of discipline responses and the usefulness of prevention and early intervention. The Restorative Practices Trainer’s Guide Example Activities booklet which accompanies this guide includes more information on this and other the other activities referenced throughout the guide.

- “Keeping the Small Things Small”

- “Positive and Negative Comments Observations”

- “Effective Listening - the 80:20 dialogue”

These training exercises increase skill levels in identifying and responding to common situations in schools using affective language and good listening skills. In turn, this builds staff ability to manage as much as they can in the classroom because that is where the relationship is.
Ensuring People Feel Comfortable and Supported

Early Elementary

• I felt so happy when you shared your experience with the class.

• I felt so proud when I saw how brave you were.

• I felt so sad when you hurt your friend.

• I feel frustrated when people are talking while I’m trying to teach.

• I felt really unhappy when you shouted out on the carpet.

• At age seven or eight, introduce more complex emotions like confusion and excitement.

• Has anyone ever talked while you were talking? How did that make you feel?

• Consider modeling for parents a restorative approach with children

• It is very important to keep students in classroom at this age to build on relationship and because behaviors are less egregious.

Late Elementary and Middle School

• How do you think it made your friend feel when you…?

• Social skills are different than relationship skills. As peers emerge as important, use RP to help reflect on and build relationship skills, as middle schools can now understand the components of a caring relationship.
High School

- Are often ready to experience RP with minimal adaptations, though trusting relationships are key along with respect and privacy.
- Abstract thought is developing and cause-effect relationships are better understood, despite continuing challenges with impulse control.
- Begin incorporating opportunities for more peer-to-peer RP.

**Trainer Role**
Facilitator, coach, trainer.

**When?**
Training and preparation workshops and ongoing professional learning community.

**Resources**
Restorative Questions, such as promoted by IIRP and others: (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2012)

**Practitioners’ Stories**
*I often change vocabulary and use examples to help younger children (or even teens) understand. For example, when talking about “respect”, I will ask, “When someone treats you in a way where you feel respected, what are they doing?” Answers even from little kids are usually variations on being listened to.*

**Repairing Harm: Key Knowledge and Practices**

**Key Concept: Restorative Chats/Impromptu Conferencing**

**Restorative Chats/Impromptu Conferencing**
What? A relatively informal interaction facilitated by an adult, lasting as little as two minutes, in which students have a chance to acknowledge and discuss the impact of their actions.

When? Minor harm by an individual that causes generalized harm (or potential harm) to others – disruptive or rule breaking behaviors, or when two individuals of equal power are engaging in disrespectful behavior without a clear victim.

Why? Help person who harmed identify emotions, recognize link between emotions and actions, understand impact of behavior and avoid similar behavior in future.

Who? Adult “in charge” and one to two children involved.
Training Ideas: Possible Activities/Approaches

Ensure All Adults Know the Restorative Questions

• What happened?

• What were you thinking of/feeling at the time?

• What have you thought about since?

• Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?

• What do you think you need to do to make things right?

• (Thorseborne and Vinegrad, 2009)

Practice by using scenarios in the practitioner stories sections. Build additional skills by role playing when the questions aren’t working. Practice these additional questions:

• What is the right/best thing or wrong/worst thing to do now?

• What exactly are you sorry for?

• Was it fair or unfair?

• Was it your intention to hurt?

• Or say: you didn’t answer my question.

• (Thorseborne and Vinegrad, 2009)
Ensuring People Feel Comfortable and Supported

In restorative chats to repair harm (after a fight or argument), sometimes it is best for the adult to review what happened and then offer participants a chance to add to or correct the summary.

If each student is asked to tell their whole story, we risk re-triggering the disagreement and/or being there all day as they retrace the long and winding road. Friendships and disagreements both are fleeting, especially at elementary and middle school ages, and it is sometimes best to highlight what is happening at that very moment and roll with it.

In contrast, for students in high school, the process of telling the story increases perspective-taking and empathy skills. Not until about age 13 do youth begin to have good capacity to understand their own feelings and analyze why they feel a certain way.

**Trainer Role**

Circle keeper, facilitator, trainer and coach.

**When?**

Ongoing professional learning community.

**Resources**

For a longer, step-by-step description of Restorative Chat see “Restorative Justice Pocketbook” by Margaret Thorsborne and David Vinegrad.

**Practitioners’ Stories**

“I sometimes have decided to do restorative chats for real violent situations and I’ve had to stop them and go back to the pre-meeting, and then use a conference or circle. So it is an art to know when to use a restorative chat or when to stop one and arrange for something else.”
Key Concept: Circles or Conferences to Repair Harm

Circle

A planned process with intentional seating arrangements and scripts, facilitated by a trained adult in an appropriate setting with sufficient amount of time.

A circle may happen multiple times and skilled Circle Keepers create an environment in which the circle is in control.

Conference

A restorative conference involves the participation of each person affected by the behavior and allows all stakeholders to contribute to the conflict resolution process. During the conference, everyone discusses what happened, how everyone has been affected, and a plan is developed detailing how to resolve the matter and prevent it from happening again.

When? Clear harm caused by individual(s) to other(s), the class or the school through a particular incident.

Why? Understand impact of actions, take responsibility and make a plan to repair harm and be restored to community and to stop the harm and avoid it in the future.

Who? Circle keeper or conference facilitator, those responsible, any people affected or harmed plus allies for all.
Training Ideas: Possible Activities/Approaches

Role Play: train for circle in circle and for conferences by role playing scenarios.

Use realistic situations, such as practitioner stories included with this section.

Emphasize preparation by training specifically on pre-meetings.

Emphasize that it has to be voluntary.

But if no one takes responsibility, you can still use conferences or circles to explore taking responsibility through the following questions:

• How have we each contributed to the situation, and how can each of us, by taking responsibility, act differently now?

• What is unspoken in the group that blocks good relationships or possible success?

• What do you think other people see as an ability or strength you need to work on?

Reflect on and brainstorm strategies related to the following quote: “In circle or conference, you create an emotionally safe space so people can talk to you about what might make them feel uncomfortable.”

Use 3 Steps and 4 Parts to Repair Harm

3 face-to-face steps:

1. Pre-meetings to prepare all participants for the meeting.
2. Conference or circle that results in an agreement reached by consensus.
3. An agreement completion meeting to assess and celebrate.

4 parts to the agreement:

• Repairing harm.
• Making a plan so that the behavior does not happen again.
• Giving back to the community.
• Support for the person harmed, the person who did the harm or any other affected person.
Ensuring People Feel Comfortable and Supported

Consider the Developmental Stage of Participants

• Questions for first graders are different than for fifth graders, etc...

• Mostly not until age nine can students begin to recognize their own thinking (‘metacognition’). This is also about when they can acknowledge others’ feelings and thoughts, and see a logical result of a hypothetical (e.g., when you treat X this way, how does that make them feel?) Prior to that stage, guide thinking by question such as, ‘how did it make you feel when someone did this to you?’ Reflections have to be focused on themselves.

• The more trauma that is present, the more time is needed to work through all of the ‘stuff’ the students may be holding.

• Give younger children time to think. Let others answer first.

• It can be helpful to discuss developmental stages, brain development, and what is normal testing of behaviors.

You never condone the harm, but you can recognize the normalcy of responses like, “I wasn’t thinking,” as being developmentally appropriate.
• Consider the identities of participants and ensure someone is there that will feel like and be an ally to the person harmed and the person who caused harm, such as other students, their friends, community mentors (volunteers) or other people from community who look like the students.

• Offer use of any languages. Include professional interpreters who are not participants. Make room for service dogs if necessary.

• If only the circle keeper doesn’t know language of the circle participants, it is OK to suspend translation as participants move into problem solving, decisions.

• Ask preferred pronoun, along with names, etc. as part of introductions.

• Include an activity with a greeting. Offer for people to do a nod, a bow, or another greeting they would like.

• A balance of students and adults in the circle will make everyone feel more welcome.

• Trust the child about who they would want their supporter to be.

• Circles can be naturally culturally competent when the right people are invited to the circle. Be sure you have inquired enough to know who needs to be invited.
**Trainer Role**
Circle keeper, facilitator, trainer and coach.

**When?**
Training and Preparation workshops. Ongoing professional learning community.

**Resources**
Multiple examples of restorative discipline, conflict and circles for serious incidents of harm are found in Modules 12 and 13 of “Circle Forward” by Carolyn Boyes Watson and Kay Pranis

“Restorative Practice in Classrooms: Rethinking Behaviour Management” by Margaret Thorsborne and David Vinegrad includes chapters on and scripts for multiple types of conferences for schools.

**Practitioners’ Stories**

“I had an incident where one girl stole a purse and and other items from another person’s locker. So we had a conference, which included the school resource officer. But unexpectedly, the father of the person who did harm, who was no longer living in the family, came unannounced to the conference. He mouthed off to the officer and was not willing to follow guidelines. So I had to close down the conference. It is my job to maintain a safe environment and it was no longer safe. The student who was harmed, though, expressed additional empathy for the person who harmed her and really wanted to conference. So with permission of adults, we were able to handle it with a follow-up meeting at school and keep it diverted.”

“Two girls were calling each other names (both online and at school) and it resulted in pushing and hitting at lunch. When asked in circle to share how this situation made them each feel, one girl said she was “fine” and did not have feelings one way or the other. The second girl took a deep breath and followed our encouragement to be authentic about her feelings. She said that she had felt embarrassed to have this happen in front of her friends as well as lots of people she didn’t know. She was emotional as she said this. The first girl was taken by surprise, appeared to lose her defensiveness and when asked if she had a response to this information, ended up apologizing almost without planning to. We haven’t heard of any issues between these two girls since then!”

“**The student who was harmed, though, expressed additional empathy for the person who harmed her and really wanted to conference.**”
“One challenging situation was in an English Learners classroom where there were lots of angry and negative interactions between students. Part of the challenge in this setting was the various languages and cultural expectations about how to communicate appropriately and the barriers this can create.

The other challenge is the reality that in settings with immigrant and refugee populations, there is often trauma in students’ life experiences. So, the goal is to have students open up in a way that lets them resonate with their similarities and honor their differences but doesn’t trigger any trauma. This is a lot of work and requires careful thought. Ongoing mindfulness strategies can help. Interpreters and cultural liaisons are also helpful.”

“We had an incident happen with a group of students of multiple races at a lunch table. A white student not at the table went up to a white friend at the table and said, ‘What are you? An [N-word] lover?’ An African American student at the table asked for clarification and threatened a fight. The white student said it again and a fight ensued. Lunch workers intervened.

I was called in to facilitate a circle. All students participated plus parents and school lunch staff (also a person of color) and principal. I prepared everyone ahead of time and did values/plates round, a practice talking piece round, and then I explained the N-word including the historical context between white and African Americans as very negative but that it now does have different meaning for some members within the African American community.

Then the circle question was ‘what does it mean for you?’ First response was from the African American student’s father who works in prison saying the word can get you killed and what he grew up with related to that word which was negative. By the time it got to person who did harm, he was extremely remorseful and made a profound and profuse apology before even talking about impact and continued that throughout circle.

Then the lunch worker shared all the terms she had been called, sharing her experience while also holding African American student accountable,
saying that you still shouldn’t use violence. So circle went well and students decided to spread some of what they learned throughout school. So it was really important in that circle to bring in parents. Even so, principal said after the circle, ‘don’t you think we could’ve gotten there faster without the parents?’ Which made me really sad, as it really didn’t acknowledge how the adult perspectives had really influenced the circle.

“I was called into respond to a situation where eighth-grade boys had been playing dodge ball and an argument had started and escalated over whether a kid had gotten hit. A fight started in a hallway and one student had hands on neck of other student after getting him down to ground. Other students pulled him off.

So the student who had hands on the neck of the other student is considered the person who harmed and the victim is the student who was on the ground. School responded by moving person who harmed out of one house and into another. The parents of the victim wanted the student who harmed charged with attempted murder and they really weren’t OK with what school did. I was told about the situation at this point and told that the victim’s story had been getting more severe all along as though he was being coached.

So we prepare. In preparation, person who harmed says he was in a rage blackout, and can’t remember. I tell the victim and family that the person who harmed is not ready to take responsibility and ask whether they wanted to go ahead and what they could expect. They said they still wanted to go ahead with circle. In circle, parents of victim are saying the person who harmed should be sent to juvenile justice. In response, a parent of a boy who helped pulled the students apart say, ‘I don’t agree with that. If that was the correct response, my brothers and I would all be in jail. My son says he doesn’t remember the hands being on the neck anyway.’

Circle went way long, and community members were really helpful. Parents of victim thanked everyone that afternoon, but the next morning parents of victim blamed me and said I told the other parent to respond in that way. They tried to report me to an ethical board and to get United Way to pull funding from my agency.

They also eventually succeeded in convincing prosecutor to file a felony charge. We were able to turn over the plan to the judge and they incorporated it into deferred prosecution. So be very cautious in situations where the perceptions seem extremely skewed. One flag I maybe missed was that they talked about RP as though it was all about the victims. Maybe I should have avoided the circle, but I also found out so much about the parents this way.”
Key Concept: Mediation/Peer Mediation

• **What?** A formal process facilitated by a neutral third party in which both individuals explain their perceptions and experiences to each other and work towards a mutually agreed upon resolution. Mediator facilitates understanding but does not suggest or decide resolutions.

• **When?** Conflict between two individuals (e.g., fallouts, disagreements)

• **Why?** To identify any deeper source of the conflict, resolve the conflict and agree on future behaviors.

• **Who?** Trained mediator plus (usually) two people in conflict.

Training Ideas: Possible Activities/Approaches

Mediation is less commonly used in schools in Minnesota as compared to conferencing and circles. If schools choose to use a mediation program, we suggest formal mediation training from one of these resources.

Mediators should consider being certified as a “qualified neutral” in Minnesota, which requires a 30-hour training, registration ($35/yearly), and 18 hours of ongoing education every three years. Recommended training: Hamline University Law School’s Mediation Center.

The Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR) has published “Recommended Standards for School Based Peer Mediation” in which they suggest program coordinators having completed a 40-hour mediation training. Elementary-aged peer mediators should receive 12-18 hours of training, while high school students should receive 15-20 hours of training. Peer mediators should continue to receive an additional 12 hours of training per year. (ACR, 2007)

Schools should consider which type of mediator model is best for their schools and get specific training on that model. Discuss how mediation is different from a restorative conference or circle and how to determine when to use which process.
Ensuring People Feel Comfortable and Supported

Both participants must have nearly equal power. This is not an appropriate bullying intervention.

- Mediation requires high-level cognitive skills. Restorative chats are more appropriate for participants with cognitive skills typical for elementary or middle school students.

- Schools should consider the following when designing a mediation program:
  - Research suggests that the main beneficiaries of peer mediation are the peer mediators themselves, in that they master many conflict resolution skills. On the other hand, peer mediators are often less effective than adult mediators in addressing and resolving conflicts among their peers.
  - There may be high value in having outside mediators, including that students speak more freely and are more trusting of the process if they have had trust issues with the school. On the other hand, school-based mediators have more ownership and are more embedded.
- Possible resolutions to both these issues is a both/and approach – designing programs with both adult and peer mediators and clear rules for referring cases and having opportunities for internal/external mediation partnerships.

Trainer Role
Circle keeper, facilitator, trainer and coach.

When?
Training and Preparation workshops. Ongoing professional learning community.

Resources
Conflict Resolution Education website:
http://www.crcminnesota.org/training-opportunities/training-catalog/

Fewer local resources related to this and usually provided in schools by outside organization.

“One day I was contacted to mediate the following morning at a middle school. The two boys were very short with their answers and not very talkative. I found that it came down to “respect” and when I asked one boy to tell me what respect means to him, he said, “treating others like you would like to be treated.” I could not have said it better myself!

Asking each boy to put themselves in each other’s shoes and how they should respond led to great dialogue and I felt the conversation was productive. It was an easy transition to have them think about the future and how they will act and respond in certain situations. We wrote out an agreement and sent them on their way. It was a very good first real mediation I thought.

I did notice that one of the boys had more issues beyond the conflict with this one child and I did not know how to approach that. I really wanted to help the child, but I do not feel it is my place as I only got a snap shot of his life through this short mediation. I think this will be something I will have to work through as I continue to mediate conflicts in schools.”

“Asking each boy to put themselves in each other’s shoes and how they should respond led to great dialogue and I felt the conversation was productive.”
Section Four: Evaluation

Despite a reputation as simply a way to pass judgment, we believe an evaluation is a critical process for continual learning and improvement. Community-based RP trainers can encourage schools to evaluate RP programs and should also consider evaluating their own practice and training. This section reviews and expands upon resources available for both of these purposes.

Evaluating Your Own Practice

It is important for trainers to consider evaluating their own trainings and coaching. Several tools for evaluating the quality of one’s own practices are included in MDE’s Restorative Interventions Facilitator’s Toolkit (MDE, 2012). While many of the tools are more appropriate for people repairing harm in schools, many are relevant for practices that focus on building community or for training school teams and staff, including:

- Circle/Conference Report and Self-Evaluation Form
- Practitioner Implementation Checklist for Circles
- Conference/Circle Participant Evaluation

Evaluating RP in Schools

In your coaching role, consider encouraging schools to conduct high-quality evaluations. Connect with whoever leads evaluation efforts in the schools and work with them to develop a plan to evaluate RP efforts. There are several tools for evaluating school-wide RP practices in the Tool Kit (MDE, 2012). Encourage schools to use a logic model for their RP intervention, to link planned activities to desired outcomes through short- and medium-term indicators. We offer three simple example logic model diagrams on the pages that follow.
Possible Logic Models for Conferences


- Conferences
  - Disputants and victims share their perspectives
  - Joint problem-solving
  - Agreed upon actions to repair harm

Short-term outcomes
- Strengthen SEL skills
- Sense of procedural justice

Long-term Outcomes
- Rule-breaking behavior goes down
  - Learning problems-solving skills and how to make “things right”
  - Active effort apology to the community

- Rule-breaking behavior goes down
  - Disputants and victims share their perspectives
  - Joint problem-solving
  - Agreed upon actions to repair harm
Once a logic model is in place, create an evaluation plan detailing how you will assess implementation of the activities and the desired outcomes. Quality of implementation can be evaluated through self-assessments, observations, and participant satisfaction surveys or circles. You can assess outcomes via academic, attendance and discipline data, observations, surveys or more qualitative measures such as conversations with staff and students. With your school partners, review school-wide assessment surveys available in the Toolkit (MDE, 2012) along with the following list of indicators, which were generated by RP practitioners, school administrators and RP advocates, to choose which assessment approaches are most applicable to the situation.

The indicators included here can serve as short- and medium-term outcomes for your logic model. Choose ones that feel meaningful to a given school context and regularly assess whether you see improvements. Many of these indicators are more intangible than typical evaluation benchmarks. In assessing these more intangible indicators, recognize that your perceptions and biases affect how you assess them and work with a team to minimize these effects.
**Indicators Assessable via Observations/School Walk-Throughs**

- Students and staff have mostly happy or calm faces, rather than angry or tired faces.

- Circle processes or guidelines for restorative language are posted, rather than rules.

- During non-structured time, adults are positively engaged with students rather than telling them what not to do.

- Teachers/adults seem relaxed and happy rather than stressed out.

- People are engaged and present rather than distracted.

- Students and teachers engage in conversation in a way that does not suggest a hierarchy.

- Visitors are greeted and welcomed.

- When the bell rings, the school doesn’t explode; instead it is a calm, gentle, caring, relationship-based transition.

- You can see and feel an incredible sense of hospitality at every level; you see in small and large ways people taking care of each other (children, youth and adults).

- When something unexpected happens, you see a capacity to pause, the ability to stop and breathe, among both

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*Students and staff have mostly happy or calm faces, rather than angry or tired faces*
students and staff.

- Restorative language starts to be used in the schools; students request circles, or call out when it’s time to use a talking piece.

- Community members volunteer to be a part of circles, especially individuals that look like students and have real life experiences that students’ can connect with.

- In school assemblies, the introduction of the presenter includes the words, “I want you to imagine that the presenter has the talking piece.”

- Assessment of student skills include levels of active listening, appropriate contributions, creating opportunities for others and the abilities to recognize different points of view, to negotiate and share ideas, to connect with others and to participate. These skills can be assessed in surveys or via classroom observations (Gray & Drewery, 2011).
**Indicators Assessable Via Document/Data Review**

- Clear description of a relational school culture in various policies
- School has a “Student and Adult Code for Being” rather than a separate Student Code of Conduct
- Families are trained in RP
- Side by side leadership among stakeholders, including youth guided by adults
- A public health model is integrated into the school
- Requests for circles increase
- Numbers of office referrals decrease

**Indicators Assessable Via Surveys or Interviews With Teachers**

- When there needs to be an intervention, it is considered a part of what happens in relationship, not something that is done away from others; it is inclusive so that it is a taught and modeled, not away and isolated
- Everything includes a check-in; for example, math class begins with a check-in circle of “what’s your favorite number?”
- Technology has not replaced the value of direct personal contact for building relationships
- Requests for circles increase

**Indicators Assessable Via Surveys or Interviews With Students and/or Parents**

- The school does a good job working with all types of families, including same-gender parents, teen parents, grandparents who are parenting and parents with shared custody.
- Student voice is highly valued in the school.
- There is a clear value on equity in the school.
- The school customizes education enough to responsibly respond to a range of stages and abilities (e.g., FAS).
Section Five: Conclusion

We recognize schools and trainers will use this guide in multiple ways. Where a school has had minimal exposure to RP but is prepared to move toward full school implementation, this guide could be used as a step-by-step manual.

However, very often you may use this guide as a toolkit, where immediate needs take you to a specific place in the guide. Wherever you begin using this guide, we invite and encourage you to at some point reflect on whether school-wide implementation of Restorative Practices could become an eventual goal of your partnership, as discussed in section one.

Be sure to use the Restorative Practices Trainer’s Guide Example Activities booklet which accompanies this guide. The booklet includes training activities referenced throughout the guide.

The authors would like to acknowledge those who contributed to the content included in this guide. Development of the guide began with two focus groups including community- and school-based practitioners who have extensive experience working on RP with or in schools.

Participants generously shared their wisdom with us about how to best bridge the gaps between community- and school-based practitioners. Additional follow-up dialogue occurred with many of these experts to identify details and develop anecdotal content to further illustrate the key concepts shared here. Specifically, we would like to thank Beth Bailey, Maureen Farrell, Phillip Gray, Ann Hite, Don Johnson, Gwen Chandler Jones, Elaine Korsch, Natasha Lapcinski, Mariah Levison, Kris Miner, Patty Popp, Kay Pranis, Linda Seifried, Mary Skillings, Michael Stanefski, Mary Leadem Ticiu, Julie Young-Burns, Jeannie Zimmer and Cindy Zwicky.

We have also drawn heavily on the published work of Carolyn Boyes-Watson, Mark Corrigan, Richard Hendry, Kay Pranis, Nancy Riestenberg, Margaret Thorsborne, David Vinegrad, the San Francisco Unified School District and the entire community of RP academics and practitioners. Our deep gratitude for the sense of “commons” this community has in allowing us to pull from, incorporate and build on their work as we create something especially for our Minnesota context.
Appendix A: Rethinking Discipline

Suspension and other Exclusionary Discipline Policies Disproportionately Affect Minorities

Suspension and other exclusionary discipline policies that many people once thought would solve problems in school can often do more harm than good. Studies show that such policies and practices can have several negative effects on students, including decreased academic achievement, increased behavior problems and an increased likelihood of substance abuse. In addition, data also shows that suspension and other exclusionary discipline policies disproportionately affect minorities.

Given those negative outcomes, educators and school leaders have been looking for an alternative. They are interested in comprehensive whole-school approaches to improve school climate. Two approaches, in particular, are cited as alternatives to suspension and expulsion. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as described on Minnesota’s PBIS website and Restorative Practices (RP). Both are whole-school or school-wide in scope. Both constitute a paradigm shift away from punishment to teaching and recognizing positive behavior expectations in the former, and building community and repairing relationships in the latter.

More and more educators and school leaders are turning to Restorative Practices and to you as a trainer to guide them in implementing RP. As a trainer, you will want to become familiar with what has prompted schools, organizations, agencies and the U.S. Department of Education to rethink discipline and what changes are being recommended.

Background and Resources on Rethinking Discipline

The U.S. Department of Education has recommended school districts change their discipline practices to keep students in school learning, and keep them off the streets and out of the criminal justice system. In January 2014, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division officials issued a Joint Dear Colleague Letter on the Nondiscriminatory Administration of School Discipline. (http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201401-title-vi.html) The letter includes guidance to public elementary and secondary schools in meeting their obligations under federal law to administer student discipline without discriminating on the
basis of race, color or national origin. You will want to read the full Dear Colleague Letter yourself, but here are a few excerpts:

“Studies have suggested a correlation between exclusionary discipline policies and practices and an array of serious educational, economic and social problems, including school avoidance and diminished educational engagement; decreased academic achievement; increased behavior problems; increased likelihood of dropping out; substance abuse and involvement with juvenile justice systems…”

“…Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), conducted by OCR, has demonstrated that students of certain racial or ethnic groups tend to be disciplined more than their peers. For example, African-American students without disabilities are more than three times as likely as their white peers without disabilities to be expelled or suspended. Although African-American students represent 15 percent of students in the CRDC, they make up 35 percent of students suspended once, 44 percent of those suspended more than once, and 36 percent of students expelled. Further, over 50 percent of students who were involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement are Hispanic or African-American.

The Departments recognize that disparities in student discipline rates in a school or district may be caused by a range of factors. However, research suggests that the substantial racial disparities of the kind reflected in the CRDC data are not explained by more frequent or more serious misbehavior by students of color.”

In July 2015, the White House held the day-long Rethink School Discipline conference (http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/educators-gather-white-house-rethink-school-discipline) on creating positive school climates and implementing effective discipline practices. The Department of Education’s National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments has several resources available to assist schools and districts in school climate and effective discipline practices. (https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov)

Addressing the Root Cause of School Discipline Disparities: An Educator’s Action Planning Guide helps schools and districts identify the root causes of disparities in the outcomes of school discipline through an analysis of student-level discipline data. It also provides a practical, action-oriented method for schools and districts to develop an action plan to address the root causes of discipline disparities. The guide includes a
Disciplinary Disparities Risk Assessment Tool to aid in data gathering and analysis, templates to help plan and facilitate communication among stakeholders, real world examples from schools and districts already experiencing success and much more tools and information. (https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/addressing-root-causes-disparities-school-discipline)

The Rethink School Discipline: Resource Guide for Superintendent Action offers a set of seven potential action items to help school leaders implement safe, supportive school climate and discipline by engaging stakeholders, assessing the results and history of existing school climate and discipline systems and practices; implementing reform; and monitoring progress. Also included in the resource guide are links to federal guidance and resources as well as postcard templates that districts may use to support local educator and parent and family engagement in the district’s school discipline reform efforts. (https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/RiskAssessmentTool508.xlsx)

MDE’s Alternatives to Suspension Fact Sheet: Outcomes of Out-of-School Suspension, The Myth of Effectiveness cites research on out-of-school suspension. (http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/EdExc/SpecEdClass/BehavAssessInterv/004674)

Many studies suggest that out-of-school suspension is not effective in deterring behavior problems and is linked to harmful effects on schools and youth. Data shows that students who are suspended are more likely to engage in misbehavior in the future (Raffaele-Mendez, 2003; Tobin, Sugai, and Colvin, 1996). Suspending students who engage in problem behaviors does not identify or address the students’ underlying problems; instead, it prevents the student from obtaining school support services (Townsend, 2000).

National organizations, including the Advancement Project, Dignity in Schools Campaign and the American Civil Liberties Union have advocated for policy changes around school discipline and practices that contribute to disproportionate minority representation in suspensions and expulsions. In 2012, the Dignity in Schools Campaign published a Model Code on Education and Dignity which presents a set of recommended policies to schools, districts and lawmakers to help end school pushout and protect a child’s human right to education, dignity, participation and freedom from discrimination. (http://www.dignityinschools.org/resources/model-code-sections)
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