

Principles of the Restorative School

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Introduction

Restorative practices support the overarching goal of strengthening school climate by developing a restorative mindset in the adults, building community and responding to harm. In a restorative school, we foster relationships with the same emphasis as academic skills. Central to restorative practices are the beliefs that all people are worthy and relational, and that we must build, maintain and repair relationships.¹

Educators develop restorative practices for schools by building community among the adults, and examining their own relationship to harm. They learn about implicit bias, historical trauma and resilience. They also explore the principles of restorative justice and identify how they can apply those principles in schools. Educators identify the process of making amends as the natural application of social emotional learning skills. They recognize that allowing everyone a chance to speak allows all students to more fully participate in learning.

The people who made recommendations for this overview of the principles of a restorative school include school administrators, restorative practices trainers and school-based restorative practices specialists.

Principles of the Restorative Mindset

Relationships First

Restorative practices are not a curriculum or a program, but a way of being in the world that puts relationships first. Seeking to repair relationships when harm happens is a choice and the challenge for everyone, whether you have been harmed or are the person who harmed.

In recent times, the field of restorative practices in schools has grown in Minnesota where it was first called “restorative measures”² and throughout the United States and the world where it may also be referred to as “restorative approaches,” “restorative discipline” or “restorative justice practices.”³ In the following image, American professor Katherine Evans and Canadian professor Dorothy Vaandering diagram the interconnected components, core beliefs and values of restorative justice in education.

¹ Evans, Kathy and Vaanering, Dorothy, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education: Fostering Responsibility, Healing and Hope in Schools* (New York: Good Books, an imprint of Skyhorse Publishing, Inc., 2016), page 7.

² Anderson, Cordelia, *Restorative Measures: Respecting Everyone’s Ability to Resolve Problems* (Minnesota Department of Education, 1997).

³Ibid, page 3.



Figure 1: From *The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education*, by Evans and Vaandering, 2016

The belief that “people are worthy and relational” sits at the diagram’s center. This belief is the starting point for engaging the principles of a restorative school—belief in the intrinsic worth of all students, family members and adults in the school and that human beings act out of a desire to be connected to other human beings.

With that starting point, the values of mutual concern, respect and dignity take on deeper meaning. People have *dignity* regardless of what they have done. Evans and Vaandering define dignity as “worth that cannot be substituted. People have dignity because the essence of who they are cannot be replaced.”⁴ *Respect* comes from the Latin root, meaning to “look at again,”—to look at the other like yourself. *Mutual concern* encompasses the idea that all of us matter, that “I am concerned about you and you are concerned about me.”⁵

The three overlapping circles in the diagram illustrate the full qualities of a restorative school and the relational nature of each area. Many schools start exploring restorative practices out of a desire to “repair harm and transform conflict.” However, that proves more effective if your school first makes an effort to “build and

⁴ Ibid, page 32.

⁵ Ibid, page 5.

maintain healthy relationships.” To maintain fidelity to practice in both repairing relationships and building relationships, schools need to carry these three principles of respect, dignity and mutual concern into the climate of the school: “creating just and equitable learning environments.” Evans and Vaandering write that restorative justice in education prioritizes justice and equity where:

- the vulnerable are cared for,
- the marginalized are included,
- the dignity and humanity of each person in the educational setting matters, and
- everyone’s needs are met.”⁶

Schools can take steps to build just and equitable learning environments by using culturally inclusive pedagogy and ensuring full participation for all members of the community. Consider whether your school has just and equitable learning environments by asking several questions: Can students and families see themselves in the curricula and lessons that are taught? Are there opportunities for all students to contribute to the life of the school through extra-curricular activities, clubs and organizations? Do all students have the ability to keep their own circles and to participate as acting members of planning committees? Are families and the community actively included in decision-making? Are school staff members offered the chance to use restorative practices with each other? Is an equity lens applied to reviewing data, curricula and policy? Are all people, students and adults, offered the opportunity to repair harm or to say how they were affected by harm?

Support and Accountability: Doing *With*

A fundamental premise of restorative practices, writes Ted Wachtel, founder of the [International Institute of Restorative Practices](#), “is that people (students, teacher and staff) are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes when those in positions of authority (teachers, staff and administrators) do things **with** them, rather than **to** them or **for** them.”⁷

In “The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education,” Evans and Vaandering expand upon the concept of doing things “with” into the Relationship Matrix, illustrated below.

⁶ Evans and Vaandering, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education* (New York: Good Books, an imprint of Skyhorse Publishing, Inc. 2016), page 54.

⁷ Costello, B., Wachtel, J. and Wachtel, T., *Restorative Circles in Schools: Building Community and Enhancing Learning* (Bethlehem, PA: International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2010) pages 7-8.

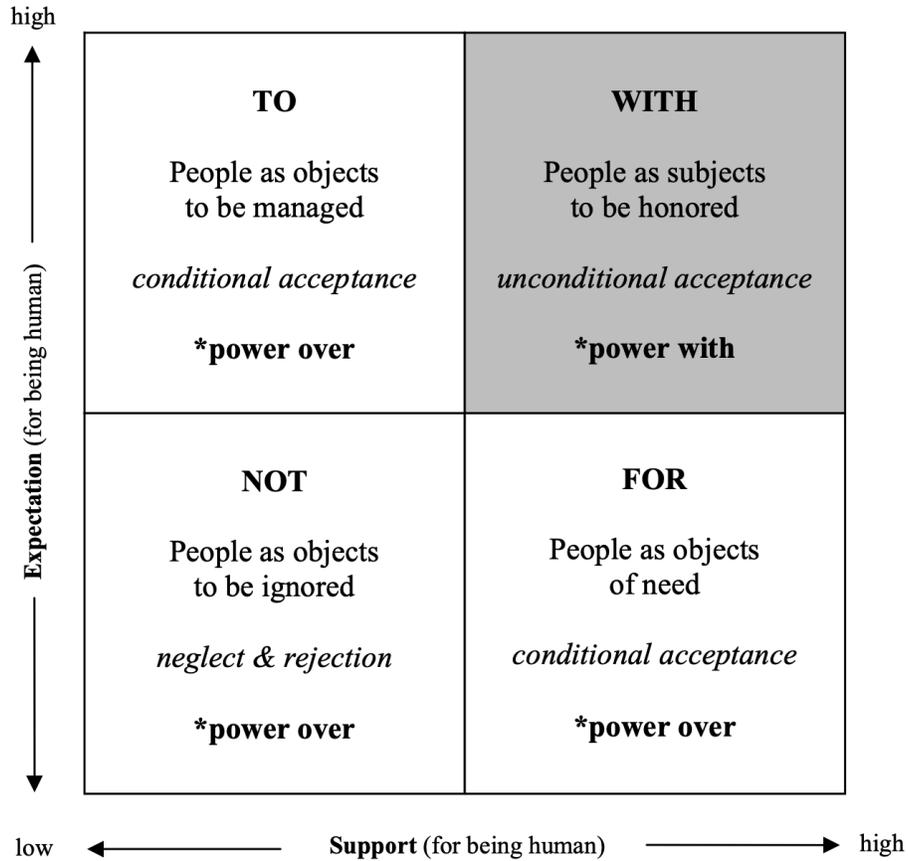


Figure 5.1: Relationship Matrix (power over; power with).

Figure 2: From *The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education*, by Evans and Vaandering

The two axis in this matrix are about “expectation and support (for being human).” Evans and Vaandering explain: “When people provide support and expectations in a balanced, reciprocal way, power is used constructively, is available to all involved, and results in people engaging *with* each other.... When relationships are unbalanced, people become objects for the benefit of others. When they are balanced, relationships radiate respect, dignity and mutual concern for each other.”⁸

⁸ Evans and Vaandering, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education* (New York: Good Books, Skyhorse Publishing, Inc. 2016), page 62-64.

Principles of Just and Equitable Learning Communities

History, Race, Justice and Language Matter

Dr. Maisha T. Winn, in her book “Justice on Both Sides: Transforming Education Through Restorative Justice” offers “four pedagogical stances” to inform and support restorative practices. The stances provide a framework to use restorative practices as a means of “creating participatory democracy” and “disrupting educational inequities in classrooms and school communities.”⁹ The stances are:

- *History Matters* represents the “infinite journey of all educators to learn about the historical contexts that affect the schools and communities in which we teach.”¹⁰ Such a journey can be uncomfortable, as it requires people to reflect upon United States education policy that has not supported all learners equally, the legacy of slavery and the impact of the Native American boarding schools. History matters provides the “opportunity to address historical wrong-doing in education and in school communities.”¹¹
- *Race Matters* builds upon History Matters and asks educators “to consider the role of racism and racist ideas in how they think about students as learners.” How do educators perceptions of people who are different from them, or their perceptions of black and brown students, affect the way we think of students, family members, their values and beliefs, their abilities and intelligence?
- *Justice Matters* posits the hope that “everyone—irrespective of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality or ability—is able to live with dignity and is recognized as belonging.”¹² Restorative justice is offered to everyone in the school and in the community, adults and students alike. It also suggests that we are working towards ‘collective freedom,’ where students and families and other adults “are free from labels that do not reflect their full humanity.”
- *Language Matters*—how we talk about students and each other creates healthy or unhealthy environments. Being mindful of our language “is foundational to healthy relationships and should never be undermined.”¹³

⁹ Winn, Maisha T., *Justice on Both Sides: Transforming Education Through Restorative Justice*, 2018. Harvard Education Press, Cambridge, MA, 12.

¹⁰ Ibid, page 32.

¹¹ Ibid, page 34.

¹² Ibid, page 36.

¹³ Ibid, page 39.

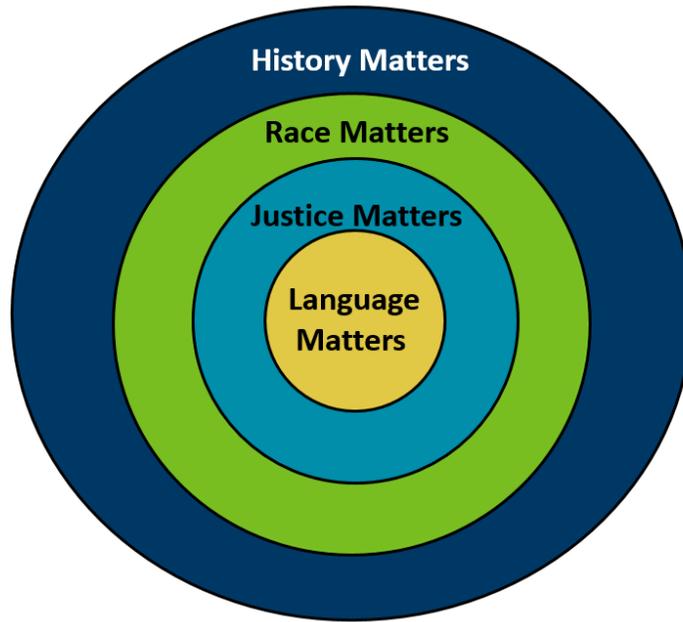


Figure 3: Four Pedagogical Stances, from *Justice on Both Sides*, Dr. Maisha Winn, 2018

Interconnection and Innate Goodness

In their book “Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community,” Kay Pranis and Carolyn Boyes-Watson provide seven core assumptions for the practice of circle. The core assumptions, listed below, are about human beings, not systems or policy.

1. The true self in everyone is good, wise and powerful.
2. The world is profoundly interconnected.
3. All human beings have a deep desire to be in a good relationship.
4. All humans have gifts, and everyone is needed for what they bring.
5. Everything we need to make positive change is already here.
6. Human beings are holistic.
7. We need practices to build habits of living from the core self.¹⁴

In a circle process, power is shared and all people are included. Boyes-Watson and Pranis write “The circle process helps individuals and the group experience healthy power in the presence of each other. Each person has voice; each person is valued; no one is more important than anyone else in the circle. Individual power in circle is self-determining—having voice, choosing whether to speak. Collective power in the circle is “power with”—decisions made by a consensus that does not privilege any point of view or position.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Boyes-Watson, C. and Pranis, K., *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community*, (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2015), pages 9-17.

¹⁵ Boyes-Watson and Pranis, “Circle Forward” (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2015), page 19.

Balance in the Process

Restorative practices put relationships first. Each engagement in a restorative school is an opportunity to build upon caring or fun connections from the last engagement. This emphasis on relationships is evidence in the outline of the circle process illustrated below. Boyes-Watson and Pranis explain:

“This diagram shows the importance of building relationships in Circles. The Circle process is divided into four equal parts based on the framework of the Medicine Wheel, with is widely used by Native Peoples. One of the lessons of the Medicine Wheel is that the four parts must operate in balance. In Circle dialogue, this means, that overall, as much time is spent on getting acquainted and building relationships as is spent on exploring the issues and developing plans.”¹⁶

The metaphor also can be extended to seeking balance as a person. Each quadrant can stand for the mental, physical, social or spiritual and emotional aspects of a person. A restorative process can provide the opportunity for each participant to bring their whole self, allowing people to experience balance in the process. For more information on circle and balance in the process, see “Peacemaking Circles: From Crime to Community,” by Pranis, Stuart and Wedge.

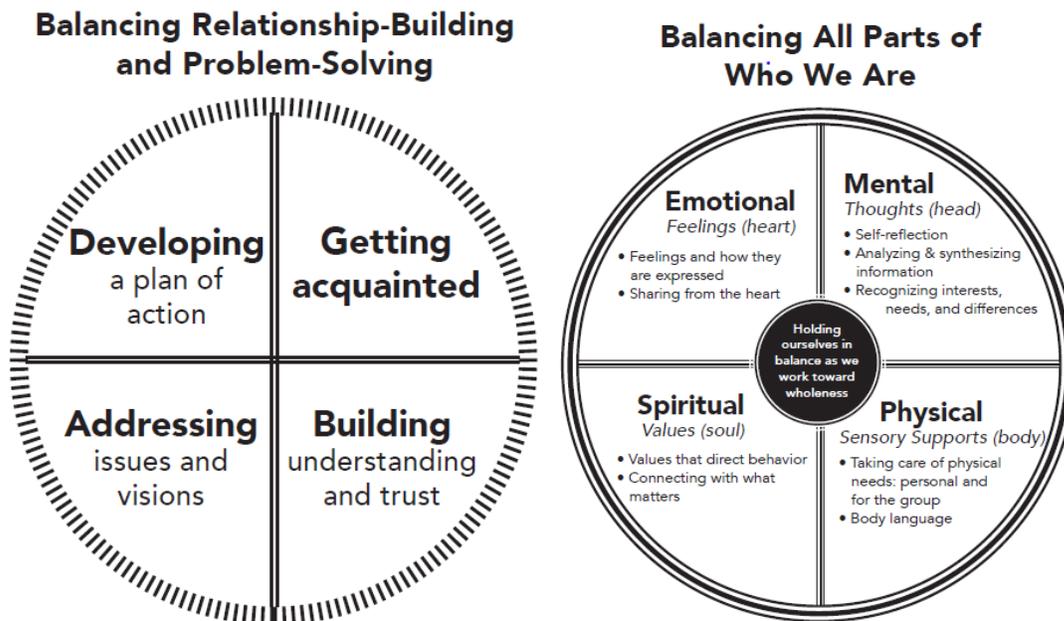


Figure 4: Two versions of “balance in the process” from “Peacemaking Circles” by Pranis, Stuart and Wedge. Restorative practices, including Circles, are derived from and build on Indigenous teachings and other wisdom traditions. Excerpted

¹⁶ Boyes-Watson and Pranis, “Circle Forward” (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2015), pages 34-35.

Principles of Just and Equitable Discipline

Needs, Harm and Obligations

Restorative practices in schools grew from modern day restorative justice theory. Howard Zehr, author of the formative restorative justice work, “Changing Lenses,” describes restorative justice as a set of principles and practices that sees crime and harm as violations of people and relationships. Violations create obligations. The central obligation is to put right the wrongs. He writes, “Underlying this understanding of wrongdoing is an assumption about society: we are all interconnected.”¹⁷

In “The Little Book of Restorative Justice,” Zehr identifies the “five key principles or actions” of restorative justice, which are:

1. Focus on the harms and consequent needs of the victims as well as the communities’ and the offenders’;
2. Address the obligations that result from those harms (the obligations of the offenders as well as the communities’ and society’s);
3. Use inclusive, collaborative processes;
4. Involve those with a legitimate stake in the situation, including victims, offenders, community members and society;
5. Seek to put right the wrongs.¹⁸

To illustrate the principles, Zehr uses an image of a flower that follows. The center of the flower is the focus on putting right the wrongs and the petals represent the actions needed to realize that focus. Zehr writes that putting right has two dimensions:

6. addressing the harms that have been done, and
7. addressing the causes of these harms, including the contributing harms.

¹⁷ Howard Zehr, *Little Book of Restorative Justice* (Good Books, an imprint of Skyhorse Publishing, Inc., New York, NY, 2002), page 19.

¹⁸ Zehr, *Little Book of Restorative Justice*, pages 32-33.

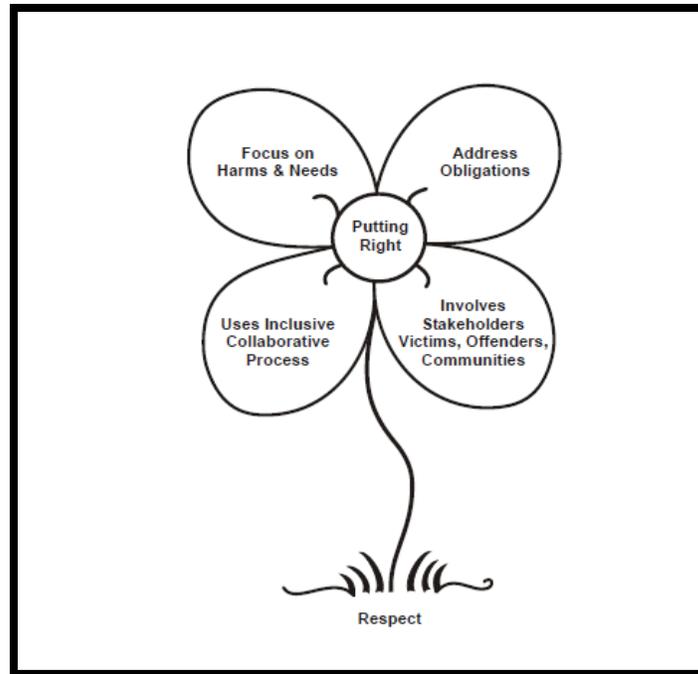


Figure 5: From “The Little Book of Restorative Justice,” by Zehr, 2002

The terminology that Zehr uses comes from the justice system, where people are categorized as “victim” or “offender.” In schools and when working with youth, use people-first, person-first language. When talking about people and harm, use a phrase such as “the person harmed” and “the person who did the harm,” or “person in need of support” and “person in need of learning.” Respectful and inclusive language puts the person before their disability, need or other label.

Repair of Harm and Emotional Literacy

Taking these core principles into the school, PR practitioners Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz and educator Judy Mullet note that educators tied the repair of harm and that underlying assumption of interconnectedness and respect for all to emotional literacy, conflict resolution and character education: that is, the practices and learning of community. In “The Little Book of Restorative Discipline,” they explain:

“Restorative justice promotes values and principles that use inclusive, collaborative approaches for being in community. These approaches validate the experiences and needs of everyone within the community, particularly those who have been marginalized, oppressed or harmed. These approaches allow us to act and respond in ways that are healing rather than alienating or coercive.”¹⁹

¹⁹ Stutzman Amstutz, L. and Mullet, J. H. *The Little Book of Restorative Discipline in Schools: Teaching Responsibility; Creating Caring Climates* (Good Books, an imprint of Skyhorse Publishing, Inc., New York, NY, 2005), page 15.

Discipline as Guidance

One definition of discipline is “to guide, to teach.” Discipline in a restorative school is designed to help students and adults repair harm, make amends and give back to the community; to help students and adults speak up and tell their story, identifying what they need; and to help students and adults make a plan to repair, rebuild and reaffirm the community.

Restorative practices provide a different way of thinking about discipline and behavior. They are more than a set of tools for managing behavior; the practices help all shift from punishment to relationships. In the tables that follow, educators in the British Isles outline a comparison between authoritarian approaches to addressing behavior and restorative approaches.²⁰

Focus of Authoritarian Approaches	Focus of Restorative Approaches
Rule-breaking	Harm done to individuals
Blame or guilt	Responsibility
Adversarial processes	Problem-solving
Punishment to deter	Repair, apology and reparation
Impersonal process	Interpersonal process

Results of Authoritarian Approaches	Results of Restorative Approaches
The needs of those affected are often ignored	The needs of those affected are addressed
The unmet needs behind the behavior are ignored	The unmet needs behind the behavior are addressed
Accountability = being punished	Accountability = putting things right

In the end, the process often results in the restoration of someone’s sense of belonging to a community (e.g. class, school, peer group or family).²¹

²⁰ Sellman, E., Cremin, H., and McCluskey, G. *Restorative Approaches to Conflict in Schools*, (London: Routledge, 2014), page 265.

²¹ Sellman, Cremin and McCluskey, *Restorative Approaches to Conflict in Schools*, (London: Routledge, 2014), page 266.

The basic process of addressing harm and rule violation in a restorative school requires us to use different questions and a different decision-making process than what we see in authoritarian approaches. The differences in questions and decision-making is illustrated in the tables that follow.

Process of an Authoritarian Approach	Process of a Restorative Approach
<p>Defer to the school administrator or person “in charge.” The administrator asks:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What rule was broken? 2. Who broke the rule? 3. What is the consequence, per the student handbook? 	<p>The people closest to the harm are engaged. This includes the person harmed, the person who did the harm and the other people affected.</p> <p>Together, they ask:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was the harm and who was affected by it? 2. What are the needs? 3. Who has the obligations to put things right?

Figure 6: Adapted from “The Little Book of Restorative Justice,” Zehr, 2002

All people are held accountable to each other, rather than accountable to a rule or to a single person with a particular role in the school. Zehr explains that restorative justice accountability means that the community works with the person who did the harm to “address the resulting harm, encourage empathy and responsibility and transform shame.”²² Youth development researcher Dr. Gisela Konopka identified accountability as a youth development task; among other things “young people need to develop a feeling of accountability in the context of a relationship among equals.”²³

Likewise, responsibility is a commitment to the common good, and is expressed in the context of the group. In a restorative school, we have collective responsibility for helping each other get along, helping each other repair harm and for supporting each other when someone is hurt. In a restorative school, all voices are heard and everyone comes together to determine how to live together in the future.

In a restorative school, discipline is something that guides and teaches. It encourages accountability to each other and accountability to repair harm, and expects all to be responsible for the common good. The discipline focuses on repair rather than on punishment. Sometimes, all that the people affected by harm need is to be heard.

²² Zehr, *Little Book of Restorative Justice*, page 17.

²³ Mann Rinehart and Kahn, *Growing Absolutely Fantastic Youth: A Guide to Best Practices in Healthy Youth Development*, Minneapolis, MN: Konopka Institute for Best Practices in Adolescent Health, University of Minnesota, 2000.