Examining Student and Staff Perceptions of an Elementary School Policy on Discipline

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ABSTRACT

Examining Student and Staff Perceptions of an Elementary School Policy on Discipline

Caroline Bouchard

This study examines one school's policy of effectively dealing with student discipline. This school, located in a suburb of Montreal, Quebec developed a "Code of Life" which sets out the standards of behaviour which are expected of all members of its learning community. The "Code" is comprised of five key components, all of which are discussed in the study. However, of these five components, the "restorative measure" component in particular required much consideration. Twelve students were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the "Code," especially the "Code's" restorative element. Teachers and other staff members were interviewed as well. This provided a comprehensive view of the perceived effects of the school's restorative practices on the overall wellbeing of staff and students. The interviews, along with observations made over a four-month span, made it possible to determine whether the staff and students support their school's chosen method of discipline.

The study's three main findings were: (1) Restorative justice does not appear to impact negatively on the students' academic, emotional, and/or social capacities. Furthermore, and according to the student participants, the restorative measures did tend to reduce their likelihood of engaging in problem behaviours. For these reasons, restorative justice appears to be an effective means of dealing with discipline. (2) The restorative measure component of the "Code of Life" has not yet been adopted by everyone and there are many inconsistencies with regard to the ways in which the

teachers and staff understand and utilize restorative justice. There are several reasons for these inconsistencies, mainly a lack of time and training. (3) The lack of consistency within the school with regard to the ways in which teachers are choosing to deal with students' behaviour problems is not conducive to the reduction of these behaviours.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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<u>Introduction</u>

The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth analysis of the key components of an elementary school's methods for dealing with discipline. To better deal with issues of student discipline, teachers at this school have created their own discipline policy called the "Code of Life." The analysis looks closely at the students' and staffs' perceptions regarding the school's methods to determine whether or not they believe them to be an effective means of discipline. In this aim, the following research questions (see chapter three for a more detailed explanation) were developed: (1) What does the "Code of Life" hope to accomplish? (2) What does the "Code of Life" look like and how does it work? (3) How does the "Code of Life" relate to existing research regarding school and discipline and is it an effective means of dealing with discipline? In order to help ensure the disciplinary measures utilized by the school do not disadvantage students or teachers, it is important to understand the potential, though perhaps unintentional, effects of the disciplinary measures used. This study presents an alternative way of determining what constitutes an effective policy on discipline that encompasses both the staffs' and students' points of view regarding effective discipline practices. It also emphasizes the role of the student in the regulation of his/her behaviour problem.

The school environment deeply influences the way a child behaves. The provision of education in this role has long been debated ever since formal schools first made their appearance. Inculcating children with a sense of moral consciousness has been, and still is, an essentially contested concept because it is subject to many different and often conflicting interpretations. What does it mean to be well behaved? And to what extent is the school responsible for developing this sense of behaviour within its students? Surely

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the answers to these questions cannot rest solely on the interpretations of those who are enforcing the school's policy on discipline—though they are important nonetheless. In determining whether or not a school is truly successful in correcting and/or negating student misbehaviour, the student's point of view regarding the disciplinary measures is equally important. In order to obtain an all-inclusive understanding regarding the effectiveness of a school's chosen methods for dealing with discipline, both the staff and students must be consulted.

In spite of the existence of a large number of programs and books on the subject of school and discipline, behaviour problems continue to be pervasive in our schools. Many students no longer show respect towards their peers, their teachers, and/or their parents and are failing to see the value in what they study. The need to create successful school discipline policies that alleviate aggression, harassment, disrespect, and apathy in today's schools is tremendous. The creation of an effective school discipline policy is a challenging task for public education but it is critical for the sake of our youth and for the future of our society. Given the numerous discipline measures currently utilized by various schools to address the aforementioned problems, it is important to question the results and effectiveness of school discipline procedures.

Determining whether or not school discipline procedures are proving to be an effective means by which to address student misbehaviour first requires an understanding of what is meant by effective discipline. Effective discipline is not simply that which corrects and/or negates behaviour problems. Effective discipline must also consider its potential impact on the student's academic, emotional, and/or social capacities. What good is discipline if the negation of a target behaviour is seemingly attained while at the

same time the student's dignity is consequently compromised in some way? Understanding the potential repercussions of any given course of action is daunting yet necessary. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, effective discipline can de defined as that which results in the desired behavioural change in the student while maintaining and/or promoting the student's academic, emotional, and social development.

An explanation of the term "behaviour problem" is also required. For the purposes of this study and according to Diane Montgomery (1989), a behaviour problem can be defined as "any kind of behaviour which prevents the teacher from teaching and the learner from learning" (p. 10). The author's definition is very telling because it allows us to consider behaviour problems not only in terms of how they may potentially hinder the teaching process but how they may affect the learning process as well. Given that Montgomery considers the student's point of view regarding his/her engagement in behaviour problems, her definition of "behaviour problem" differs greatly from the commonly accepted view of the term which does not often consider the intrinsic role that the student plays in his/her own behaviour or misbehaviour. The term "maladjustment" was commonly used to describe these students until it became a stigmatizing label in the early 1980s. Until this time the maladjusted child was depicted as one who:

> did not respond well to normal discipline in the classroom, participate in classroom activities like most other children, accept affection and concern from the teacher or his/her peers, and was likely to over-or-under-respond to normal criticism or blame (Montgomery, 1989, p. 6).

Most behaviour problems exhibited by today's students are reflected in the above-mentioned depiction of the maladjusted child. Teachers in today's classrooms seemingly

continue to focus on those problems that interrupt their teaching; however, they must learn to consider these problems from the learner's point of view. How do student behaviour problems affect the learner and how can the learner participate in the modification of these behaviours? An effective policy on discipline should at least consider the student's point of view regarding effective discipline practices and draw attention to the role of the student in the regulation of his/her behaviour problems.

This study is an important one because, although there currently exists a great deal of literature pertaining to school and discipline, the main emphasis of this research has typically addressed the various causes of student misbehaviour and it has proposed many potential solutions. The existing literature has in fact provided some schools and their surrounding communities with practical and useful strategies for dealing with discipline. The researchers of those studies did not always speak directly with students about the various factors they considered to be affecting their successes and failures in school— behavioural or otherwise—nor did these researchers seek to understand how the students perceived their school's chosen methods of dealing with discipline. In addition, most of these studies did not assess the particular approach that the school of this study is currently utilizing to address discipline, which is commonly referred to as restorative justice. There does exist a great deal of literature pertaining to the topic of restorative justice; however, much of the data obtained was non-empirical.

As this study emphasizes student and staff perceptions, it may potentially provide learning communities and policy makers with a more comprehensive understanding of effective disciplinary practices, in particular those associated with restorative justice. In order to determine the effectiveness of disciplinary practices, everyone affected by these

measures should be consulted in order to limit the possible, although perhaps unintentional, repercussions they may have on students' academic, emotional, and social development. Moreover, by also speaking directly with teachers, it is possible to determine how these same measures are affecting them both personally and professionally.

With the increase in discipline problems facing schools and the overwhelming number of books and programs that are geared toward "fixing" them, all those who are directly involved with the implementation of any potential solutions need to be considered. Because of its inclusive nature, it is anticipated that the findings of this study will help to improve student-school as well as teacher-school relationships.

The first chapter will provide a detailed description of the study's setting, which is the South Shore Community School (a pseudonym). The teachers at this particular school have devised their own course of action in order to deal with discipline problems currently facing their school. Their chosen method for dealing with discipline is called the "Code of Life" and it, along with the description of the school's teachers and students, will be discussed in chapter one.

As mentioned previously, it is has become increasingly apparent that the area of school and discipline that is most often examined is the link between the school environment and behaviour problems. The school environment influences student behaviour through its assumptions, perceptions, and expectations of students. The school's use of curriculum materials and instructional approaches independent of actual student prior knowledge results in academic and behavioural struggles. Therefore, the main focus of chapter two will be to explore the link between discipline and academic

success since student misbehaviour and academic failure are so related. The school plays an important role in the promotion of academic success and its inability to do so may lead to increased behaviour problems among students.

In addition, this chapter will examine the link between discipline and relationships. Students' relationships with their school, teachers, peers, and even their parents, can and do influence their behaviour. Interestingly, the disciplinary practices of the school will also influence their behaviour. Though these practices are aimed at preventing misbehaviour, they sometimes miss the mark and actually increase the likelihood that a student will engage in misbehaviour. Restorative justice practices, however, are emerging as one of the best options to regulate student behaviour.

Chapter two will also explore the nature of restorative discipline. Though we know our educational system to be typically punishment oriented, current research has shown a need to shift to restorative discipline, which is of course what the teachers at the South Shore Community School are trying to achieve. This chapter will explore the principles of restorative justice and the idea that the needs of the school community can be better met through this approach to discipline. Most importantly perhaps, this chapter will also examine how the restorative justice approach, if applied correctly, can positively impact the school environment overall which, as discussed in the first section of chapter two, is essential when addressing behaviour problems.

Chapter three will explain how the study was planned and implemented as well as the rationale behind the study's qualitative case study design. Finally, all issues and concerns which may have affected the study will also be presented.

Chapter four will reflect the information previously presented in the literature review and will determine whether existing research on school and discipline supports the disciplinary practices currently employed by the South Shore Community School. In doing so, the data collected through observations and interviews will also be discussed at length.

The fifth and final chapter will offer possible suggestions for future research. Similarly, this chapter will make recommendations for other schools regarding possible changes to their own disciplinary practices. Most importantly, this chapter will make recommendations specific to the South Shore Community School based on the perceptions of its own learning community. As stated in the introduction, the main goal of this study was to determine what constitutes an effective policy on discipline; thus, this chapter will examine which parts of the school's "Code of Life" are proving successful for the school and which are not.

Chapter 1: School Context

The setting of this study—the South Shore Community School (SSCS)—is described in depth in this first chapter. To better deal with issues of student discipline, teachers at this school have created their own discipline policy called the "Code of Life." This chapter explains the "code" in detail and provides a description of the school's teachers and students as well.

<u>Setting</u>

SSCS is a public elementary school located in a suburb of Montreal, Quebec. According to the 2006 StatCan Census, the suburb had a population of 42 786 people. The area and population from which the school enrols students is comprised of several families with low to high incomes although those with high incomes are few. The average income of two-parent families is $57 809 and in single-parent families it is $20 137 (representing 20% of the school's population). The school is currently servicing students from kindergarten to grade six in a bilingual setting with 12.5 hours of instruction in each official language weekly. During the 2009-2010 school year, 120 of the school's 348 students were Native children from the nearby reserve. According to the school principal, between 60 and 90 of these Native students were believed to be at risk. Many were at risk in terms of their health, their learning, their family situations, their second language acquisition, and their intrinsic motivation. To assist these students, the SSCS has been issued funds from the Native Literacy grant. This financial allocation allows for the funding of a 100% French teacher, a 100% English resource teacher, and a Special Education Technician for 25 hours a week. According to the Special Education

Technician, the prognosis for the 2010-2011 school year resembles that of last year's—60%-80% of our Native population are believed to be at risk.

The SSCS is open evenings and Sundays and it even offers a summer literacy camp. It has a steering committee that meets once a month to discuss what is going on as well as to discuss plans for the future. Some of its community partners include the *Community Economic Development and Employability Committee*, the *Châteauguay English Community Network*, *Champlain College*, and *Quebec en Forme*, just to name a few. All are helping to implement activities in the school to promote learning. For instance, at this very moment *Quebec en Forme* is in the process of teaching the students how to develop and maintain healthy habits and lifestyles. *Crossroads Carrefour* partnered with our school this summer to host a summer literacy camp for children aged 5-12 years. Students came to camp for seven weeks and worked on their writing and oral skills while also partaking in sporting activities. In all, about 150 children from the community attended the camp. *Champlain College* is currently using the school's facilities to teach a course on child development to the residents of Châteauguay and has employed the SSCS's own teachers to teach this program. There are many instances in which the school is partnered with community agencies in order to help promote educational achievement.

The school is oriented toward the community and encourages student learning through community service and service learning. The school offers a large variety of after-school programs to students and families. It has a social worker who is available a couple of days a week as well as a nurse who comes in once a week. Whenever possible, various members from the community are invited to come and support what the students

are working on in school. For instance, every Wednesday students from the high school down the street come to the SSCS to work with students. Also, last February the retired professional boxer Otis Grant came to help support the school in its efforts to teach Black History. A full-time community school coordinator oversees the delivery of an array of support services provided by local agency partners and participates on the management team for the school. These support services include a breakfast program, a homework program, some primary health services, numerous after-school programs for youth and families, adult education programs, etc. At the SSCS, turning to the resources of the community is not only encouraged, it is also expected.

<u>Key Components of the "Code of Life"</u>

In this section, the so-called "mechanics" of the "Code of Life" are discussed. It is important to examine the explicit ways in which the "Code of Life" allow teachers to deal with students who violate the "Code of Life." How does the "Code of Life" work? What does it look like?

The "Code of Life" is comprised of five key components: the contract, the values, the tickets, the restorative measure, and the tracking/follow up. We will begin our discussion with the contract component. The contract, though not legally enforceable, is an agreement between students, teachers, and parents. By signing the contract all three parties promise that they will adhere to the values prescribed by the "Code of Life." The contract helps to ensure open, consistent communication and partnership between the student's home and the SSCS. Parents are encouraged to take an active role in supporting their children through their experiences with the "Code of Life" and the contract helps to

ensure that this does in fact occur. The contract is included at the beginning of the

students' agenda. (See Appendix C.)

The values component of the "Code of Life" works to promote the livelihood and

happiness of everyone in the SSCS community. The SSCS's approach to discipline is

premised on the idea that all members of the learning community have the right to learn

and exist in a safe and harmonious environment. The following values, which form the

core of the "Code of Life," are said to be practiced and celebrated consistently at the

SSCS by everyone during all aspects of school time.

Respect: We are respectful of oneself, of other adults, children, and property.

Responsibility: We are responsible and accountable for our own actions, work, and
choices.

Honesty: We are honest.

Safety: We promote a harmonious environment where everyone feels safe and
accepted.

Communication: We encourage open and consistent communication and partnership
between home and school regarding the behaviour, safety, academic, and social
development for the benefit of each child.

When a student goes against the "Code of Life" by violating one or more of its

values, their homeroom teacher issues him/her a ticket. The student may have "offended"

outside of their regular class time schedule; however, it is always the homeroom teacher

who issues the ticket. The adult who witnessed the violation must report the incident to

the homeroom teacher so that the ticket can be issued. (See Appendix D.) It is done this

way to ensure that the homeroom teacher is notified of all behaviour problems exhibited

inside and outside of the classroom by his/her students during school hours,

Tickets are utilized to help students, teachers, and families keep track of incidents that need restorative measures or that violate the "Code of Life." The school uses a "three-notice" system of tickets. The first notice is called a "yellow ticket." The student must have the yellow ticket signed by their parents and then return it to school. The ticket outlines the circumstances that led to this first notice. It is sent home to be signed and returned and restorative measures must take place within three days of the ticket having been issued.

The student will receive another "yellow ticket" in the form of a second notice if he/she goes against the "Code of Life" another time. Their behaviour will result in a second restorative measure. This ticket will also be sent home to be signed and returned and restorative measures will be carried out within three days.

Finally, if a third misbehaviour happens, a third notice is sent home. The third notice is called a "red flagged ticket." This signals an intervention by the school principal. The organized restorative measures are to be carried out at the end of the school day and parents are responsible for picking up their child. An action plan for behaviour will be put in place immediately and the child must take part in "Code of Life" training so that they can improve and change their behaviour accordingly. Children are given a fresh start every 45 days so that they may have a chance to start again after learning why they need to follow the same "Code of Life" as the rest of the school.

The ticket component, as well as the contract component, make it possible for parents to talk with their children about their tickets and help them understand that the circumstances that led to the notice are reparable and should not happen again. Parental support is key in helping students to become responsible members of the school

community. Parental support also helps frame the children's school experience with home support, it encourages active communication with the school, and it allows for a review of the "Code of Life" as often as necessary.

The restorative measure component is essential to the "Code of Life." The restorative measure is basically a way in which the child can "fix" what they did wrong. It is not seen as a consequence, but rather as a positive approach to repairing any harm that may have been caused as a result of their actions. It is agreed upon by both the teacher and the "offending" student. Here is an example of an actual restorative measure carried out by one of the study's participants: A student who had bullied another student was issued a restorative measure wherein he wrote a reflection paper explaining the dangers of schoolyard violence. He was required to present his paper to the other students in his class. The restorative measures are written on the tickets and are sent home so that parents are informed of the situation and are provided with an opportunity to speak with their child about what happened. (See Appendix E.)

The student on the receiving end of the restorative measure works with the homeroom teacher to determine an appropriate action to repair any harm done. The teacher must consider the student's point of view in order to ensure that the student is not only held accountable for their actions, but that he/she comes to value their role in the restorative process. The student must reflect on what he/she has done and explore various alternatives for "fixing" what went wrong. The restorative measure then becomes a meaningful experience for the student rather than a mere punishment. After all, why should the teacher be solely responsible for determining how best to remedy a situation?

The final component of the "Code of Life" is the tracking/follow-up component.

Once the student has performed his/her restorative measure, the teacher must keep a written copy of the incident in GPI. GPI is an Internet student monitoring system and it is used as a prevention and assistance tool in the individualized follow-up of students. It makes it possible for teachers to track students' behaviours from the very beginning of their entry into the elementary school system. This system is very useful in cases where teachers are required to submit a behaviour log for students considered to be at-risk or in crisis. It also makes it possible for teachers to assess in what situations behaviours tend to worsen or improve, which serves the teacher well in the development of an action plan geared towards behaviour modification. Furthermore, because the service is available through the Internet, GPI can be accessed by all school personnel anytime, anywhere.

All five components are necessary for the successful implementation of the "Code of Life." The various members of the learning community—the student, teacher, parent, etc.—all have a role to play. From the moment a child "offends" until the moment his/her restorative measure is carried out and later recorded, it is apparent how important consistent communication is to the success of the "Code of Life."

<u>School Rationale Behind the Implementation of the "Code of Life"</u>

The "Code of Life" was developed by teachers to help the children understand how to live and interact in society and in a community that is bigger than just the family. There are principles, values, and rules that need to be known and followed in order to have a safe and pleasant environment where, ideally, everyone feels included and respected and, in our case, is predisposed to learn. The teachers at the SSCS wanted to help make this possible by ridding its learning community of its negative approach to discipline.

Prior to the "Code of Life," the school utilized a system of infractions as its means of dealing with issues of discipline. This system was based on punitive measures. Students who exhibited behaviour problems were given a written warning that they were expected to have signed by their parents. In addition to the warning, and depending on the severity of the behaviour in question, students also received recess or lunch detentions as well as in-school and out-of-school suspensions. Sometimes students were also required to write lines.

In the end, behaviour problems increased in both frequency and severity, and teachers began to realize that they needed to create a new discipline system to deal with these behaviours. A committee was thus formed to develop a new system of dealing with issues of discipline. At about the same time, the school principal—who wanted to help the teachers with this important yet daunting task—gave the teachers copies of the book *Beyond Discipline* by Alfie Kohn. Members of the committee were very interested in his work to say the least and the "Code of Life's" development was influenced by the work of Alfie Kohn.

According to Kohn (1993), society's approach to raising children has typically centered on a system of bargaining wherein children are told: "Do this and you'll get that." (p. 3). In his book *Beyond Discipline*, and with respect to students' learning and children's behaviour in particular, Kohn challenges our traditional way of thinking. He suggests that instead of trying to control students' behaviour through the use of external motivators such as punishment and/or rewards, we should focus instead on creating classrooms based on dignity and respect. Furthermore, he argues that by creating such an environment where restrictions and threats do not exist, students will naturally be

encouraged to participate in making meaningful decisions about their schooling and will be better able to think for themselves and care about others.

This is precisely the kind of outcome that the teachers were hoping to generate with the implementation of the "Code of Life." Teachers wanted to instil in students a sense of power with regard to the regulation of their own behaviours. In order to compel students to truly care about others, they first need to take responsibility for themselves and their actions and they must understand the impact that their decisions have on others. When teachers try solely to make students do what they are told to do, students are thus absolved from having to take responsibility for their actions and they are consequently not afforded the opportunity to even question why they did what they did. They are "forced" to behave a certain way because their teacher told them to, not because they necessarily think it is the right thing to do.

One way in which the "Code of Life" strives to help students experience the value of caring and making good choices is by giving students the opportunity to solve problems and get along with others. When a student violates the "Code of Life," he/she is not punished nor is the student excluded from the conflict resolution process that is enacted in order to repair any harm that may have resulted from their actions. Instead, they are included in discussions pertaining to the violation and its impact on the learning community. As well, the student is involved in finding potential solutions that are required to repair the harm.

Violations of the "Code of Life" result in restorative measures that are to be carried out by the "perpetrator" but are decided on by both the student and the homeroom teacher. Students and staff see restorative measures as a positive approach to discipline

because these measures emphasize problem-solving skills and recognize the importance of establishing agreed-upon rules and consequences. Often, the person who was harmed is brought together with the person who harmed them and they are encouraged to work together to find a solution to their problem. Parents are also informed when restorative measures are issued so that they can talk with their children at home about what happened. The goal is to involve various members of the learning community to help repair the harm that was done.

Restorative measures differ greatly from many current disciplinary practices used in public schools which typically involve out-of-school suspensions and expulsion. The SSCS has ruled that these tactics are largely ineffective based on its own prior experiences using suspensions and expulsion as disciplinary responses to student misbehaviour. Research supports the SSCS's decision to limit its dependence on said disciplinary tactics, as there is no empirical basis to support the effectiveness of suspensions and "suspensions have also been shown to be associated with a number of health and social problems" (Dupper, 2010, p. 2). In fact, students who are not in school are more likely to have "lower rates of academic achievement, to smoke, to use substances, to engage in sexual intercourse, to become involved in physical fights, to carry a weapon, and are far more likely to commit crimes and be incarcerated" (American Academy of Pediactrics, 2003; Wald & Losen, 2003, as cited in, Dupper, 2010, p. 2). While the likelihood that elementary students will engage in these types of activities is seemingly less probable than for middle school and/or high school students, the possibility remains nonetheless.

Another reason the "Code of Life" was developed by the teachers at the SSCS is precisely to help ensure that students remain in school so as to limit the opportunities for students to engage in the aforementioned types of hazardous activities. More importantly, however and as discussed previously, the teachers were looking for a way to involve students in the regulation of their own behaviours. Teachers wanted students to take a more active role in determining the right course of action for any number of situations that students might face in school and in their overall everyday lives.

By involving students in the regulation of their own behaviour problems, the belief was that the "Code of Life" would go beyond producing temporary obedience in students. Students would come to see the value of their input in regard to the regulation of their own behaviour and would be motivated to make any necessary changes. By involving the "offender" in the reparation required to remedy the behaviour problem and the damage that was done as a result of this said behaviour, teachers believe that a more positive behavioural change is produced than if a punishment is merely imposed on the "offender." The idea that reparation that is offered by an "offender," or at least readily agreed to, is more effective than reparation that is imposed will be discussed further in chapter two.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As previously mentioned, finding a connection between a school's environment and related behaviour problems is the focal point of most inquiry regarding school and discipline. The assumptions, perceptions, and expectations of students that are part of a school's overall environment influence student behaviour. As well, academic and behavioural problems result when a school fails to use proper curriculum materials and implement instructional methods that take into account students' prior knowledge. Since there is a strong relation between student misbehaviour and academic failure, chapter two thus focuses a great deal on the link between discipline and academic success. A central mandate of any school is to promote academic success, and if a school fails in this objective behavioural problems among students tend to increase.

This chapter also looks at the value of having students develop meaningful bonds with their school, their teachers, and their peers. The students' need to feel a sense of belonging to the school community is another important factor that is linked to behaviour problems. A section of this chapter examines how a school's disciplinary practices may actually promote behaviour problems in students. This is especially true in areas where the thoughts and opinions of students matter very little with regard to decision making.

Finally, this chapter examines the nature of restorative discipline. Our educational system generally deals with student discipline problems in a punishment oriented manner, but current research indicates a need to shift to restorative discipline which is what the teachers at the SSCS are trying to achieve. Chapter two explores the tenets of restorative justice and the notion that the needs of the school community can be better met by

adhering to this method of discipline. Of greater significance, perhaps, this chapter also explores how the correct implementation of restorative discipline can positively affect a school's overall environment which is, as elaborated in the first section of chapter two, crucial when addressing student misbehaviour.

<u>Academic Achievement and Behaviour Problems</u>

Many of the current disciplinary practices used in public schools are largely based on punishing and removing students from school while giving little or no regard to input from the student exhibiting behaviour problems. Student misbehaviour is often caused by external factors for which the student seemingly has no control. For instance, research regarding issues of school discipline usually describes an inverse relationship linking the school environment with behaviour problems. As such, the environment of a school can have a significant impact on the academic and behavioural performance of its students (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, Solomon & Schaps, 1995; Roser, Midgley & Urban, 1996; Battisch & Hom, 1997; Preece, 2009).

One such way the school environment may potentially inhibit the academic and behavioural performance of its students is through its perceptions of students. For example, children perceived as being from low-income and minority group families are more likely to rebel in school. This is caused in part due to the fact that these students are often placed in low-ability groups and teachers might underestimate their learning potential (Schafer, Olexa & Polk, 1972). Assigning a student to a lower track can have a negative impact on the student's self-esteem causing him/her to misbehave in a variety of ways. Students misbehave in reaction to the perceptions of those around them. David Hargreaves (1968) provides a compelling explanation:

In a streamed school the teacher categorizes the pupils not only in terms of the inferences he makes of the child's classroom behaviour but also from the child's stream level. It is for this reason that the teacher can rebuke an A stream boy for being like a D stream boy. The teacher has learned to expect certain kinds of behaviour from members of different streams…It would be hardly surprising if 'good' pupils thus become 'better' and the 'bad' pupils become 'worse'. It is, in short, an example of a self-fulfilling prophecy. The negative expectations of the teacher reinforce the negative behavioral tendencies (p. 105-106).

It is clear that low teacher expectations generate declines in students' motivation and performance, especially in those schools where tracking is present; however, tracking may not be the only rationale for poor student performance. Schools can also contribute to academic failure through misconceptions about students due to differences in teacher/student backgrounds. Research by Gottlieb suggests that "the greater the social and cultural differences between students and teachers, the more negative the perceptions of students" (Gottlieb, 1964, as cited in Shafer & Polk, 1972, p. 187). In general, teachers tend to judge as more capable those children who share their own values.

Consequently, the curriculum materials and instructional approaches that are used in areas where teachers do not share the students' lifestyle and culture are often not effective and thus increase the likelihood that behaviour problems will occur. In brief, "current textbooks and other curriculum materials are largely irrelevant to the experiences, language, style, skills, and orientation of lower class children" (Schafer & Polk, 1972, p. 189). Reading materials are generally developed with the middle class in mind, making it quite difficult for members outside of this class to form any meaningful

engagement with the material presented. Mandated curriculum often limits our children's understanding of their world through its reinforcement of the values deemed important by the dominant classes who share in the development of this said curriculum. The school curriculum needs to change so that students become willing to question the assumptions and values held by the privileged classes. This is a tricky thing to do because teachers do not fully comprehend how the current curriculum, as well as their own teaching methods, actually work to maintain the accepted class values of the dominant class.

bell hooks (2009) argues that "there is little or no discussion of the way in which attitudes and values of those from materially privileged classes are imposed upon everyone via biased pedagogical strategies" (p. 136). Furthermore, and according to hooks, these biased strategies are "reflected in the choice of subject matter and the manner in which ideas are shared" (p. 136). Discussions that give way to thoughts and ideas which question the assumptions and values held by the privileged classes are few and far between.

This brings to mind Pierre Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory. According to Bourdieu, "economic obstacles are not sufficient to explain" the discrepancies in the educational successes and failures of children from different social classes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, p. 8). Bourdieu argues that, in addition to economic factors, the "cultural habits and…dispositions inherited from" the family are fundamentally important to school success (p. 14). In other words, schools emphasize the social and cultural disparities among members of society. This is accomplished through the school's use of "particular linguistic structures, authority patterns, and types of curricula; children from higher social locations enter schools already familiar with these social arrangements"

(Lareau, 1987, p. 74). The cultural experiences in the home determine the degree to which children will succeed in school based on how familiar the child is with the school's chosen teaching methods and curriculum. Schools tend to value knowledge which is prescribed to them by the dominant classes; therefore, those students from outside this particular class have a harder time adjusting to school and academic achievement. A student's cultural capital can be seen as a type of currency. Typically, the more you have the better off you are. Therefore, a child who possesses a great deal of cultural capital— the same type that is valued by schools—will often do better in school than a child who possesses very little. The problem is that schools make assumptions about the cultural capital children possess based not on actual academic merit but on their perceptions of students and their families. Students from outside the dominant class are often discounted with regard to the cultural capital they possess because schools do not value their type of cultural currency.

Similarly, schools are often not acutely aware that students entering schools may or may not already possess the cultural capital required to succeed academically. Instead, assumptions are made regarding prior student knowledge in an attempt to match students with the prescribed curriculum. However, "making assumptions about what students should know and implementing curriculum independent of the student's prior knowledge will result in academic and behavioral struggles" (Stromont, Lewis, Beckner & Johnson, 2008, p. 4). Again, these assumptions are often made based on the extent to which a student's cultural capital matches that which is valued or taught by the school. Research indicates, however, that "effective systems of behavioral support move beyond false assumptions of children's prior learning histories and include direct instruction, practice,

and monitoring of social behavior" (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1992; Cotton, 1999; Elliot, 1994a, 1994b; Greshman, Sugai, & Horner, 2001; Sugai et al., 2000; Tolan & Guerra 1994; Walkner et al., 1996, as cited in, Stromont et al., 2008).

It is clear that the school can and does contribute to the academic failures of its students. As was previously discussed, this is accomplished through the school's misperceptions about students, the inherit class structure of schooling, as well as the curriculum materials and instructional approaches utilized by the school. Schafer and Polk (1972) explain that these factors can cause students to feel negatively about the schools they attend. The negative attitudes can in turn lead students to misbehave because they are frustrated as they do not seem to belong or fit in.

Relationships and Behaviour Problems

Beyond problems posed by poor pedagogy, some researchers have attributed increases in student misbehaviours to the quality of attachment—or lack thereof— between students and their teachers. According to Hallinan (2008), teachers play a major role in shaping students' feelings about school as well as their experiences in school:

> The way that teachers interact with students is of considerable importance in shaping how students feel about themselves and their surroundings. If students feel ignored, misunderstood, devalued, or disrespected by their teachers, they are likely to react negatively. If they feel that their teachers have regard for them, approve of their behavior, and are interested in their welfare, they will react positively. For positive or negative teacher-student interactions to generalize to feelings about school, they need to occur consistently in a stable, enduring environment (p. 273).

Teachers' support can have a significant impact on the way students come to view themselves. The link between self-esteem and academic achievement is important as several studies have shown how a person's perception of himself or herself can affect academic performance in the school context (Lent, Brown & Larkin, 1986; Sanchez & Roda, 2003; Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006; Aryana, 2010). The set of perceptions that we have about ourselves influences how we "feel, think, learn, value ourselves, relate to others, and ultimately, how we behave" (Clark, Clemes & Bean, 2000, as cited in Sanchez & Roda, 2003). The results of these studies suggest that high self-esteem is an important factor in achieving positive academic gains. Similarly, these studies also suggest that high self-esteem can lead to less involvement in behaviour problems.

Several studies have also shown that supportive relationships can also help students to improve their sense of acceptance within the school (Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, 1996; Solomon, Watson, Battisch, Schaps & Delucchi, 1996). When students feel that they are part of a supportive community, they are more likely to engage in pro-social behaviours (Osterman, 2000). The significance of a caring relationship between teacher and student is clear. Teachers play an important role in helping students feel as if they are welcome members of the school community.

In addition to teacher support, positive relationships between students and their primary caregivers are important. Walden and Beran (2010) found that "students with lower quality attachment relationships are more likely to bully others and be the victims of bullying than their peers with higher quality attachment relationships" (p. 5). The link between attachment status and bullying is likely due to the fact that securely attached children expect that their relationships with others will be as positive as those they share

with their parents (Walden & Beran, 2010). Since children with high-quality parental attachments are more likely to behave pro-socially, it "increases the likelihood of being socially accepted and decreases the likelihood of being excluded from peer groups" (Georgiou, 2008, as cited in, Walden & Baren, 2010). On the other hand, children with poor-quality parental attachment relationships may experience "feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem" (Georgiou, 2008, as cited in Walden & Beran, 2010). Thus, a secure attachment relationship between students and their primary caregivers could possibly help to reduce behaviour problems such as bullying in school.

Of course, the importance of peer relationships in the reduction of behaviour problems needs to be addressed as well. According to Sutherland's (1947) differential association theory, "criminal behavior is learned in communication with other persons, predominantly in intimate groups" (As cited in, Matsueda, 1988, p. 281). Though I am not looking at the likelihood that school-aged children will engage in "criminal behaviour" per se, the underlying idea is that the nature of a child's peer relationships is an important factor associated with delinquency. Through our interactions with others who misbehave, we in turn learn deviant behaviours. This is the main assertion of the differential association theory. As such, the negative relationships that students form with their peers also influence the likelihood that they will engage in situations of misconduct.

Sutherland's (1947) differential association theory posits that "delinquent behaviour is learned like any other behaviour, that is, in a symbolic interaction with others" (As cited in, Megens & Weerman, 2010, p. 300). However, what this symbolic interaction actually entails is less clear. Clearly, older children are more capable of communicating why it is seemingly more favourable for themselves and others to "break"

the rules as opposed to "following" the rules. However, it is less clear exactly how younger children, such as those who participated in this study, communicate with or motivate their peers to actually commit an offence.

According to Zimmer-Gembeck, Geiger, and Crick (2005) the children's status with their peers is an important factor that can and does influence their behaviour. "Being held in positive regard by peers has been associated with future social competence and relatively fewer behavioural problems" (Hymel, Rubin, Rowden & LeMare, 1990, as cited in Zimmer-Gembeck, Geiger & Crick, 2005, p. 422). Similarly, because it is important for children to feel as though their peers accept them, they tend to want to behave in a manner that will gain the acceptance of their peers. On the other hand, children whose peer groups possess "questionable" values are more likely to act up in school.

Taken as a whole, behaviour problems arise when a student's attachment relationships with significant others are compromised in some way. This is what the research presented has shown. Yet, no one says it quite like Travis Hirschi. Hirschi's (1969) social control theory explores the link between an individual and his/her attachment to conventional institutions such as school. According to Hirschi, when the attachment is weak or broken, the likelihood that a student engages in delinquent behaviour is increased.

Though the significance of securing positive and secure attachment relationships has already been noted, let us end the discussion with a more detailed analysis of Hirschi's (1969) social control theory. Hirschi's theory puts forward the idea that a student's bond to school has four key parts: attachment; commitment, involvement, and

belief. The attachment element emphasizes how the expectations of others influence our behaviours. If we do not care about the expectations of others, we are free to do as we like. Hirschi explains it like this:

> The norms of society are by definition shared by members of society. To violate a norm is, therefore, to act contrary to the wishes and expectations of other people. If a person does not care about the wishes and expectations of other people-that is, if he is insensitive to the opinion of others-then he is to that extent not bound by the norms. He is free to deviate. (p. 18).

In this way, and with regard to the school context, a student who lacks attachment to other members of the learning community is more likely to misbehave.

The commitment element assumes that a person who is committed to a particular activity will likely consider the weight of their actions before acting. If he/she believes that an action may deter them from the successful completion of the activity, they will re-evaluate whether this action is truly beneficial to them. In other words "when or wherever he considers deviant behavior, he must consider the costs of this deviant behavior" (Hirschi, 1969, p. 20). The concept of commitment, within the school context, assumes that the school is organized so that most students understand that their actions have consequences. These consequences could possibly prevent the student from pursuing their interests. Thus, when a student invests time and energy into something, he/she is likely to behave in a manner that will ensure that their interests are protected. For example, a student who is committed to playing basketball on the school's team will think twice before they skip practice. They have a vested interest in coming to practice on time as they do not wish to be benched or worse—suspended.

Likewise, when time and energy are spent in the pursuit of one's interests, free time is limited. The involvement element assumes that when an individual is busy engaging in their usual activities, they are less likely to engage in deviant behaviours. Simply put, and within the school context, the more involved a student is in their regular school activities, the less time they have to engage in problem behaviours.

Finally, Hirschi's belief element suggests that when an individual believes in the value system of their community, they are not likely to stray from this system. In order for this individual to violate the belief system shared by both themselves and their community, they would have to do so knowing full well that they were betraying not only their own personal beliefs, but that of their community as well. Put another way, "the less a person believes he should obey the rules, the more likely he is to violate them" (Hirschi, 1969, p. 26). Again, when applied within the school context, the relevance of this particular element is clear. When a student shares a common value system with the school, they are more likely to obey the school's rules. Similarly, when a student does not believe they should obey the school's rules, they are more likely to misbehave.

All four elements are closely linked. Hirshci sums up the relation among the elements quite succinctly:

> In general, the more closely a person is tied to conventional society in any of these ways, the more closely he is likely to be tied in other ways. The person who is attached to conventional people is, for example, more likely to be involved in conventional activities and to accept conventional notions of desirable conduct. (p. 27).

<u>Disciplinary Practices and Behaviour Problems</u>

A school's response to student misbehaviour is an important factor in determining whether the student will re-offend. In fact, the school's chosen disciplinary practices and/or policies may actually work to encourage defiance. It is important for schools to question whether their disciplinary practices are truly effective in dealing constructively with student misbehaviour.

Schools typically respond to student misbehaviour with external discipline such as corporal punishment, suspensions, and expulsions. "Such responses present a short-term fix to what is often a chronic and long-term problem" (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010, p. 48). Furthermore, punitive and exclusionary approaches to discipline have been linked to antisocial behaviour (Gottfredson. Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; Mayer & Butterworth, 1995, as cited in, Osher et al., 2010).

While suspension and other types of punishment are generally ineffective at rectifying behaviour problems, non-punitive measures are not necessarily effective either. Unless or until the causes of the student's problem are diagnosed correctly, preventing the misbehaviour from recurring is difficult, perhaps even impossible. Gorton (1977) sums up the importance of a correct diagnosis:

> It would seem that before persuasion and exhortation can be effective in preventing recurring student misbehaviour, a correct diagnosis of the factors causing the misbehaviour needs to be made. If the causes of the student's problem have been incorrectly diagnosed, the administrator may be trying to persuade or exhort the student to do something that will not remove the basis for the misbehavior (p. 19).

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Gorton goes on to explain:

> And if the administrator is not perceived by the student as someone who can be
> believed and trusted, the student is unlikely to be persuaded to change his
> behavior (if the student can avoid it). Therefore, while persuasion and exhortation
> by the administrator may be preferable to punitive measures in response to student
> misbehavior, the former techniques are dependent on certain predisposing
> conditions for effectiveness (p. 19).

This brings us back to the importance of students establishing a meaningful bond
to the school and the school personnel. In the context of the school, a student's
misbehaviour will undoubtedly rouse a response by the school's personnel. The student
will better receive the response if they have developed a secure relationship with the
teacher or administrator who is responding to their misbehaviour.

In addition, if the teacher has false beliefs about the student, this could also limit
the effectiveness of the disciplinary response. In other words, if the teacher or other
school personnel perceive the student as being a habitual "trouble maker," the student is
not likely to respond well to the disciplinary tactics used and is likely to re-offend.
Merton (1948) coined the term "self-fulfilling prophecy" to refer to the process by which
a person's false beliefs about someone can actually lead that someone to conform to those
beliefs. Teachers develop expectations about their students and sometimes treat students
differently depending on these expectations. In turn, students react to this treatment in
ways that in fact confirm the expectations of their teachers. Thus, students who
repeatedly misbehave may do so because they themselves have internalized the way the

teachers have come to see them. In this sense, the teachers' expectations actually encourage the student to persist in misbehaving.

Some researchers point to the authority structure of schooling as yet another cause of the prevalence of behaviour problems among students. This idea is not new, as William Waller (1930) first remarked upon it roughly eighty years ago when he described the teacher-student relationship as "a form of institutionalized dominance and subordination" (As cited in, Goodman, 2010, p. 228). Waller elaborates:

> Teacher and pupil confront each other in the school with an original conflict of desires, and however much that conflict may be reduced in amount, or however much it may be hidden, it still remains. The teacher represents the adult group, ever the enemy of the spontaneous life of groups of children. The teacher represents the formal curriculum, and his interest in imposing that curriculum upon the children in the form of tasks; pupils are much more interested in life in their own world than in the desiccated bits of adult life which teachers have to offer. (Waller, 1967, p. 195-6, as cited in, Goodman, 2010, p. 228).

In this way, hostility between teachers and students is perhaps inescapable to some degree. Since the 1960s researchers have noted a decline in teacher authority coupled with a rise in student deviance (Grant, 1988; Hurn, 1985, as cited in, Goodman, 2010). Students are exhibiting an increased resistance with regard to teacher authority. Apple (1982) found that "students subvert adult authority by rejecting the school curriculum and social expectations—punctuality, neatness, behavioral compliance" (As cited in, Goodman, 2010, p. 228).

In schools where students are assigned some decision-making powers, they tend to make a more positive contribution to their school life. By allowing students a voice in matters related to their school life, it helps to foster student engagement while also working to limit student estrangement (Goodman, 2010). Thus, when students actually have a say in the way in which their school operates, they are less likely to display behaviour problems. Similarly, when students are consulted about the regulation of their own behaviour problems and are able to see the value of their input in regard to the regulation of these behaviours, they are perhaps more motivated to change. Determining how much power to give to students regarding various aspects of their school lives is less clear, however.

Restorative Justice and Behaviour Problems

The practice of restorative justice in educational settings is changing the way in which schools view and respond to behaviour problems. It offers an alternative to traditional modes of discipline driven by external motivators that are often based on punishment or rewards. The alternative—restorative justice—emerged over a quarter of a century ago and was first introduced in connection with juvenile and adult criminal justice processes. Though the concept of restorative justice initially grew out of concerns within criminal and juvenile justice, there have since been many developments in the practice of restorative justice in schools.

Advocates of restorative justice argue that traditional ways of responding to wrongdoings are largely ineffective as they actually promote blame as opposed to repairing harm. Traditionally, justice is seen as a way of determining guilt. Guilt, however, is only part of the equation. In order to make thing rights, we must also

consider the nature of the relationship between those who harmed and those who were harmed and how to best repair or reconcile this relationship.

In *Changing Lenses*, Howard Zehr (2005) explains that justice can be and is seen through different lenses. Given that justice is interpreted differently by different groups of people, the views they have with respect to crime and punishment differ also. Zehr asserts that there are two main ways in which one might understand and/or experience crime. The first is through a retributive lens which "defines the state as victim, defines wrongful relationship as violation of rules, and sees the relationship between victim and offender as irrelevant" (p.184). The restorative lens, on the other hand, "identifies people as victims and recognizes the centrality of the interpersonal dimensions" (p. 184). Zehr further differentiates the two contrasting models of justice in the following table (2005, p. 184-5):

Table 1

Understandings of Crime

Retributive Lens	*Restorative Lens*
Crime defined by violation of rules (i.e., broken rules)	Crime defined by harm to people and relationships (i.e., broken relationships)
Harms defined abstractly	Harms defined concretely
Crime seen as categorically different from others	Crime recognized as related to other harms and conflicts
State as victim	People and relationships as victims
State and offender seen as primary parties	Victim and offender seen as primary parties
Victims' needs and rights ignored	Victims' needs and rights central
Interpersonal dimensions irrelevant	Interpersonal dimensions central

Conflictual nature of crime obscured	Conflictual nature of crime recognized
Wounds of offender peripheral	Wounds of offender important
Offence defined in technical, legal terms	Offence understood in full context: moral, social, economic, political

Crime, as seen through the restorative lens, is a violation of people and relationships. Relationships are more important than power and "restorative justice assumes that there is a fundamental human need to be in good relationship with others" (Pranis, 2007, p. 65). The idea that humans are profoundly and perhaps inherently relational is at the heart of restorative justice and it is best explained by Pranis (2007):

Restorative justice assumes an interconnected and interdependent universe. Every part of existence is connected to every other part and impacts every other part. Every part of the universe needs every other part. The concepts of interconnection and interdependence engender a deep sense of mutual responsibility. Individuals are responsible for their impact on others and on the larger whole of which they are a part. Communities are responsible for the good of the whole, which includes the well-being of each member. Because all parts of the community are interdependent, harm to one is harm to all – good for one is good for all. (p. 65).

Restorative justice reinforces the idea that building healthy relationships and a strong sense of community are key factors in the prevention of crime. Interestingly, the significance of relationships and sense of community in the prevention of student behaviour problems was discussed earlier. Zehr (2005) suggests, however, that society tends typically to view justice and/or crime through a retributive lens which does not lend

itself well to the idea that people and relationships matter more than the designation of guilt or the settling of scores.

Zehr argues the need for society to change lenses and rethink the traditional notion of crime as anything other than a violation of people and relationships. He asserts that in order for any real justice or healing to occur with respect to crimes committed, society must change from a retributive to a restorative lens—hence the title of his book. Society must do away with its need to assign blame and instead focus on solutions that promote healing through the restoration of the relationships harmed. It is not about who did what and how should they pay. It is about helping the "offender" understand how their actions may have affected others. It is about people and relationships. The goal is to fix the relationships that were harmed and to set in motion a plan so that the relationships remain intact. Chances are that the reason the "offender" acted out in the first place is because their relationships with others were already compromised in some way.

The commitment to making, maintaining, and repairing relationships is no easy feat, however. One must determine what skills are required to build, maintain, and repair relationships. In her book *Just Care: Restorative Approaches to Working with Children in Public Care*, Hopkins (2009) provides the following checklist for those who are befallen with the responsibility of responding to misbehaviour or conflict:

- Do you invite young people to give their perspective?
- Do you express sincere curiosity about their thoughts and feelings during the incident and since?
- Do you ask them to think who else may have been affected or involved?
- Do you encourage them to identify what needs to happen to put things right?
- Do you invite them to think about what their own needs are for closure and repair?

Do you refrain from:

- using your body or tone to threaten or show disapproval?
- giving your own opinion about what has happened?
- taking sides?
- assuming you know what has happened?
- telling people what to do?
- offering unasked-for advice?
- insisting people apologize and make up? (p. 37).

Research regarding the effectiveness of restorative justice practices and programs in the school setting indicate that they do in fact work to help prevent, or at least reduce, student behaviour problems. In 2000, the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales initiated a pilot program in two schools in London. The program used "restorative justice conferences to tackle exclusions, truancy, bullying, violence, and other forms of antisocial behavior" (Cowie, Hutson, Jennifer & Myers, 2008, p. 500). The pilot program proved successful and was later extended across the United Kingdom (Cowie et al., 2008).

Morrison and Martinez (2001) evaluated a restorative justice program in an Australian elementary classroom and found the following:

The teacher reported a number of benefits to the classroom: "Gave us a safe place to share problems face to face; modeled effective conflict resolution; encouraged the open expression of emotion; allowed us to move beyond niggling behaviors; contributed to a 'way of being' based on respect, communication and support" (As cited in, Morrison, 2003, p. 696).

This same teacher continued to explain a number of other significant changes that she witnessed with regard to her students' behaviour:

Ken, a boy who would shut down during conflict at the start of the year, was asking for open communication by the end of the year; Brent evolved naturally

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from the role of aggressor to supporter; Josh, a boy with extreme learning difficulties, found a voice for his strength in providing positive solutions; Adam's modeling of open expression broke the taboo on shedding tears; Monique, a strong learner, convened two of the circles independently (circle time was a classroom process used to address problems and concerns within the classroom and school); Jake, a boy integrated from the behavior support unit, willingly contributed and found another tool for managing his relationships. (p. 696)

Karp and Breslin (2001) explored the implementation of restorative justice practices in school communities in Minnesota, Colorado, and Pennsylvania. The authors found that there was a reduction in the number of detentions, suspensions, and expulsions. "[A]fter 2 years of restorative practices, the number of reports of violence decreased from seven per day to fewer than two" in one particular school (p. 257).

Though reductions in disciplinary actions were noted across the board it is not clear why. Was it because students exhibiting behaviour problems saw the value of repairing the harm caused by their actions? Karp and Breslin (2001) did note, however, that the reduction could be due to a number of the study's structural variables. It may be that "creating additional options for disciplinary action-options that seek to reintegrate offenders and restore victims rather than simply separating them and punishing the former has allowed school administrators the freedom to construct remedies" (p. 257). Therefore, the reduction may not necessarily be attributable to fewer instances of students' misconduct as much as it may be attributable to the fact that school personnel are simply handling these situations differently.

The findings of the previous studies are very positive in regard to the potential benefits of restorative justice. However, it should be noted that beyond those studies presented here, there are in fact very few empirical records that either support or contradict the perceived benefits of restorative justice. The bulk of the literature on restorative justice is based mainly on its meaning. However, while the literature on restorative justice is becoming increasingly extensive, there "is still no consensus as to the nature and extent of applicability of the restorative notion" (Gavreilides, 2008, p. 165).

Although Zehr (2005) and other advocates of restorative justice argue that it is the opposite of retributive justice, Daly (2002) tells it differently. Daly offers what she calls the "real story" of restorative justice. She argues that restorative justice is not easily defined because it can include a number of practices. She summarizes the problem of defining the term as follows:

> Restorative justice is not easily defined because it encompasses a variety of practices at different stages of the criminal process, including diversion from court prosecution, actions taken in parallel with court decisions and meetings between victims and offenders at any stage of the criminal process (for example, arrest, pre-sentencing and prison release)….Restorative justice is used not only in adult and juvenile criminal matters, but also in a range of civil matters, including family welfare and child protection, and disputes in schools and workplace settings (p. 57).

There are a number of meanings of restorative justice and contexts in which it can be applied. Thus, the concept of restorative justice cannot be bound by one particular

term or practice (Daly, 2002). Similarly, although proponents of restorative justice tend

to characterize it in opposition to retributive justice, as does Zehr (2005), this too is

potentially problematic. It has been said that restorative justice is not in any way punitive.

The assumption is that punishment is bad and therefore retributive justice is bad. Daly

argues that while restorative justice is often depicted in sharp contrast with retributive

justice, one is not necessarily better than the other. Similarly, although the said contrast

leads one to assume that restorative justice has nothing in common with retributive

justice, this too is potentially false. For example, Daly actually sees restorative justice as

punishment because "it leads to obligations for the offender" (As cited in, Gavrielides,

2008, p. 174). She draws her conclusion from her work in a study previously conducted

with young offenders who experienced a form of restorative justice known as "Family

Group Conferring" (Gavrielides, 2008). It is therefore possible that connections between

retribution and restoration do in fact exist.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The planning and implementation of the study as well as the rationale behind the study's qualitative case study design is explained in chapter three. Issues and concerns which may have affected the study are also presented in this chapter.

Research Design

Qualitative Case Study Design. For the purposes of this study, a qualitative case study design formed the basis of investigation. Since many of the findings resulted from interviews with the staff and students at the SSCS, it was necessary to document their thoughts and/or opinions as they were presented. A detailed description of the participants' perspectives regarding the school's disciplinary methods cannot be achieved through any other means such as through the retrieval of quantitative data or statistics.

My research did not deal with hypotheses as I was interested in providing an in-depth description and understanding of a particular school's policy of effectively dealing with students' behaviour problems. I conducted interviews with the students and staff at the SSCS in order to hear about their *individual* experiences in dealing with the "Code of Life." I wanted them to share their stories with me in any way that felt natural and/or comfortable to them. As such, this would not have been possible had I attempted to break the study down into specific components or variables. In other words, I was interested in knowing more about the individual experiences of the SSCS's learning community members with regard to the "Code of Life." I was not interested in devising artificial-type situations that would have subjected participants to various factors that may or may not have reflected accurately how they would have normally acted. Litchman (2010) makes

this especially clear as she explains that "qualitative research typically involves studying things as they exist, rather than contriving artificial situations or experiments" (p. 15).

Although many of the findings presented were collected through interviews with participants, informal observations were also utilized in the data collection process. I was able to observe both student and teacher participants in the school environment. I work at the school where the study was conducted which provided ample opportunities to observe participants in a variety of situations, some of which were particularly useful in determining how both students and staff regularly enact the "Code of Life." The role of the researcher is key to qualitative research and "interpretations are based on [the] researcher's experience and background" (Litchman, 2010, p. 9). As a teacher at the school in question and as one who has had her own personal experiences in dealing with the "Code of Life," I am perhaps more capable of interpreting what I observed.

The level of participation that an observer assumes in the research setting is a central issue when doing qualitative research. Several factors should be considered when determining to what degree the researcher should or should not be involved in the activities of his/her participants. According to Hatch (2002), "researchers who take on the role of teacher, teacher assistant, or student in school-based studies will influence the way that life plays out in those settings more than the observer who acts as a fly on the wall (p. 73). Hatch goes on to say that "not only does acting as a participant allow access to the places where the action happens, but it places the researcher in a position to experience feelings similar to those they are studying" (p. 75). I would argue that my level of involvement in the study's setting provides me with a richer perspective; however, the benefits of such involvement need to be carefully considered and pitted

against the potential limitations that go along with this level of involvement. (An argument could be made against my being both teacher and researcher; this issue will be discussed in the section on "issues and concerns.")

In order to meet my objectives it was necessary to document the conversations that I had with participants as well as the observations I made while watching participants engage naturally with the "Code of Life." According to Hatch (2002), while observations are sometimes used alone, it is more common to observe participants in context and to interview them in order to get another view of their perspectives (p. 91). Interviewing and observations made it possible to see, hear, and record the experiences of the participants.

Overall, the most significant factor in determining that qualitative research truly was the best method through which to conduct this study was that "words, as opposed to numbers," made it possible to depict the perceptions of students and staff with regard to the "Code of Life" (Litchman, 2010, p. 18). I have provided direct quotations from the participants to illustrate the various ideas or points expressed. Interviews as well as observations were the major sources of data collected in this study as both methods were needed to enhance my understanding of the various contexts in which participants experienced the "Code of Life."

A case study approach was necessary because of the study's emphasis on one school in particular, which is of course the SSCS. Case studies are designed "to study behaviours, traits, or characteristics" (Litchman, 2010, p. 83). The case study presented here was designed to study the perceptions of the SSCS's learning community members with regard to the disciplinary methods used by this particular school. Although many public schools are similar on the surface, the inner workings of these schools can differ

greatly. The case study approach makes it possible to examine the inner workings of a particular school rather closely without requiring one to compare or contrast one school with another. This was not the main focus of this study as I was not merely interested in seeing how the SSCS's policy on discipline differed from other schools. I was interested in determining whether the SSCS's policy on discipline was working for them.

There are many forms of case studies. In their book, *Qualitative Research for Education*, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) define a form of case study termed "situation analysis." According to the authors, in this type of case study, "a particular event (the expulsion of a student from school, for example) is studied from the points of view of all participants (the student, his or her friends, the parents, the principal, the teacher that initiated the action)" (p. 60). I would consider this study a situated analysis as it encompasses the points of view of both students and staff. I talked with students, teachers, special education technicians, daycare workers, and lunchtime monitors as well as the school principal. It was necessary to include the thoughts and/or opinions of everyone affected by the SSCS's "Code of Life" in order to determine whether it is proving to be an effective means of dealing with discipline for the school. No one group is more important than the other and the perspectives of all need to be considered in order to truly understand the discipline experiences that take place in the school.

Participants. Of the 360+ students, 12 were selected to participate in the interview portion of the study—four from each of the three cycles. (Cycles refer to the various grade levels at the elementary level. Cycle One encompasses grades 1 and 2, Cycle Two encompasses grades 3 and 4, and Cycle Three encompasses grades 5 and 6.) Each cycle contained at least one first time "offender" as well as at least one repeat "offender."

Repeat "offenders" are those students who have violated the "Code of Life" two or more times. Participants ranged in gender, academic performance, and the number of times they were previously found to be in violation of the "Code of Life."

Student participants were selected using "purposeful sampling." Although there are a variety of purposeful sampling strategies through which to select participants, a "homogenous sample" was utilized for the purposes of this study. "Homogeneous samples are made up of participants who share common characteristics" (Hatch, 2002, p. 50). I met with homeroom teachers and asked them to suggest participants for the study. Teachers consulted their records and recommended students who had been in violation of the "Code of Life" on at least one occasion.

Of the 20 teachers on staff, three teachers were selected to participate. One teacher was selected from each cycle so that experiences with students from all three cycles could be documented. The teacher participants were those who taught the student participants and they were chosen also because they were the "head" teachers. Finally, one daycare worker, one lunchtime monitor, one special education technician, and the principal were also selected to participate as the students interacted with a number of adults during the day outside of regularly scheduled class time and activities.

Time. Interviews and observations were carried out for four months during the 2010-2011 school year. The idea was that by conducting the study at the beginning of November until sometime after Christmas break it would indicate whether the "Code of Life" was indeed proving successful over an extended period of time. Similarly, it would also indicate whether its effectiveness varied according to different times in the school

year as the stress levels of the participants tend to fluctuate around holidays and reporting periods. In the end, the study began in November and ended in March.

Interviews with students were conducted during the school day during my planning periods. It was decided that students would participate in the study during regular class time so that they were not required to miss recess or lunch breaks. Parents, as well as students and teachers, were informed of this ahead of time. Interviews lasted roughly 15 minutes and I met with each student between two and three times over the four-month span. If the teacher was in the middle of teaching something particularly important and did not want the student to miss the lesson, I would return at a later time. Likewise, if a student judged that he or she should remain in class for a given reason, I would return later.

I made a concerted effort to meet with student participants soon after a disciplinary incident occurred so that they were better able to remember and describe what happened. If too much time passed it was difficult for students to remember what happened. Although it mattered very little whether or not they remembered the dates and times of these incidents, it was important that they remembered how they felt, the causes of the incident, the reasons why it unfolded as it did, and whether or not their behaviour changed following the incident. Therefore, it was best to meet within three days of the incident having occurred.

Meetings with adult participants happened before or after school and at lunchtime. Similarly, I also attempted to meet with teachers soon after a disciplinary incident occurred so that they, like the students, were better able to describe what happened.

<u>Research Questions</u>

As noted in the introduction, the following questions were developed in an effort to help guide my research: (1) What does the "Code of Life" hope to accomplish? (2) What does the "Code of Life" look like and how does it work? (3) How does the "Code of Life" relate to existing research regarding school and discipline and is it an effective means of dealing with discipline?

Question 1: What does the "Code of Life" hope to accomplish?

Of the research questions listed above, this one is perhaps the most important. In order to determine whether or not the students and staff at the SSCS perceived the "Code of Life" as being an effective means of dealing with discipline, understanding what it was meant to achieve in the first place was necessary. In doing so, it was necessary to discuss what the school had in place prior to the "Code of Life" and why the staff found it necessary to change the school's disciplinary policies and procedures. This made it possible to understand how the "Code of Life" differed from the other forms of disciplinary practices.

Question 2: What does the "Code of Life" look like and how does it work?

The aim of this study was to examine the students' and staffs' perceptions regarding the school's current disciplinary practices. Therefore, a detailed description of the "Code of Life" and its key components was required. By providing a detailed description, it was possible to assess which of the key components were proving to be successful and which were not. Determining whether or not the students and staff at the SSCS shared a common description and/or understanding of the "Code of Life" was also made possible.

Question 3: How does the "Code of Life" relate to existing research regarding school and discipline and is it an effective means of dealing with discipline?

Once the key components of the "Code of Life" were identified and the school's expectations of its "Code of Life" were likewise identified, determining how the code relates to existing research on school and discipline was possible. Existing research in this field has examined a wide range of causes relating to student misbehaviour in school, especially the effect of school culture on student behavioural problems. This research has also proposed a variety of solutions, although the seemingly endless abundance of this research provides conflicting interpretations as to what tools are truly the most effective to use in the remediation of student behaviour problems. Furthermore, this research did not often address students and/or staff directly about the factors they saw as contributing to their school's successes and failures. This study was partially intended to evaluate whether the "Code of Life" is an effective means of discipline by examining whether existing research in the area of school and discipline supports this school's chosen methods of dealing with discipline. However—and most importantly—the main intent was to also consider the thoughts and opinions of those who are directly affected by these methods before determining whether the "Code of Life" is truly effective for this particular school.

Issues and Concerns

Level of Involvement. The data collection and analysis processes are greatly influenced by the researcher. "All information is filtered through the researcher's eyes and ears and is influenced by his or her experience, knowledge, skill, and background" (Litchman, 2010, p. 16). As such, it is imperative that researchers consider the dilemma

of trying to be impartial and objective. This was sometimes difficult to accomplish, as I acted both as teacher and researcher throughout my study. I often considered how this might have affected the research process.

Although I have on occasion had personal dealings with the "Code of Life," I decided not to include them in the study. Instead, I focused on the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of others. I asked a lot of questions and made many observations over the four-month span in which the study was conducted. Although I may have had some preconceptions as to whether the "Code of Life" was indeed proving to be a successful disciplinary tool for our school, I did not assume that the students or staff shared my view of the "Code of Life." In fact, since I was the music specialist at the SSCS when the study was conducted, I knew that my own experiences in dealing with the "Code of Life" would not suffice in and of themselves. I was not a homeroom teacher and only saw the students twice during a six-day cycle for 45 minutes. In order to truly determine whether the "Code of Life" was working for our school, it was important to speak with the teachers and all persons who saw these students regularly as they knew them best. Furthermore, although I had experienced the "Code of Life" personally, it was from a teacher's perspective only. The aim of this study was to also consider the students' points of view. Only after meeting with several persons did I attempt to figure out whether *they* perceived the "Code of Life" as being an effective discipline policy.

Also, because I acted as both teacher and researcher, I had to consider how this might have affected the behaviour of the participants. In other words, because my students and colleagues knew that I was studying them, they may have done or said things simply because they assumed that is what I wanted them to do or say or because

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they feared I would judge them in some way. There were instances in which I had observed teachers dealing with students who had violated the "Code of Life" and when they noticed I was watching they would comment: "You might not want to document this incident, even though the student's behaviour warrants a restorative measure, I've decided not to write a notice in his agenda." I sometimes felt that teachers were worried that they would somehow ruin the study and they seemed apologetic about it.

Similarly, I noticed that some students were a bit anxious during our meetings. One student in particular actually apologized to me for having previously violated the "Code of Life." I had to explain to him that he was not in any trouble with me and that I was not there to judge his behaviour in any way. I simply wanted to discuss with him what had happened and how it made him feel. In the end I do believe he understood that our conversations were simply an avenue through which he could communicate to me about what had happened without feeling as though he had disappointed me in some way.

Finally, another issue I needed to consider as a researcher who also acted as a teacher had to do with my ability to document data as it was presented. "If the researcher is acting as teacher, student, or administrator, stopping to make a record of what is happening may be impossible, and trying to remember without some kind of field note record will be very difficult" (Litchman, 2010, p. 75). I definitely experienced this. Some of the observations I made occurred in the hall when I was walking students back to their classrooms. I was not always in a position where I could stop and make a note of what was happening. I was, however, able to meet with teachers afterward but this did not necessarily provide me with the verbatim conversations they had with students. Also, I was not always able to meet with the students whom the teachers had stopped in the hall.

When I did manage to meet with these students, they often did not provide explicit descriptions of what had happened because too much time had passed.

Confidentiality. In order to ensure the confidentiality of participants, special considerations were sometimes required. For instance, because students saw the participants being pulled from class they sometimes asked why these students were leaving or where they were going. I told the inquiring students that I had previously asked the participants to help me with something in my classroom. Students often helped me with various jobs in my classroom, so this did not seem out of the ordinary. Since I was required to consult with teachers about possible student participants for the study, the teachers did know which students were meeting with me. However, the names of the participants were changed in the final presentation of this thesis so that teachers were not able to pinpoint a particular student's comments. Also, because student participants were under the age of consent, it was necessary to obtain parental consent.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Findings

As noted in the previous chapter, the undertaking of this study was based on the following research questions: (1) What does the "Code of Life" hope to accomplish? (2) What does the "Code of Life" look like and how does it work? (3) How does the "Code of Life" relate to existing research regarding school and discipline and is it an effective means of dealing with discipline? The findings discussed in this chapter will focus primarily on the third question as research questions one and two were previously discussed in the first chapter on school context. I will return to questions one and two in the fifth chapter when I make my final recommendations to the SSCS.

Chapter four highlights the information that was presented previously in the literature review in order to determine whether current research on school discipline corroborates the disciplinary methods that are currently used at the SSCS. While the findings presented are largely based on the literature review, the definition of "effective discipline" introduced in the introduction must also be considered in this process. Effective discipline was defined as that which results in the desired behavioural change in the student while maintaining and/or promoting the student's academic, emotional, and social development. As a supplement to this analysis, excerpts from the interviews conducted with both students and staff are also presented, as are the observations that I made over the course of a four month span.

The "Code of Life" and Academic Achievement

Although the aim of this section is to examine how the "Code of Life" is affecting the students' academic achievement, we will begin by first examining how the school's

environment in general is affecting students' academic achievement overall. It is important to consider the implications of low academic achievement as research has shown that it can lead to an increase in student behaviour problems. As was presented in the literature review, student misbehaviour is often caused by external factors over which the student seemingly has no control. Students who feel no connection to their school or its surroundings are more likely to act out their frustrations. Similarly, teachers who feel little or no connection to their students often make judgements about them, their learning, their behaviours, etc.—all of which are typically based on perceptions rather than on actual facts. These perceptions are typically in line with the dominant ways of thinking that are present within the school. Through my interviews with and observations of teachers, the seemingly subtle manners in which dominant ways of thinking can lead teachers to develop inaccurate perceptions of their students' learning abilities were evident. As was previously mentioned, approximately one third of our students are Native children from the nearby reserve and many are believed to be at risk regarding their health, their ability to learn, their family situations, their second language acquisition skills, and their intrinsic motivation.

We are currently making every effort to help our Native population succeed in their academic, social, and emotional capacities. However, I believe that our actions— even though they are perhaps unintentional—are further differentiating these students from the rest of our population. I say this because, through our explicit tracking of these Native students, the treatment they receive from teachers and school staff differs greatly from the ways in which teachers treat and interact with "high-track" students.

This discrepancy is often a reflection of the cultural capital these students possess as Mohawk children entering the public school system. For instance, although we have come to understand that we have a significant number of strong oral learners among our Native population, some teachers have yet to fully accept and incorporate this type of learning in their classrooms. Some teachers continue to say: "What's wrong with them? I tell them to write and they don't."

High-achieving students (i.e., those perceived as having an innate talent for the written word) are expected to work independently and are generally thought to be more intelligent. Furthermore, the seemingly less capable students (i.e., those perceived as having poor writing skills) receive poorer grades as well as less rigorous coursework. Overall, teachers have less patience with these students and refer them to special tutoring and after-school homework programs. More than half of the students who attend the after-school programs are Native.

Similarly, in an attempt to encourage students to complete their homework, some teachers use a "token" system. Students receive a predetermined number of tokens at the beginning of each term and as long as they submit their homework regularly and are generally well behaved, they keep their tokens. However, each time they do not submit their homework, students lose a token. At the end of the term, as long as a student has at least one token remaining, he/she can be a recipient of the class reward. The class reward is also predetermined. Numerous teachers are currently using this method to help motivate students to do their homework. While talking with one of these teachers, I learned that it was often the same students who continued to lose their tokens and nearly

half of them were Native. It did not take long before I questioned whether changes to the teachers' policies on homework were needed.

Because of the token system, teachers were quite certain that parents were thus taking a more active role in ensuring that homework was completed. Much of the work that was being sent home, however, required students to write in both English and French which made it increasingly difficult for Anglophone parents to help their children with homework. Although the teachers seemingly could not concede that maybe they needed to rework the homework policy, I did suggest that they meet with those students who repeatedly lost tokens and allow them to communicate with the teachers orally. The teachers declined to do so; however, they did say that arrangements were sometimes made in which students could try and win back tokens after they had been taken away. These teachers generally interacted more positively with their high-track students than with those perceived as being in the lower streams and homework was sometimes used as a way of sorting through the two groups because emphasis is placed on the completion of homework.

Initial studies of social class impact have shown, as has my account of the evidence presented in my observations of and interviews with the teachers at the SSCS, that:

> teachers tended to judge as more capable the children who shared their own
> values, and that since most teachers either were born into, or had become part of
> the middle class, they encountered many students in their classrooms who did not
> share their values or other forms of cultural capital. (Coleman, 1996; Cicourel,
> 1963; Jencks, 1972; Rist, 1973; Rosenfeld, 1971, as cited in, Mangan, n.d., p. 8)

Of the twenty members on our teaching staff, no one is Native. We are all members of the middle and/or upper classes and we do not share many of the values of our Mohawk students.

While the "Code of Life" was not explicitly geared towards changing the class structure of schooling, it does inadvertently work to partially remedy this problem through the introduction of a whole-school approach to regulating the school community. It is an approach that places a great deal of emphasis on the communication between home and school regarding the behaviour, safety, and academic and social development of each child. The "Code of Life" thus aims to help and encourage students, their families, teachers, and the learning community at large to see themselves as "one." I have already expressed that when students see themselves as being part of a supportive community they are more likely to do better academically.

However, this does not explain the ways in which the "Code of Life" is having a *direct* impact, if at all, on the students' academic achievement. In assessing the "Code of Life's" potential impact in this area, we need to refer to what the students actually had to say. Since the principles of restorative justice are at the very core of the "Code of Life," student participants were asked how the various restorative measures they received affected their class work.

Results tended to indicate that the restorative measures had little or no significant impact on the students' class work unless those measures required them to miss class time. Herein lies a problem. Although the school's personnel is, in theory, working to implement restorative discipline practices, the restorative measures received by some of the study's participants were anything but restorative. In other words, there were cases

where students were actually punished. As such, some students received out-of-school

suspensions. One student in particular, let us call her Jodie, told a fellow classmate in

class to "shut the fxxx up." This resulted in her being sent home which also resulted in

her missing class time.

> Researcher: How do you think this affected your class work?
> Jodie: *I missed some hard work.*
> Researcher: So you were a little confused when you returned to school?
> Jodie: *Yeah, I had to ask my teacher to help me.*

A student who received five recess detentions as a result of having played roughly

with another student during recess also commented that this discipline measure had

negatively affected his class work. He did not miss class time but believed that his

punishment made it difficult for him to concentrate in class.

> Researcher: How did you think the recess detentions affected your class work?
> Matthew: *It affected it a little cause I kept thinking about it. I couldn't concentrate.*
> Researcher: Why couldn't you concentrate?
> Matthew: *Cause I knew I was going to have to stay in at lunch instead of playing with my friends.*
> Researcher: So you were thinking about your upcoming detentions instead of paying attention in class?
> Matthew: *It was hard not to think about it.*

It should also be noted, however, that Matthew's actions were actually severe enough to

warrant sending the student he was "rough housing" with to the hospital. Matthew

mentioned that it was difficult to remain on task during class because he often found

himself thinking about the extent to which he had injured his classmate. Until the staff

could assess whether Matthew was likely to again injure others, they thought it prudent to

keep him in at recess.

Another participant mentioned that he too was having some difficulty

concentrating on his class work because the restorative measure he had received required

him to speak in front of his class. This student had stolen a pair of scissors from a classmate and he was required to prepare an oral presentation explaining why it is wrong to steal. He was very nervous about the prospect of speaking in front of his class.

> Researcher: How do you think the restorative measure affected your class work?
> Anthony: *Well, I hate talking in class so I was really nervous. I didn't want to do it.*
> Researcher: So, because you were nervous about presenting it was difficult for you to pay attention to your class work?
> Anthony: *Yes, I really didn't want to.*
> Researcher: Was it really that bad in the end?
> Anthony: *No, because my teacher asked me questions to help me.*
> Researcher: Your teacher helped you through it by asking questions throughout your presentation?
> Anthony: *Yes, so I didn't have to do all the talking. It was easier.*

In most instances where the students did in fact receive restorative measures, they were neither academically advantaged nor disadvantaged. Nine of the 12 respondents believed that the restorative measures had little, if any, effect on their class work. Two students who received punitive measures because of misconduct did think that such measures had negatively affected their class work. And in one of those cases, it was unclear whether the student had trouble concentrating on his class work because of the punishment he received or because he was experiencing some anxiety over the harm he had inflicted upon his classmate. I suspect it was a combination of the two. In the end, only one of the respondents who did receive a restorative measure perceived it as having negatively affected his class work. The respondent, Anthony, reported experiencing some anxiety with regard to presenting in class.

The "Code of Life" and Relationships

The literature review has shown that when students secure meaningful attachments to their schools, teachers, peers, and parents it will reduce the likelihood that

they misbehave. Thus, a school's chosen disciplinary tactic, in and of itself, is not enough to curb student misbehaviour. These tactics matter little if the students have not secured quality relationships with members of the learning community. It is for this reason that I have included the opinions of the students regarding how they believed their relationships with various members of the learning community were affected as a result of the restorative measures that they received.

Overall, the respondents did have a lot to say about the various ways in which the restorative measures had apparently affected their relationships. With regard to their relationships with peers, many of the student participants did believe that these relationships were affected. Most saw them as having been positively affected.

One student remarked that the restorative measure had actually strengthened his friendship with one of his classmates. After having kicked this classmate in the leg, the "offender" agreed to write him a letter of apology.

> Researcher: How did this affect your friendship?
> Robert: *It made it better with Kevin.*
> Researcher: How's that?
> Robert: *I wrote him a letter to tell him I was sorry.*
> Researcher: And the apology was accepted by your friend?
> Robert: *Yes, and now we're best friends.*

Robert also remarked that after having written the letter of apology, he remembered feeling bad about having kicked his classmate. In similar situations where the "offender" was given the opportunity to apologize to his "victim," the "offender" often reported that the apology helped to repair their relationship.

There was another instance where a respondent reported that the restorative measure she had received impacted positively on her relationships with peers. Annabelle, after having whipped an orange at a student, was required to write a reflection. The

reflection helped her to question whether her friendships were actually encouraging her to misbehave.

> Researcher: How did the reflection affect your friendships?
> Annabelle: *It made me realize that I was always blaming my friends for things.*
> Researcher: Tell me more about that.
> Annabelle: *Well, I don't have to listen to them. I don't have to be cool.*
> Researcher: So it was your friends who told you to throw the orange?
> Annabelle: *Yes.*
> Researcher: Are you going to remain friends?
> Annabelle*: I'm not sure yet. Some of them yes, but others no. I don't have the same friends.*
> Researcher: Do you think that changing friends will help you to improve your behaviour?
> Annabelle: *Yeah because I don't have to be cool all the time.*

Annabelle realized that her friendships were impacting negatively on her behaviour. This is in line with the information presented in the literature review which suggests that students who have friends who misbehave will more than likely misbehave themselves as well.

The importance of helping students to repair the relationships that were harmed as a direct result of their actions is central to restorative justice practices and was also duly noted in the literature review. However, not all of the study's respondents were actually afforded the opportunity to repair their relationships with peers. Again, this occurred because although the SSCS has made a commitment to practising restorative justice as a means of addressing student misconduct, the school continues to apply punitive measures in some cases. Consequently, those respondents who did experience punitive measures reported that these measures had negatively affected their relationships with peers.

Referring again to Jodie's case, wherein she had been sent home for using foul language in class, it was clear she felt that her relationships with some of her peers had suffered.

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Researcher: How were your friendships affected after you were sent home?
Jodie: *Well, everyone thinks I'm bad now.*
Researcher: Why do your friends think you're bad?
Jodie: *Because I was sent home, everyone thinks I'm bad and no one wants to be my friend. Only Chuck, Gabriel, and Tracy want to be my friend.*
Researcher: You think that by being sent home, it made your friends think you were bad?
Jodie: *Yes but I said "it" by accident. I didn't even mean it.*

Another respondent reported that the consequence he received also impacted negatively on his friendships. In this case, the "offender" had been fooling around in the cafeteria at lunch and had shown disrespect to one of the lunchtime monitors. His actions had earned him a week's worth of lunchtime detentions.

Researcher: How did the detentions affect your friendships?
Chris: *Well, I had nothing to do.*
Researcher: I'm not sure I understand.
Chris: *I had nothing to do with my friends. I couldn't have fun with them.*
Researcher: You feel like you missed out?
Chris: *Yes, I missed them. And when I was allowed to go out again one of my friends wouldn't play with me anymore.*
Researcher: Why not?
Chris: *Because he made new friends.*

Overall, the respondents who were given the chance to fix their relationship with peers reported that it had helped improve their friendships. One respondent reported that upon reflection of the incident, she actually determined that her values did not necessarily match those of her peer group. She decided to change friends as a result. Those who experienced punitive measures felt differently. The respondent who received a suspension reported feeling ostracized by her peers. Similarly, the respondent who had received lunchtime detentions for a week experienced some anxiety over having been separated from his friends.

The quality of relationships with peers is also linked to student misbehaviour as was indicated in the literature review and reflected in interviews with the study's

participants. However, the significance of students' relationships with teachers also needs to be addressed. Teachers' support can have a significant impact on the way students come to view themselves and ultimately how they behave.

Interestingly, only those respondents who had received punitive measures remarked about their relationships with their teachers. Chris (the one who had received the lunchtime detentions) for example, reported that he had never really had a good relationship with any of his teachers.

> Researcher: How do you think the lunch detentions affected your relationship with your teacher?
> Chris: *I don't think it did. I mean I never had a good relationship with a teacher before.*
> Researcher: Why do you think that is?
> Chris: *Probably because I'm always in trouble. I don't think they like me.*
> Researcher: You think if you behaved better your teachers would like you better?
> Chris: *Actually, I've been trying harder to do my work. But really that's because I don't want to get in trouble.*

In the end, the detentions served only to reinforce in Chris the idea that his teachers see him as a "troublemaker." At no point did he mention the relationships that were harmed as a result of his actions. Instead, he focused on the fact that he was always in trouble and that his teachers did not like him. This incident marked his third offence since the beginning of the year. He went on to "offend" twice more before the study was completed.

The literature review also indicated that the students' relationships with their primary caregivers play a role in the regulation of behaviour problems at school. The student-parent relationship was not easily addressed in the study, however, as I did not speak directly with participants' parents. Furthermore, it happened periodically that parents did not indicate receipt of their children's tickets. Therefore, it was not always

clear if the parents had even been informed of their children's involvement in situations of misconduct. In those cases where parents did acknowledge receipt, none of the study's student participants believed that their relationships with their parents had been significantly affected. The respondents tended only to indicate that their parents had signed the tickets and had merely asked what happened—their relationships remained intact and unchanged. Except in one case, however, a respondent reported that her mother was angry with her for being sent home and she was consequently sent to her room. I am referring again to Jodie's case. Here again, however, punitive as opposed to restorative measures were used.

There were instances where parents had written comments in the students' agendas indicating they did not support the teacher's account of what had happened. For example, there was a case where two students were asked to stop playing with scissors but refused to stop. This resulted in the students having to write a reflection on safety at school and making good decisions. One of the student's parents responded by writing a note to the teacher telling her that her son was only trying to make a new friend. According to the teacher, however, this did not excuse the student because both students had disrespected her by choosing to continue playing with the scissors after they had been asked to stop.

This account does not necessarily demonstrate how parents' influence can significantly affect their children's behaviour, but it does demonstrate how different people can interpret situations differently. In the literature review, I presented a checklist for those wishing to adopt a restorative approach to working with children in public care. The first item on that list requires one to ask whether or not he/she invites children to

give their perspective of what happened. Clearly, the teacher did not do this. I am not saying that the teacher's response was wrong or that the student's behaviour did not warrant a response from the teacher. I am saying that the parent took the time to ask her son what had happened.

After having observed the parent's comment in the student's agenda, I spoke with the student about it.

> Researcher: Do you agree with your teacher's decision?
> Marc: *I sort of agree with it. I should have stopped playing with the scissors but I was only trying to make a new friend.*
> Researcher: Did your teacher ask you why you were playing with the scissors?
> Marc: *No.*
> Researcher: What did your parents say when they heard about what happened?
> Marc: *My mom asked me why I was playing with scissors. I told her I was only trying to make a new friend.*
> Researcher: Then what?
> Marc: *She said that it's good to make new friends but playing with scissors is dangerous.*
> Researcher: Do you agree?
> Marc: *Yes.*
> Researcher: Besides talking to you what else did your mom do?
> Marc: *Nothing really, that's usually what happens. My mom just talks to me.*
> Researcher: Do you enjoy talking with your mom?
> Marc: *Yes, she doesn't get mad at me.*
> Researcher: Do you think the teacher was mad at you?
> Marc: *A little bit.*
> Researcher: How would you have handled the situation differently?
> Marc: *I don't know really. My mom said I should ask the boy to come over.*
> Researcher: Do you think you will?
> Marc: *I don't know, probably.*

The student's discussion with his mother indicates that he felt at ease discussing the incident with her. He said he enjoys talking with his mother because she does not get mad at him, but he did think that his teacher might have been a little mad. His mother suggested that he invite the other boy over. This is obviously a better choice as it does not involve scissors nor does it involve writing a reflection on making good decisions. I am

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not at all sure how a child in Cycle Two would go about writing a reflection such as this. I am also unclear as to whether this reflection would actually help the student to make better choices in the future. After all, is it his decision to play with scissors that needs rethinking, or is it his decision to use scissors while trying to befriend a classmate? The situation is ambiguous to say the least and the relevance of writing a reflection on safety at school, and on making good decisions, is questionable. The mother's suggestion to invite the classmate over to the house offers Marc an alternative to making friends that will not get him into "trouble" a school.

In this particular case, the parent's involvement did impact on the student's behaviour as it encouraged him to think about better alternatives for making friends. Furthermore, the mother's involvement allowed her son to share his own interpretation of what happened which is something the teacher neglected to do. Had the mother not asked questions, we would never have known that her son did in fact have good intentions. Marc felt comfortable talking with his mom about what happened and she helped him to understand that playing with scissors can be dangerous. It should be noted again, however, that the preceding anecdote is the only example I have to offer in terms of the link between student-parent relationships and behaviour problems. Furthermore, this anecdote would not have presented itself if it had not been for the principle of the "Code of Life" that aims to keep parents informed of their children's alleged misbehaviours.

The "Code of Life" and Disciplinary Practices

The literature review showed that a school's chosen methods of dealing with issues of discipline are usually aimed at reducing instances of student misbehaviour. However, although the goal may be to prevent students from reoffending, the likelihood

that this will occur as a direct result of enforcing the school's disciplinary methods is unlikely. In order to establish an effective means of dealing with discipline, there are several other factors that must be taken into account such as the quality of the students' relationships with significant others, their academic abilities, etc.

Assessing whether the "Code of Life" was successful in reducing instances of student misbehaviour was not an easy task. In my conversations with students, it was clear that they believed their behaviours had changed as a result of the restorative measures they had received. However, although the respondents almost always commented that the restorative measures had helped them to change their behaviours so that they would not "offend" in the future, many did "re-offend." In fact, of the 12 student participants, eight "re-offended" at least once. They did not necessarily "re-offend" in the exact same way they did the first time but they did continue to engage in situations of misconduct.

The problem I encountered in trying to determine whether the restorative practices affected the students' behaviour was that the school often utilized punitive practices instead. Although the students often referred to these practices as being restorative, they were not. For instance, after receiving a week's worth of lunchtime detentions for behaving poorly in the cafeteria, Chris commented that the detentions were not restorative.

> Researcher: How did the detentions change your behaviour?
> Chris: *Well it's not like it fixed anything.*
> Researcher: How come?
> Chris: *It wasn't really a restorative measure. I was just sitting at the office. It didn't do anything.*
> Researcher: You would have handled things differently?
> Chris: Yes. *I think the teacher should have had a conversation with me and we should have come up with the restorative measure together.*

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Chris did say that he was trying harder to follow the rules since this incident but he "re-offended" twice more.

Most of the students who experienced punitive measures did believe that the measures had impacted positively on their behaviours. However, although the students agreed to change their behaviours as a result of the consequence, it may only have been because they did not want to face the consequence again. For example, one of the respondents, we will call him Bob, noted that the consequence he received changed his behaviour. Bob had eaten his lunch upstairs instead of in the cafeteria and was given a lunchtime detention. Bob was particularly upset about this because the detention fell on a day when he had basketball practice. He was worried that his coach would be angry that he missed practice.

> Researcher: Did the detention change your behaviour?
> Bob: *I don't want to miss basketball.*
> Researcher: Does that mean you won't eat your lunch upstairs anymore?
> Bob: *Yeah. I was really worried about missing basketball practice. I wanted to talk to my coach so he would know where I was.*

Bob agreed that he would no longer eat his lunch upstairs unsupervised. However, there was no indication that he understood why it was necessary for him to eat in the cafeteria with the other children. Nor was their any indication that he was sorry for having caused the lunch monitors to worry about his whereabouts. Bob was only concerned about having missed practice and whether or not his coach would be angry with him because of it.

Restorative justice emphasizes the role of people and relationships. Yet the consequences that Jodie, Chris, and Bob (and there were others) received did very little to cause these students to look at how their actions affected the people and relationships

around them. I suspect this is due, in part, to the fact that in many instances the teachers seemed to worry more about controlling the students' behaviour. Although their goal may have been to involve children in the regulation of their own behaviours, through my interviews and observations of participants, it is clear that this was not always the case.

The teachers I interviewed have only partially adopted the "Code of Life" into their classrooms. In addition to the "Code of Life," some teachers used token systems like the one mentioned earlier while others used "red light/green light systems" which let the students start off with a green card but if the student misbehaves, his/her card is changed to yellow and if the bad behaviour persists, it is turned to red. A note is then sent home to parents for them to sign and return to school. Of course, classroom management is a big part of the teacher's job; however, because each classroom used a different system in addition to the "Code of Life," it seemed as though at the time this study was conducted it was proving impossible for the school to adopt the "Code of Life" full-heartedly. Instead, many teachers continued to utilize their own means of controlling student behaviour within their classrooms and the notion of the whole-school approach, once desired, was seemingly ignored.

In addition, with the renewed interest in teaching character education in public schools that has surfaced over the last few years, our school was recently allocated funds to hire a new teacher to teach character education. This teacher, with support from our school board, has since introduced the *CHARACTER COUNTS!* program to help promote six shared values in our school. They include: citizenship, caring, trustworthiness, fairness, respect, and responsibility. The values, commonly referred to as the *Six Pillars,* are taught during class time and school-wide assemblies. The newly introduced character

education program is also based upon the bucket filling metaphor. A "bucket filler" is a person who says and/or does nice things to people, whereas a "bucket dipper" is someone who says and/or does mean things to people. Students are encouraged to fill other students' "buckets".

Our school had already implemented its own character education initiative, which is of course the "Code of Life." With the adoption of yet another character education program, it appears some students were not always able to differentiate between the two programs. I am not implying that it is in fact necessary for students to understand these differences. I wonder though whether the ideals we had hoped the children would take from the "Code of Life"—in particular the significance of the restorative process—are somewhat lost in the "mix up."

For instance, in my conversations with students, it appeared that they did not have a full grasp of the concept of restorative justice. I asked the student participants to explain to me in their own words what the "Code of Life" was. In this aim, I also asked them to tell me about restorative measures. In an effort to answer these questions, students often referred instead to the *CHARACTER COUNTS!* program.

> Researcher: Can you tell me in your own words about the "Code of Life?" What is it?
> Cori: *It's about trustworthiness, caring and fairness. I think there's more…I think there's six things.*
> ---
> Researcher: What did you receive as a restorative measure?
> Sandra: *I don't know.*
> Researcher: Okay, well tell me what your teacher wanted you to do to solve your problem.
> Sandra: *You mean like bucket-filling?*
> Researcher: What's bucket-filling?
> Sandra: *It's when you are nice to someone.*
> Researcher: What happens if you are mean to someone?
> Sandra: *Then you dipped in their bucket. You tell them sorry.*

The *CHARACTER COUNTS!* program is not necessarily in and of itself a "bad" program. However, as is evident from the above comments, the combination of two separate programs does not lend itself well to the successful implementation of the "Code of Life."

Teachers' Perspectives

As mentioned in the introduction, the aim of this study was to assess the school's disciplinary measures by speaking with both staff and students. I have already discussed the students' points of view. I will now focus on the views held by the teachers and other school personnel as they too are key stakeholders in the restorative process. Although the "victim" and the "offender" are often seen as the sole parties affected by an offence, in a school setting we must consider that the "victim" and the "offender" require assistance when negotiating possible solutions to their conflicts. Since teachers and other school personnel work with young elementary school children, the students may not be acutely aware of the impact their actions have on others. Thus, teachers must work with students to guide them in the restorative process. Teachers must help both parties agree to a restorative measure and keep documentations of all incidents and restorative measures. We must not overlook the fact that teachers are also affected by the offence.

Overall, the consensus among teachers and staff was that the underlying philosophy of restorative justice is good. Students should be made to reconcile the relationships harmed as a result of their actions. They should be encouraged to share their perspectives and help in determining the best course of action with the regard to the regulation of their behaviour problems. Less clear, according to teachers, was the role they were required to play in the restorative process.

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The problem lies not in the general conception of the "Code of Life," but in the application of its restorative principles. Problems arose for teachers when it was necessary to determine an appropriate restorative measure for students who had committed an offence. The comments I received from teachers and other adults tended generally to indicate that developing appropriate restorative measures for the varying situations of misconduct that they encountered was difficult. There are a number of reasons why teachers were experiencing some difficulty in this regard.

Time. First, for some teachers, the issuing of a restorative measure was proving problematic because they simply did not have the time to ensure that the measures were carried out properly. Restorative measures need to be considered carefully before they are issued. One teacher remarked that it takes a great deal of time to meet with all the parties affected by the offence and then determine with all those involved how best to remedy the situation. Once a restorative measure is agreed upon, the teacher is responsible for ensuring that it is carried out. Depending on the restorative measure this could take several minutes, hours, or even days to complete successfully.

It is no secret that the demands placed on teachers are increasing steadily. Teachers must work with students, plan lessons, grade assignments, supervise students at recess, attend meetings, complete all kinds of paperwork, contact parents, etc. In addition to all of these activities, teachers must also work with students to help manage their undesirable behaviours. Some teachers are overwhelmed by these demands. When asked whether the "Code of Life" seemed to be working for their school, a teacher participant replied by stating that "*some teachers aren't dealing with some behaviours because they don't want the responsibility of dealing with the paperwork and the restorative measure.*"

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This sentiment was echoed often in my interviews with teachers and other school

personnel.

> Researcher: What do you dislike about the "Code of Life?"
> Staff Member: *It just takes too much time!*
> Researcher: Explain.
> Staff Member: *Well for one thing, teachers don't seem to want to give up their recesses to supervise restorative measures. Since they can't be carried out during regular class time, a lot of teachers send their students to see the resource team. The resource team is then made responsible to supervise that the restorative measures are indeed happening. Teachers just don't want to give up recess, lunch, or stay after school.*
> Researcher: What does the resource team have to say about this?
> Staff Member: *They're tired of dealing with it. They don't want to have to deal only with students who are misbehaving. They don't think it's fair.*
> --
> Staff Member: *We have to find a better way to handle the restorative measures. It takes up a lot of our time. We don't always make sure the restorative measures are done.*
> --
> Researcher: How do you think the restorative measure you assigned affected the student's class work?
> Staff Member: *To tell you the truth, I'm not even sure if he did it. I was really busy last week and I didn't check to see if he even went to help out with the kids in kindergarten. I'll have to ask him about that.*

Follow-up. In addition to being present for restorative measures, establishing a

timeline of when and how restorative measures took place was also required. Record

keeping and documentation of all incidents and restorative measures was to be done in

the GPI computer program by the homeroom teacher no more than three days following

the undesirable behaviour. However, in speaking with teachers, it was apparent that the

follow-ups were also proving problematic for teachers.

> Researcher: Did you make a record of the incident in GPI?
> Staff Member: *Not yet because I haven't had a chance to talk to the lunch monitor.*
> Researcher: You didn't issue the restorative measure?
> Staff Member: *Well, I signed the ticket but I didn't give the restorative measure, the lunch monitor did.*
> --

Researcher: Why did you consider the student to be in violation of the "code"?
Staff Member: *It wasn't me who gave the ticket.*
Researcher: But you signed the ticket.
Staff Member: *Yes, but I didn't handle it. That's not my writing. I think it was Lynn.*
Researcher: Did you write the incident in GPI?
Staff Member: *No. I didn't handle the restorative measure so I didn't write it up.*
Researcher: Did Lynn write it up?
Staff Member: *I don't know.*

When the "Code of Life" was first implemented, teachers agreed that it was imperative to consult the homeroom teacher in order to determine the restorative measure that would be most effective for each individual student. The idea was that the students' homeroom teachers knew their students best and could help determine the most appropriate course of action. In this same regard, homeroom teachers need to be, at the very least, informed of the various issues affecting their students. This was clearly not happening. In fact, I once asked a teacher about the restorative measure she had issued a student and she informed me that I was mistaken. It was not she who had issued the ticket. She explained that the staff assistant had given the measure to the student. I asked the staff assistant about it and was informed that it was not she but a member of the school's resource team who had issued it. After having consulted the resource team I was told that the principal was the one who had actually issued the restorative measure. The resource team did say that they were present for the restorative measure but were not responsible for issuing it. In the end, I never did determine who was truly responsible for having issued it. The homeroom teacher signed the ticket. The resource team supervised the restorative measure. The person who issued the restorative measure remains a mystery.

The Concept of Restorative Justice. Clearly, time is a major factor affecting teachers' decisions regarding how to best apply restorative measures. This is perhaps one reason why some teachers are resorting to punitive measures. After all, punishment takes a lot less time to administer compared to restorative justice. The "punisher" does not need to consult with anyone before administering the punishment, nor must he/she consider the people or relationships that are in need of repair.

Of the 29 situations of misconduct that were recorded throughout the study, restorative measures were utilized in 18 of those cases and punitive measures were utilized in the other 11 cases. Of the 18 cases that were considered restorative, teachers alone decided on the restorative measures used in nine of them. In other words, in half of those cases in which restorative measures were used, the student did not actually agree to them. Instead, teachers obliged the students to engage in the so-called "restorative measures." I do not wish to imply that the students involved in those cases performed their restorative measures in protest. The students were simply told what to do and they did it.

Some would argue, like Daly (2002), for instance, that when offenders are obliged to make amends they are in fact being punished. I would normally tend to agree with her; however, although the teachers did not necessarily consult with the "offenders" in those cases, it is my opinion that they nonetheless attempted to fix the relationships that were harmed as a result. In one of those cases, for instance, a student was detained during his lunch hour but was also required to write a reflection during that time. He did not agree to the detention nor did he agree to writing the reflection; however, as a result of having

written it he remarked: *"I didn't like that I had to write it but I liked what I wrote…it*

helped me."

Teacher participants often pondered whether the restorative measures they had

issued were reasonable. Some argued that their restorative measures were in fact

restorative, although the process was not completely voluntary on the part of the student.

One teacher commented:

> *The student really didn't want to present to the class. He kept telling me he left his presentation at home so I called home. His mom said he had taken it to school earlier that week. I checked inside his locker and I found it. I told him he had to present later that day and he seemed really nervous. I think he benefited from the experience. He realized he could do it and his presentation was well done.*

Afterward, I asked the student how he felt after having done his presentation in

front of this class. He told me he felt good about it. He said: "I didn't like standing up in

front of the class but I enjoyed answering questions. I felt good."

On the other hand, some teachers and other school personnel reported that they

knew that they had coerced students into doing certain actions because they simply did

not know what else to do. These participants admitted that they lacked training and that

no one really ever explained to them about the concept of restorative justice. Similarly,

the participants were not at all clear whether they themselves were supposed to engage

students in restorative measures or leave it for the homeroom teachers. A lunch monitor,

for example, explained that teachers are not always available on their lunch hours and

sometimes he/she needs to take care of particular situations right away. She also

commented that she was not sure that the homeroom teachers would even follow-up on

an incident if she did take the time to write a ticket and issue a restorative measure. In the

end, she did not feel comfortable using restorative practices*: "If I could change one thing*

about the "Code of Life" it's that I'd want to feel more empowered. I don't have the

training needed to do it."

Although the confusion among staff members regarding the concept of restorative

justice led some to rely instead on punishment, some continued to use punishment

because they thought restorative justice was too lenient.

> Researcher: Why did you give the student a detention?
> Staff Member: *He's done letters of apology before. I don't think they're effective.*
> *Researcher: Why not?*
> Staff Member: *Because I think he's impulsive. I don't think he gets it. I'm aware a*
> *detention might not be effective either but you need to take away what they want*
> *most. In my head that's playtime. Is there any data proving detentions don't*
> *work?*
> Researcher: Yes, there's a lot of data that shows detentions, as well as
> suspensions, are ineffective.
> Staff Member: *Dr. Phil says you need to find their currency. Find out what the*
> *child values and take it away when he misbehaves. I know I'm not following the*
> *"Code of Life" but we really haven't had enough training.*
> --
> Staff Member: *I do believe in restorative justice. I had the student wash down the*
> *stalls in the bathroom after she had vandalized it. We decided together that this*
> *was the best course of action but some behaviours should be dealt with*
> *differently. Any kind of physical altercation requires some form of in-school*
> *suspension. I wouldn't send the kid home because then he'll think he's on*
> *vacation. Severe misbehaviour like this should be dealt with differently. There*
> *should be a special section in the "Code of Life" for severe misbehaviour and*
> *kids should know restorative measures will not be used in those cases.*

Interestingly, one teacher reported that while she was aware that the way she

handled some situations was inconsistent with the "Code of Life," she did not know what

else to do. She argued that it did not make sense for the school to adopt a school-wide

approach to discipline. Restorative measures, according to her, do not work for everyone.

She did believe that the "Code of Life's" core values should be adhered to by everyone in

the school. However, because it is difficult for some students to understand how their

actions affect others, we should not expect that restorative measures will necessarily

teach them otherwise. When asked how she might improve on the "Code of Life," she

replied:

> *We should have two separate "Codes." One for our mainstream students and one for our IEP's* (individual education plans). *We adapt academics for our students with learning difficulties but why don't we adapt the "Code of Life" for our students with behavioural or social difficulties?*

Her point of view is worth discussing. We should adapt our disciplinary tactics to

the needs of our students, especially those who are experiencing behavioural and/or

social difficulties. However, the "Code of Life" does account for the individual

differences of students. First, and according to one of the other teacher participants, the

value component of the "Code of Life" is "broad enough so that any and all situations of

misconduct fall into it." Furthermore, restorative measures are supposed to be determined

based on the particular individuals involved. It is up to the teacher to make them relevant

to the individual situations of his/her students. On the other hand, because homeroom

teachers are not always present for the restorative process, it is sometimes difficult to

tailor the restorative measures to each student. Also, it takes a great deal of time to get to

know your students. Even in those cases where the homeroom teachers are present, if

they have not yet spent enough time getting to know their students and their personalities,

how are they to know which restorative measures would be most effective? What works

for one student may not necessarily work for another but that does not mean we should

do away with restorative justice altogether.

Main Findings

The results of my research yielded three main findings.

Finding 1. Restorative justice does not appear to impact negatively on the students' academic, emotional and/or social capacities. Furthermore, and according to the students, the restorative measures did tend to reduce their engagement in behaviour

problems. For these reasons, restorative justice appears to be an effective means of dealing with discipline.

Students who experienced restorative justice generally reported positive outcomes, especially with regard to their relationships. This is consistent with the literature presented as well as with my definition of effective discipline. Students did not necessarily report that their experiences had a significant positive impact on their academic and/or emotional development; however, the lack of data indicating otherwise leads me to believe that their growth in these areas was not compromised.

The most significant factor affecting students' decisions to engage in behaviour problems was their involvement in the regulation of these behaviours. Students reported feeling good about having had the opportunity to repair the relationships harmed as a result of their actions. Writing letters of apology to their friends, for example, seemed to help the healing process for both the "victim" as well as the "offender." Reflections were also particularly effective as students were given the opportunity to think about what happened and why it happened. As we saw with Annabelle, after having written a reflection she realized that her friendships were impacting negatively on her behaviour.

Finding 2. The restorative component of the "Code of Life" has not yet been adopted by everyone and there are many inconsistencies with regard to the ways in which the teachers and staff understand and utilize restorative justice. There are several reasons for these inconsistencies, mainly a lack of time and training.

Although the school has committed to the restorative process on paper, in reality it has a long way to go. The "Code of Life" was developed because teachers were searching for a better way to deal with discipline. They wanted a more positive approach. Staff Member.·

> *We developed the "Code of Life" because of the negative connotations that come with rules. We wanted students to know how to be good members of society but we*

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wanted to accomplish this positively. Instead of rules, we have values to live up to. It isn't about "don't", it's about "should."

Despite the fact that it was developed as a positive approach to discipline, some teachers wondered whether a more serious approach would be more effective. This contradicts what the staff already knew about punishment. The system they had in place prior to the "Code of Life" was punishment oriented and it did not work for them. Yet, many teachers continued to use punitive measures in an effort to regulate their students' behaviour problems.

In addition to the "Code of Life," some teachers employed their own personal methods of managing student misbehaviour in their classrooms. As such, there was little consensus as to the types of behaviours that actually warranted the issuing of tickets or restorative measures. In an effort to explain how she had chosen to manage her students' behaviours, one teacher remarked the following:

> *The yellow notices are given when, after a few red lights, the child is still repeating the same misbehaviour like throwing rocks or sneaking out of class. Tickets are for more serious issues than the regular talking out of turn, cutting in line or running in the halls. In my case, it would be given for stealing, hitting a teacher, using foul language towards a staff member, hurting someone on purpose or by accident (throwing rocks), fighting...or to prove a point after many other things were attempted (e.g. Not coming in at the bell, fooling around in the washroom and not coming back...)*

Although the school made a commitment to implement the "Code of Life," it did not necessarily account for the time and energy that is required to do so. Teachers and staff reported feeling overwhelmed by the apparent magnitude of the "Code of Life's" restorative component and there was confusion as to the roles that they were required to fulfill with regard to this particular component. Most of the respondents agreed that more training was required.

Finding 3. The lack of consistency within the school with regard to the ways in which teachers are choosing to deal with students' behaviour problems is not conducive to the reduction of these behaviours.

The staff was not united in their decision to adopt the restorative principles of the "Code of Life." As such, some of the staff continued to use punitive measures in an effort to regulate students' behaviour problems. In those cases where punitive measures were utilized, the students' academic, emotional and/or social capacities had been negatively impacted. Students often reported experiencing anxiety over having been detained from their friends during recess and lunchtime detentions. Some reported that this anxiety made it difficult for them to concentrate in class.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Chapter five is the final chapter of this study. It provides recommendations for future research and suggests ways for other schools to make changes to their existing disciplinary methods. More importantly, however, this chapter offers recommendations that cater specifically to the SSCS based on the perceptions of its own learning community. It was stated in the introduction that the main purpose of this study was to determine the factors that constitute an effective student discipline policy; thus this chapter examines which parts of the school's "Code of Life" are working and which are not.

<u>Recommendations for the South Shore Community School and Other Schools</u>

The SSCS's "Code of Life," in particular its restorative measure component, does appear to be an effective means by which to deal with students' behaviour problems. However, due to the time that is required to implement this component successfully, the school needs to consider the following recommendations:

First, I would recommend that the school hire a restorative justice coordinator to oversee the restorative process. Teachers reported that it took an overwhelming amount of time to meet with students and supervise the restorative measures. Students affected by an offence could be sent instead to meet with the coordinator who would help them to solve their conflicts. Once the conflict is solved, the coordinator could also arrange a time and place for the restorative measures to be carried out.

In addition to meeting with "victims" and "offenders" during situations of conflict, the coordinator could also see to it that teachers have the necessary classroom

resources to teach their students the "Code of Life's" core values. Children need to understand what they mean and how the values apply to them. The coordinator could provide teachers with concrete examples to share with their students. It is important to discuss these values and the other components of the "Code of Life" with children. In doing so the children would come to better understand the terminology used throughout the "Code of Life." As it was, students did not understand the term "restorative measure." They often commented that they did not know what it meant; however when I explained that it was a way for them to fix what went wrong this made more sense to them.

The coordinator could arrange school assemblies and other school activities to teach the various components of the "Code of Life." Parents too could attend these assemblies. Daily announcements could be made over the intercom. Informational pamphlets could be sent home. A section of the school's newsletter could be reserved for discussions pertaining to the "Code of Life."

Of course, in the event a person is hired to coordinate the "Code of Life," the issue of funding needs to also be considered. However, given that a coordinator was hired for the *CHARACTER COUNTS!* program, it is clear that funds are in fact available. In my opinion, the coordinator for the latter program should never have been hired. Instead, the school should have hired a coordinator to oversee the initiative that was already in place.

Second, more training is required for staff members. Staff members need to understand their role within the restorative process. There was some confusion as to which individuals were responsible for issuing notices and restorative measures. Likewise, there was confusion as to who was responsible for being present when the restorative measures were carried out. The staff needs to meet and discuss these issues.

Following this meeting, a guide should be developed for all school personnel outlining the various procedures. Replacement teachers need to also have access to this information. Again, in the event that a coordinator is hired, he or she could oversee the delivery of this material. Training sessions need to occur regularly, especially in the event that new members are added to the staff.

Third, a *real* commitment on the part of staff members is required. All teachers and members of the school's personnel need to adhere to the "Code of Life" if it is to be successful. Teachers and other school personnel have not adopted the school-wide approach to discipline that is part of the "Code of Life". Research has shown that one aspect of the school context that is important for the reduction of behaviour problems is "the extent to which the school is a functional community (i.e., an environment characterized by caring and supportive interpersonal relationships, opportunities to participate in school activities and decision making, and shared norms, goals, and values" (Battistich and Hom, 1997, p. 1997). Until the school personnel is united in their decision to work towards the establishment of restorative justice as their primary means of managing student misbehaviour, no real progress can occur.

Punitive measures are not effective and the staff of the SSCS knew this. Yet, the school continued to administer punishment in some cases. This is not to say that restorative justice does not have faults. It takes time to do it well and this is something that teachers simply do not have enough of in general. The SSCS teachers need to decide once and for all which way they want to go.

Fourth, I would recommend reading the book *Just care: Restorative justice approaches to working with children in public care* by Belinda Hopkins (2009). In it, the

author identifies practical benefits of employing the restorative approach. More importantly, she explains different ways in which restorative approaches can be conceptualized within the school. She argues that while restorative justice is primarily understood to be a conferencing model—a process "predicated on the involvement of an impartial facilitator, at least one clearly identified offender who acknowledges responsibility for what they have done, and at least one victim willing to attend"—it can actually assume many forms (p. 25). Hopkins admits that while the conferencing model can be highly effective, it does require a commitment of time and preparation. The time element was one of the leading causes that discouraged teachers from truly adopting the "Code of Life." Hopkin's book provides a variety of ways in which to incorporate restorative practices in the school setting including some less formal ways than the conferencing type model that was used by the SSCS at the time this study was conducted.

Finally, I wish to make a recommendation that is not directly related to the "Code of Life" or its restorative component. Instead, I wish to offer the following suggestion based on the observations I made regarding the school's choice of some curriculum materials and instructional approaches. In speaking with teachers, the general consensus was that for many they were experiencing low levels of student achievement in their classrooms. This is important as I have already documented the link between academic achievement and behaviour problems. Much of the research aimed at understanding and overcoming the problems of low-achieving students indicates that the schools' chosen curriculum materials and instructional approaches need to be carefully considered (Ornstein & Daniel, 1989). This is particularly important in schools like the SSCS where teacher and student backgrounds differ. Therefore, and respectfully, I would recommend

that teachers inquire more about the backgrounds of their students before formally assessing their academic abilities. Likewise, teachers also need to consider students' backgrounds when developing relevant learning materials. Students who are able to connect with teachers and the curriculum are less likely to exhibit discipline problems.

Although my recommendations thus far were addressed specifically to the SSCS, they are nonetheless beneficial to all schools wanting to know more about the process of restorative justice. For other elementary schools in general, I wish to point out an additional factor that needs to be considered. This factor has to do with any and all discipline programs schools may be considering.

Before a school decides that changes to its policy on discipline are in fact required, it must first evaluate its current program. The school cannot very well make changes to its program without first determining what seems to be working and what does not. Remember to consult with your staff and students regarding this process as they are key stakeholders in whatever form of discipline is currently being utilized. Once the school has established the various factors that it sees are affecting its students' rates of behaviour problems, it can begin working towards a plan. It is also important to consult other professionals and researchers in the area of school and discipline along the way.

Lastly, make sure to involve the students' parents in this process. It is important to establish a partnership between home and school. Research has shown repeatedly that involving parents can help reduce discipline problems. In fact, a study by Sheldon and Epstein (2002) indicates that "regardless of schools' prior rates of discipline, the more family and community involvement activities were implemented, the fewer students were disciplined by being sent to the principals' offices or given detention or in-school

suspension" (p. 4). Cooperation among the school and family contexts is necessary for schools to improve school discipline.

<u>Implications for Future Research</u>

First, it would be interesting to return to this school in a year from now to see whether the school accepted and/or implemented the proposed recommendations. This would be important considering that the school struggled to adopt the restorative approach effectively. Due mainly to the lack of time and training, some teachers simply were not on board with this approach and continued to use contradictory methods of discipline. If, for example, a restorative justice coordinator was hired, it could potentially have a significant impact on helping teachers to fully adopt the "Code of Life". By returning a year from now, it would be possible to determine whether the recommendations were beneficial and to what degree.

Second, a longitudinal study is required to measure the school's rate of students' behaviour problems. Although the students who experienced restorative justice generally reported that it was positive and that it did work to reduce the likelihood that they would repeat the offence, it was not possible to measure the reduction in the school's overall rate of student misbehaviours. Only 18 cases of restorative justice were documented in the study. Although the students in those cases said that they were unlikely to re-offend, it was not possible to accurately determine whether the school was in fact experiencing a reduction in the overall number of problem behaviours exhibited by students. To do this it would be necessary to document all instances of student misbehaviour over an extended period of time. Similarly, it would be necessary to document the restorative approaches utilized in each case so as to ensure that the reduction is directly attributable

to the restorative justice practices. Finally, the longitudinal study could also determine whether rates of student misbehaviour vary according to different times in the school year. This study did try to determine whether time was a factor since it was believed that the students' stress levels would likely fluctuate around holidays and reporting periods. In the end, this did not prove possible as the school was inconsistent in its handling of situations of student misconduct.

Third, it would be beneficial to follow a control group of students from the time they enter the public school system up until they graduate in order to document the discipline experiences they encounter along the way. Researchers could determine how students are affected by the various modes of discipline they experience along the way and which appear to be the most successful. It would be interesting to note how the various modes of discipline affecting the students differ. Similarly, researchers could also look at the differences between those modes used at the elementary level and those used in high school. How are the discipline methods that are used in the elementary settings preparing students for what is to come in high school? Furthermore, although the study would take a great deal of time, it would help to further substantiate the initial positive findings of this study with regard to restorative justice.

Fourth, it would be useful to look at how other schools have implemented restorative justice approaches. There are several ways to implement this approach and while the SSCS generally tended to use a conferencing model as its main approach, there are other models that are less formal and require less time. Some schools might be further along in the process and their experiences could help other schools to fine-tune their

specific approaches. By comparing different restorative approaches that are used in

different schools, a more comprehensive evaluation of restorative justice is possible.

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Appendix A: Consent Forms

Dear Student,

You know me as your music teacher but I am also a student. I am going to university to get a Masters degree in education. In order to complete my studies, I have to organize a study and write a report. I have decided to look at the SSCS's "Code of Life" and see whether or not it seems to be working for our school.

If you agree to participate in this study, I will need to meet with you a few times throughout the year to talk about the "Code of Life." Your opinions about the "Code of Life" are valuable to this study and I look forward to hearing what you have to say about it.

As a participant in my study, I will record everything you say and refer to your comments in my reports. I will not use your real name. I promise that if you take part in this study it will not affect your progress in school. It is all right to change your mind at any time if you decide you would rather not participate.

_____ Yes, I agree to participate in the study. I understand that Miss Bouchard will use my comments in her final report.

_____ No, I do not wish to participate in the study.

Student Signature : _____   Date : _____

Dear Parent(s), Guardian(s),

Although you probably know me as the school's music specialist, I am also a graduate student at Concordia University in Montreal and I will be conducting research at school from November, 2010 until March, 2011. I will use the information obtained from this study to write a thesis that will fulfill part of the requirements to complete a Master of Arts in Educational Studies. I am conducting my research with the school's knowledge and support. The purpose of the study is to look at the effectiveness of the SSCS's "Code of Life." This letter outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your child's involvement and rights as a participant.

Participation or non-participation in this study will not affect your child's progress at school. His/her participation will be voluntary, confidential, and will be a valuable part of my research that will hopefully add important information to a growing body of knowledge on school discipline.

Your child's participation in this study will include periodic interviews during class hours. Although your child will be pulled from his/her regular classroom to do this study, I can ensure that his/her anonymity is maintained, since all students who inquire as to your child's whereabouts will be told that he/she is helping me work on a special project in my own classroom. Your child's teacher will be informed about your his/her participation in the study; however, your child's name will not be used in the final publication of this study and therefore his/her teachers will not know what your child specifically contributed to the study. The interviews will last between 15-20 minutes. I will ask your child questions regarding his/her involvement with, and/or perceptions of, the "Code of Life." At the beginning of EACH session, your child will be asked to give their oral consent to do the activity. If your child does not wish to participate, he/she will return to the class and not be part of the activity.

You and your child are encouraged to ask questions at any time about the nature of the study and the methods I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me; please contact me any time at school. The school's telephone number is (450) 691-4550. I guarantee that the following conditions will be met :

1. Your child's real name will not be used during at any point of information collection, nor in the final written report. Your child will be given a pseudonym (fictitious name) that will be used in all reports and/or discussions pertaining to this study.
2. Your child's participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw your child from this study at any time, for any reason, and without prejudice. The information collected on behalf of your child will be destroyed.

Do you grant permission for your child to be quoted directly?　　　Yes ____　　No ____

Parent Signature : _____　　Date : _____

Dear Staff Member,

Although you probably know me as the school's music specialist, I am also a graduate student at Concordia University in Montreal and I will be conducting research at school from November, 2010 until March, 2011. I will use the information obtained from this study to write a thesis that will fulfill part of the requirements to complete a Master of Arts in Educational Studies. I am conducting my research with the school's knowledge and support. The purpose of the study is to look at the effectiveness of the SSCS's "Code of Life." This letter outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

Participation or non-participation in this study will not affect your work or relationships at school. Your participation will be voluntary, confidential, and will be a valuable part of my research that will hopefully add important information to a growing body of knowledge on school and discipline.

Your participation in this study will include periodic interviews. The interviews will last between 15-20 minutes. I will ask questions regarding your involvement with, and/or perceptions of, the "Code of Life." You are encouraged to ask questions at any time about the nature of the study and the methods I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me; and I will ask that they please contact me any time at school. The school's telephone number is (450) 691-4550.

I guarantee that the following conditions will be met :

3. Your real name will not be used during any point of information collection, nor in the final written report. You will be given a pseudonym (fictitious name) that will be used in all reports and/or discussions pertaining to this study.
4. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, for any reason, and without prejudice. The information collected on your behalf will be destroyed.

Do you grant permission for your comments to be quoted directly?   Yes ___ No ___

Signature : _____ Date : _____

Appendix B: Interview Questions

For students

Name: Cycle :

Offences: # Meeting(s):   Date:

1. What is the "Code of Life"?

2. Why were you considered to be in violation of the "Code of Life"?

3. What were you given as a restorative measure and how was it decided upon?

4. After the restorative measure was carried out, how did you feel? Why?

5. How did the restorative measure affect your (class work – friendships – relationship

with the teacher – relationship with parent?)

6. How has the restorative measure changed your behaviour?

7. What did you like or dislike about your restorative measure?

8. Additional Comments/Questions:

For Teachers and Staff

A.

Teacher: Cycle :

Meeting(s):   Date:

1. What is the "Code of Life"?

2. Why did you consider the student to be in violation of the "Code of Life"?

3. What did you assign to the student as his/her restorative measure and how was it decided upon?

4. After the restorative measure was carried out, how do you think he/she felt? How did you feel? Why?

5. How did the restorative measure affect the student's (class work – friendships – relationship with the teacher – relationship with parent?)

6. How has the restorative measure changed the student's behaviour?

7. What did you like or dislike about your restorative measure?

8. Additional comments/questions :

B.

1. In your opinion why was the "Code of Life" developed?

2. If you could change something about the "Code of Life" what would it be? Explain.

CONTRACT

Between a South Shore Community School and _____
                                                    Student's Name

Student's commitment and responsibility: I have gone over the Code of Life at a South Shore Community School with my parents/guardians. I understand that I will live this Code of Life to be respected and safe. I will approach a trusted adult if I have a question or concern, I promise to do my very best at a South Shore Community School.

Student's Signature

Parents'/Guardians' Promise: We have gone over the Code of Life with our child and as parents/guardians we agree that this Code will be lived by ourselves and our child. We will encourage open, consistent communication and partnership between our home and a South Shore Community School regarding the behaviour, safety, academic and social development for the benefit of our child. We are also aware and understand that we must report to the office when we enter the school premises through the front entrance. If we wish to speak to a teacher or the principal we see the school secretary and make an appointment. We understand that this is for the safety of all the students attending a South Shore Community School.

Parents'/Guardians' Signature

Teacher'/Principal's Promise: We have gone over the Code of Life of this school community and we agree that this Code will be lived by ourselves and our students. We will encourage open, consistent communication and partnership between a South Shore Community School and our parent community regarding the behaviour, safety, academic and social development for the benefit of a peaceful experience for all.

Homeroom Teacher's signature:

Principal's Pledge:

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Appendix D: Ticket

Ticket Session One:
August 31st to November 5th, 2009 (Term One)

Ticket Notice Number One: **YELLOW TICKET**
Date: Event that led to this notice: Intervention by adult: Restorative Measure agreed upon: Adult signature:_____ HR Teacher_____
Ticket Notice Number Two: **YELLOW TICKET**
Date: Event that led to this notice: Intervention by adult: Restorative Measure agreed upon: Adult signature:_____ HR Teacher_____
Ticket Notice Number three: **RED FLAGGED TICKET**
Date: Event that led to this notice: Intervention by adult: Restorative Measure agreed upon: Adult signature:_____ HR Teacher_____ **<u>Principal Signature and Comment</u>**:

Appendix E: Examples of Restorative Measures (created by teachers at the SSCS)

Write a letter of apology

Create a poster of respect

Sweep the front walk free of rocks

Sweep the cafeteria

File books in the library

Write a story to read to younger grades about respect, fighting or cooperation

Write a poem, song, or skit to perform

Replace bulletin boards if he/she destroyed it

Clean graffiti

Removal from extra-curricular activities

Create a contract or devise a plan of action to ensure behaviour is not repeated

Clean up litter from yard

Rake rocks under playground equipment

Counting and delivering notices home

Unpacking paper from boxes

Loading paper into photocopier cabinets

Helping Miss R. clean art room/supplies

Cafeteria helper during junior lunch hour

Sweeping gymnasium floor

"Code of Life" reading over intercom (or relating their own story)

Dusting/cleaning computer monitors in Lab

Emptying/cleaning recycling bins

Welcome/help guest teachers in our school

Washing the kindergarten toys

Sweeping the stairways

Making a peace offering (such as a friendship bracelet...)

Participate/animate in a cooperative game or activity