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Measuring the Effect of Restorative Justice Practices: Outcomes and Contexts

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The Ontario, Canada Ministry of Education Safe Schools Act challenges schools to augment disciplinary practices to ensure that schools are safe and inclusive. A pilot study initiated by a southwestern Ontario School Board measured the effect of a restorative justice (RJ) intervention in seven schools to meet specific aims: reduction in behavioral infractions, creation of a culture of positive relationships, and improved achievement. A two-phase explanatory mixed-research design was used to investigate the effect of RJ on students' personal, social, and academic success. Phase 1 data examined these aims-based outcomes and potential predictive factors associated with the variance in the outcomes. Phase 2 data analysis contextualized the outcomes and predictive factors and their relevance to the classroom/school context. Findings indicate that RJ practices were associated with reduced infractions, fostered a humanistic school culture focused on restoration and student engagement, and resulted in an increase in GPA at the senior academic level. Ongoing assessment of the RJ intervention in schools is recommended.

Restorative justice is an ancient wisdom, once lost and now being re-discovered. It is the wisdom based on the five tenets of Community, Capacity, Connection, Voice, and Sacredness. Restorative justice goes much deeper than the exclusive experience of a mediation process between a single offender and a single victim. Rather, it demonstrates how we can all deal with the harm, pain, trauma that come into our lives, by attending to the building of community. (Lockhart & Zammit, 2005, p. 6)

The roots of restorative justice may be traced back to such groups as the Aboriginal peoples of North America, the Maori of New Zealand, and the peoples of Japan and Africa. More recently, restorative justice has been the framework in which contemporary approaches to justice have been formed. In 1989, New Zealand made restorative practices the center of its entire system of juvenile justice. In South Africa, the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission relied heavily on the principles of restorative justice. In Alberta, Canada, after a much-publicized 1999 high-school slaying, the victim's father Dale Lang chose to speak publicly about forgiveness in the context the principles of restorative justices (Lockhart & Zammit, 2005).

Cormier (2002) defines restorative justice as an approach that focuses on repairing the harm caused by offending behavior while holding the offender accountable for his or her actions. It provides an opportunity for the parties directly affected by such behavior (victims, offenders, and community) to identify and address their needs that result from the offending behavior and to seek resolution that affords reparation, healing, and reintegration and prevents future harm.

The introduction of the amended *Ontario Ministry of Education Safe Schools Act* (Bill 212) in 2009 presented a challenge to school boards across Ontario actively to research strategies by which to augment their current disciplinary practices and thereby support students in reaching their personal potential. As stated in the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) document *Making Ontario's Schools Safe: What Parents Need to Know*, safe-schools strategies need to move discipline away from solely punitive responses to an approach that codifies conduct in a manner that corrects inappropriate behavior while offering multiple levels of support for students (both victims and offenders). Affirmation of this goal was evident in Ontario Minister of Education Leona Dombrowsky's assertion that "students need a safe and inclusive learning environment to focus on their studies and reach their full potential. By making schools safer, we are helping to boost student success" (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 2). Following from this rationale, a collaborative initiative between university researchers and a school board Restorative Justice Steering Committee in a southwestern Ontario city was undertaken to examine one aspect of social justice, that of restorative justice (RJ) practices. This collaboration took place in the framework of a pilot project initiative involving seven of the board's schools.

It was anticipated that this implementation might affect school effectiveness. The literature takes a two-pronged approach to the nature of school effectiveness: either a humanist view (interested in classroom environment, school climate, and relationships between processes such as leadership, decision-making, and communication) or a scientist view (interested in the measurement of processes and products). Consistent with the nature of RJ, this study was particularly sensitive to evidence of increases in humanist effectiveness in schools.

The project had three specific aims: reduction of students' behavioral infractions; supporting the creation of a culture of positive relationships; and improving student achievement. Board and school personnel conducted implementation, and the researchers examined outcomes associated with the implementation and factors potentially predictive of these outcomes such as

principals' leadership styles and teachers' pupil control ideologies. The study specifically examined the potential effect that RJ practices might have on improving students' personal, social, and academic success.

Review of the Literature

O'Callaghan (2005) states that restorative practice is a method to help staff, students, and parents to find healthy ways of relating in school, at home, and in the workplace. Restorative practices require the development of a common language, understandings, and agreed-upon strategies for implementation. O'Callaghan further states that instead of zero tolerance and authoritarian punishment, restorative practices should provide high levels of both control and support to encourage appropriate behavior and place responsibility on students themselves using a collaborative response. The philosophy underlying these practices holds that human beings are happier, more productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* or *for* them.

Braithwaite, Ahmed, Morrison, and Reinhart (2001) note that restorative practices focus on maintaining and strengthening social bonds to prevent children, either bullies or victims, from feeling isolated from or rejected by the school community. At the same time as the child is encircled in this community of care as identified in Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory, the issues of accountability and responsibility for wrongdoing are placed center-stage for discussion and resolution. Offenders and victims meet, and care and support are available for both sides. Restorative justice practices share the common features of recognizing and discussing the harm done and helping the "wrongdoer" to work toward acknowledgment and commitment to make amends. The approach accepts human weakness in the sense that every person is capable of hurting others, but at the same time affirms human dignity by recognizing each person as a valued member of the community who can make amends and be reintegrated with forgiveness.

Amstutz and Mullet (2005) state that situations requiring discipline in schools can in fact be opportunities for learning, growth, and community-building. Before this can happen, schools need to move beyond viewing discipline as punishment. Discipline usually has several goals. In the short term, discipline intends to stop a child's inappropriate behavior while explaining, modeling, and reinforcing what is appropriate. The long-term goal is to teach self-discipline. Punishment continues to be the dominant feature in school discipline because it is quick, easy to administer, and seems to meet the criterion that "at least something was done." Restorative discipline, like punishment, is concerned with appropriate consequences that encourage accountability, but accountability that emphasizes empathy and repair of harm.

According to Amstutz and Mullett (2005), restorative discipline emerged out of Conflict Resolution Education (CRE) and Character Education (CE)

and Goleman's work on Emotional Literacy. They affirm that restorative justice promotes values, principles, and behaviors that use inclusive, collaborative approaches for being in a community. These approaches validate the experiences and needs of everyone in the community, particularly those who have been marginalized, oppressed, or harmed. They facilitate actions and responses that foster healing rather than alienation or coercion. Restorative discipline requires flexibility and creativity in conflict resolution, character education, and the development of emotional literacy. As Smith (1998) and Noddings (1995) emphasize, children who connect person-to-person with their teachers are more likely to learn and succeed personally and academically. Amstutz and Mullet indicate that if children do not feel cared for, they may not feel safe enough to risk performing well academically or care enough to resist engaging in negative behavior. When students see adults treat each other with care, they are more likely both to model the behaviors and to engage actively the restorative practices offered to them.

Lockhart and Zammit (2005) focus on integrating restorative justice in the classroom and school community. They suggest that the key objectives of restorative justice practices are:

1. to understand the harm and develop empathy for both the harmed and the harmer;
2. to listen and respond to the needs of the person harmed and the person who harmed;
3. to encourage accountability and responsibility through personal reflection within a collaborative planning process;
4. to reintegrate the harmer (and, if necessary, the harmed) into the community as valuable, contributing members;
5. to create caring climates to support healthy communities; and
6. to change the system when it contributes to the harm.

O'Callaghan (2005) describes restorative practices as being focused on teaching students to be good citizens. O'Callaghan reports that research has shown that restorative processes maintain school order and safety through processes that build relationship networks throughout the school community to ensure responsibility in decision-making and accountability in reparation of harmful behavior. O'Callaghan states that the use of a circle provides the emotional attachment necessary for learning to occur. Restorative-practice circles have a positive, long-term effect on students' behavior. Circles need to include all bystanders, including those who had knowledge but did nothing about it, because the circle is a learning opportunity, not a punitive action. Restorative practice serves as a reintegration to school process when students return from suspensions.

Some educators have seen the use of a prominent restorative justice technique, circles, as a hybrid approach where traditional responses to misbehavior and wrongdoing may be influenced by students' voices and their

acknowledgment and acceptance of responsibility for wrongdoing. Hamilton (2008) states that circles used in conjunction with traditional disciplinary practices can provide schools with an additional tool to teach appropriate behavior and address behavioral infractions among high school students. Hamilton further described a qualitative case study approach that was used to examine the effect of circles in a secondary school. Thirteen participants were interviewed during a week-long visit to the high school. Interview responses revealed that the restorative approach to discipline included the use of circles as a complement to traditional disciplinary procedures. The circle process led to the elimination of further behavioral infractions among participants because they were given increased opportunities for conflict resolution and learning and a forum in which to discuss personal issues unrelated to the original conflict. Circles were also seen as affecting participants' perceptions of the school climate relative to student discipline.

Braithwaite et al. (2001) state that restorative practices focus on building social bonds and replacing feelings of isolation with a sense of community. In such a community, the offender is more likely to acknowledge wrongs and make commitments toward amendment in a context that accepts human weakness and affirms human dignity.

Porter (2007) found that an increasing number of schools worldwide adopted restorative practices as a means of dealing with discipline and improving school culture; school leaders were beginning to analyze the effect of restorative methods. The Waterloo Region District School Board in Ontario implemented restorative practices in 2005 to manage violence and bullying. The district's elementary suspensions dropped 80% in under three years, and secondary school suspensions decreased by 65%. Schools implementing restorative methods have seen a drop in disciplinary problems, reduced reliance on detention and suspension, and an improvement in students' attitudes. Gathering such data is important both for evaluating the effectiveness of restorative methods and for gaining funding support for restorative programs.

Gibbon and Ruddy (2007) state that the implementation of restorative practices is a movement for school boards across Ontario. With the recent Ontario government changes with two bills, Bill 52 (Learning to 18) and Bill 212 (Safe Schools), boards are required to demonstrate that they have used a variety of proactive measures to manage students' negative behavior. The heightened responsibility for administrators to demonstrate, document, and program for all students, but particularly students at risk, is central to both bills. The practice of restorative justice offers an option for restoring relationships and building a community that may prevent misbehavior and promote good citizenship.

The Study

During June 2008, the trustees of a school board in southwestern Ontario established a pilot project using restorative justice practices as an integral part of its safe-school policy implementation. The board invited school administrators to join a steering committee to implement the RJ pilot project. The response was overwhelming, with over 40 administrators expressing an interest in being involved.

Under the supervision of the board's superintendent responsible for implementation of the *Safe Schools* legislation and with the support of its senior administration, a committee was selected that included nine principals and four vice-principals. The goal of this committee was to research restorative justice practices and to become familiar with what has been developed and implemented across Ontario. Input was sought from the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF). One of Ontario's leading consultants facilitated the RJ training and provided expertise and guidance in the implementation of restorative justice in the pilot schools. RJ training began in August 2009 with three days of introduction and orientation workshops. A scaffolding approach was used to integrate and disseminate RJ training in the pilot schools: Training was to be provided for the administration, teachers, support staff, and key staff members in the pilot schools. In addition to the guidance provided by the RJ consultant, additional supports were made available to the pilot project participants through board staff, the Director of Mediation Services at the local university, and trained restorative-practice coaches. These coaches, administrators from three of the seven schools, were able to demonstrate restorative practices to participating teachers both in relation to students' office visits and classroom behaviors that required teachers' interventions.

Methodology

A two-phase explanatory, mixed-methods research design was used. In Phase 1, Stage 1, quantitative data were collected to identify outcomes associated with the identified aims of the RJ intervention (reduction of students' behavioral infractions, positive influence on overall school climate, and improved student success). Phase 1, Stage 2 quantitative data were used to examine factors that may be seen as predictive of the range of outcomes identified in Stage 1. In Phase 2, analysis of qualitative data from focus groups facilitated understandings of the Phase 1 findings in contexts that more closely represent the classroom level where these initiatives actually take on pedagogical reality.

Phase 1, Stage 1

Table 1 provides a conceptual overview of the two aims of the RJ intervention that were directly related to the quantitative data provided by the school board. Phase 1, Stage 1 data reflect the periods of September 2008 to June

Table 1
Conceptual Overview of Phase 1, Stage 1

Aim	Factors
Reduction of Behavioral Infractions	Behavioral Infractions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • safety • insubordination • criminal offences • overall total Attendance School Response (Office Visits)—consequences in terms of RJ or Non-RJ approach
Improved Student Success	Student Academic Achievement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grades • credit accumulation

2009 (Time 1), and September 2009 to February 2010 (Time 2). The second time period was shortened in order to meet the requirement of providing a report of findings and conclusions to the board by the end of the school year. Bearing this restriction in mind, the most appropriate time frame with regard to collection of achievement and behavioral data for the 2009-2010 school year was at the end of February.

Types of and Responses to Behavioral Infractions

In Phase 1, Stage 1, the school board provided quantitative data in terms of behavioral and attendance infractions, office visits (the consequences of these infractions), and students’ academic achievement. They also provided a detailed list of behavioral infractions that the researchers categorized as follows: safety infractions (*bullying, fighting, hand-on, safety, throwing objects*); insubordination infractions (*harassment, insubordination, language, racial slurs, smoking*); attendance infractions (*late persistent lateness, truant class or school*); and criminal infractions (*possession and/or use of drugs, weapons, or alcohol; sexual assault; theft; use of vandalism, class or school*); and an overall total category of all behavioral infractions. Table 2 provides a list of the consequences deemed appropriate by the school based on the student’s behavioral or attendance infractions as noted above. To assist in the analysis of these data, each item was categorized as either a restorative or non-restorative response.

Table 2
School Office Visits

<i>Office visits restorative responses:</i>	<i>Office visits non-restorative responses:</i>
apology	bus suspension
behavioral counseling	detention
board community program	expulsion
in-school counseling	supervised withdrawal (student withdrawn from the classroom and supervised in the office or an alternate location)
mediation (used as a method to resolve the situation)	suspension (1-4 days)
parent contact about the incident	suspension (short-term, 5-10 or more days*)
referral to outside counseling	suspension (long-term, 10 or more days*)
	suspension pending expulsion (20 or more days and is awaiting the expulsion hearing*)
	timeout (student removed from situation for a period of time)

*Displays as total number of days suspended.

Phase 1, Stage 2

In this stage of the study, predictive factors potentially associated with successful implementation of RJ practices as indicated by the outcomes of the identified aims were measured. These included leadership style and pupil control ideology.

Table 3 lists the instruments used to measure these potentially predictive factors.

Instruments

Pupil Control Ideology (PCI) Form. The PCI Form (Willower et al., 1967) consists of 20 Likert-type items to use for locating educators’ pupil control orientations on a humanistic-custodial continuum. Much work has been done re-

Table 3
Conceptual Overview of Phase 1, Stage 2

<i>Predictive Factor</i>	<i>Instrument/Data Source</i>
Pupil Control Ideology	Pupil Control Ideology (PCI) Form (Willower, Eidell, & Hoy, 1967)
Leadership Style	Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (Ross & Gray, 2006)

garding the validity and reliability of the PCI Form. Willower et al. reported split-half reliability coefficients in two samples of .95 ($N=170$) and .91 ($N=55$). Gaffney and Byrd-Gaffney (1996) provide relevant information on the continued validity of the original PCI Form, including Graham, Halpin, Harris, and Benson's (1985) alpha coefficient of .90 and Hoy and Woolfolk's (1990) alpha coefficient of .72.

Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ). The TLQ (Ross & Gray, 2006) contains 12 items "measuring teacher perceptions that their principal leads by developing the capacity of the organization and its members to adapt to the demands of a changing environment" (p. 804). It assesses four of six global transformational leadership criteria identified by Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999), that is, good professional practice, individualized support, intellectual stimulation, and high performance expectations.

Phase 1 Participants

Based on school leaders' expressed interest in the project and their ability to prioritize the implementation of restorative justice practices during the proposed time frame, the School Board selected five elementary and two high schools, representing both rural and urban locations, to participate in the pilot project. The study population included teachers and administrators in these schools. Table 4 provides demographic information for participating schools.

Table 4
Demographics of RJ Schools

	<i>RJ Schools Elementary</i>	<i>RJ Schools Secondary</i>
2008 Full-time Equivalent (FTE) Enrolment	231.05 – 432	932.56 – 1447.32
2009 FTE Enrolment	209.5 – 409	943.24 – 1508.17
Male	52.0%	*46.0%
Female	48.0%	*54.0%
% of Students 1 st Language English	94.2%	92.5%
Recent Immigrants	4.3%	3.7%
Household Income	\$59,931	\$69,718

*One RJ secondary school had a dramatic gender split in its student population: 39% male and 61% female.

Phase 1 Procedure

Phase 1, Stage 1 data pertaining to the seven participating schools were provided electronically by the school board. Phase 1, Stage 2 involved administration of the two instruments identified above. In this stage, immediately following the completion of Stage 1 data-collection, all pilot study participants in the RJ schools were invited by e-mail by board personnel and their principals to participate in the study voluntarily and confidentially by completing these instruments electronically. The instruments were posted on a password-protected Web site. Descriptive and inferential statistics were determined using statistical tests with regard to the degree to which the independent variables might be associated with various outcomes.

Phase 2

Data collected during the focus group interviews included the member-check summary used to ensure the accuracy of interpretation of participants' meaning, along with researchers' field notes from each focus group session. The first stage of qualitative analysis involved open coding of all participants' responses and included naming or conceptualizing words and passages from the focus group data: integrating the member-check summary data with the researchers' field notes (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Using this multi-layer analysis, categories of themes/patterns were identified. The coding process linked data with concepts that facilitated data interpretation (Creswell, 2003). Next, responses to each of the focus group interview questions across participant groups (elementary/secondary) were combined to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences.

Phase 2 Procedure

Following the completion of data-collection for Phase 1, the school board invited participants, again through their principals, to participate voluntarily in focus group interviews facilitated by the university researchers. Three focus groups interviews were scheduled, two for the elementary panel participants and one for secondary panel participants, and were held at the researchers' home university. The focus group questions were designed to gain a clearer understanding of the aims of the study and were structured in two sections. To ensure consistency, the same questions were asked at each session, the same three university researchers attended each of the interviews and took notes, and each session was audio-recorded. Eleven participants, nine women and two men, represented four of the five elementary schools; and four participants, two female and two male, represented both RJ pilot secondary schools.

The interviews began by providing the RJ pilot participants with an overview of the following: (a) the purpose of the focus group interviews; (b) an overview of the pilot study itself; (c) clarification of terms; and (d) a

brief overview of preliminary findings. During the interviews, focus group participants addressed two sets of questions. The first was about their impressions of the effect of restorative justice practices in their schools in terms of reduction of students' behavioral infractions, support for the creation of a culture of positive relationships, and improvement of student achievement. During this time, participants were also asked why they believed there might have been differences between schools and between divisional levels in terms of the aims-based outcomes in relation to behavioral infractions, office visit responses, student attendance, and students' academic achievement.

The second set of interview questions was prefaced by providing participants with clarification of the meaning of humanistic and custodial approaches in the classroom. The humanistic approach was characterized as the development of an *educational community* where students learned through interaction and cooperation; and a custodial approach was defined in terms of a rigid and highly controlled classroom atmosphere (Willower et al., 1967). Transformational leadership was defined in terms of the capacity of the organization and its members to adapt to the demands of a changing environment (Ross & Gray, 2006). Participants were asked about their beliefs about whether an educator who identified as either humanistic or custodial would be more or less likely to follow through on the implementation of restorative practices. Regarding transformational leadership, participants were asked to share their beliefs about what effect the presence or absence of transformational leadership might have on the implementation of restorative justice practices in their schools.

At the conclusion of each of the focus group interviews, a member-check process was conducted to ensure the accuracy of the findings in terms of the participants' meaning as well as the researchers' interpretation of participants' meaning.

Hypotheses

Following from the purposes of this initiative and the specific aims of the intervention, the following hypotheses were identified.

1. Regarding office visits: For RJ schools, regardless of level, at T2 there would be a significant increase in the number of RJ office visit responses types and a reduction in the number of non-RJ office visit response types.
2. Regarding behavioral infractions: For RJ schools, regardless of level, at T2 significantly fewer behavioral infractions would be reported.
3. Regarding absences: For RJ schools, at the high school level, at T2 there would be significantly fewer absences. For all other levels, there would be no significant differences.
4. Regarding grades: For RJ schools, regardless of level, at T2 there would be a significant increase in GPA.
5. With regard to predictive factors, it was hypothesized that there would

be a negative predictive relationship between PCI scores (humanistic scores are lower, custodial scores are higher) and outcomes associated with successful implementation of RJ practices in the pilot schools.

6. With regard to predictive factors, it was hypothesized that there would be a positive predictive relationship between the reported presence of transformational leadership in schools, as identified by higher scores on the TLQ, and outcomes associated with successful implementation of RJ practices in the pilot schools.

Limitations

Researchers were aware of the effect that personal bias might have on the various quantitative and qualitative data that served as a foundation for the findings of the study and took steps to reduce evidence of this bias. Nevertheless, the potential still existed for the researchers' philosophical and sociological orientations to be inadvertently reflected in the study findings. Researchers' orientations might be best characterized as having been influenced by a progressivist view of the classroom (Dewey, 1938), a range of objectivist and subjectivist philosophies of science (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), a humanistic approach to interaction between teachers and learners (Willower et al., 1967), and a constructivist approach to child development (Piaget, 1955). Care was taken to guard against any bias in relation to procedure or reporting of outcomes in this study.

Bearing in mind the pilot-study nature and the quasi-experimental design of this study, causation cannot really be inferred. At best, correlations and "factors associated with ..." can be identified. Although it is acknowledged that possibly a broad range of moderating and mediating variables could have been in a causative relationship with particular outcomes, it is hoped that findings from this study will start a process that researchers who wish to pursue the identification of such factors will continue. Multiple levels of analysis were involved in this design (e.g., student level, class level, teacher level, grade level, school level, etc.). Exhaustive testing of the more intricate levels of these phenomena could not be conducted owing to collection restrictions associated with the pilot-study nature of this research. In this regard, Multilevel Modeling (MLM) strategies would be useful in future studies.

The most significant limitation of this study is the sample size. It is important to note that this was a pilot study and that generalization of findings arising from it should be done with caution. Significance findings suggest that these results are reliable, but they do not necessarily reflect the effect or impact that these results will carry when generalized to other samples. It would be most appropriate to treat these findings as a foundation for future, more elaborate examinations of larger and more diverse school populations with regard to the efficacy of restorative justice practices at the school and classroom levels.

Data Analysis

Phase 1 Findings (Outcomes)

Data-collection periods were identified as Time 1 (September 2008-June 2009) and Time 2 (September 2009-February 2010). To correct the discrepancy in the number of months included in each time, the total number of occurrences of each criterion in the time was divided by the number of months. Therefore, in each of the following points of analysis, the number of occurrences is reported as an average per month for that time.

Before collecting data for Phase 1, Stage 1, the researchers identified five additional non-RJ schools that were to serve as a matched sample for the purposes of facilitating between-subjects analyses. However, because Time 1 data revealed a significant difference in baseline measures of evaluation criteria between these non-RJ and RJ schools, it was concluded that the non-RJ schools were not an appropriate control group for the purposes of the study. No further analyses involving these non-RJ schools were conducted.

Because this was a pilot study and a primary purpose was to identify areas where future study might be warranted, non-significant trends with an alpha of less than .10 were reported. Otherwise, an alpha level of .05 was used to identify significant findings.

Stage 1 (Aims-based Outcomes)

Behavioral infractions

Elementary school. At the elementary level, based on within-subjects comparisons of RJ schools for T1 versus T2, there were significant differences in the number of total infractions between T1 and T2 where $T2\ t(4)=2.995, p=.04$. T2 ($M=29.17, SD=26.98$) had significantly fewer total infractions than T1 ($M=64, SD=50.30$).

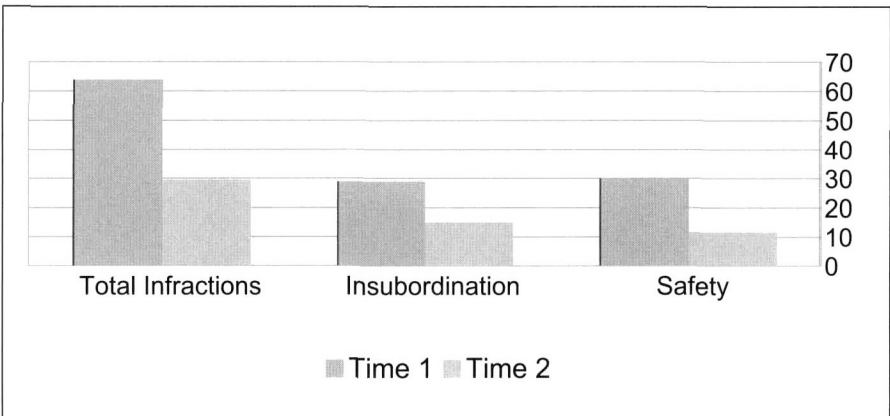


Figure 1. Elementary school infractions for RJ schools.

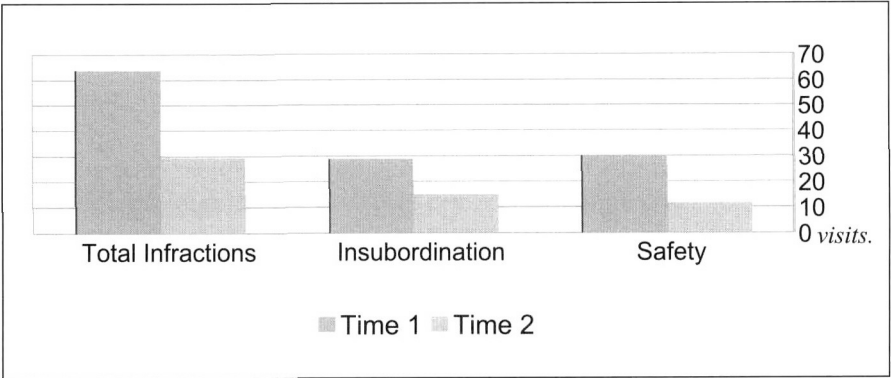


Figure 2. High school infractions for RJ schools.

As indicated in Figure 1, further investigation revealed a significant effect for safety infractions, $t(4) = 3.146, p = .035$, where T2 ($M = 14.93, SD = 13.82$) had fewer safety infractions than T1 ($M = 29.16, SD = 23.66$). With regard to the number of reported insubordination infractions, a non-significant trend, $t(4) = 2.56, p = .063$, demonstrated a reduction in the number of reported insubordination infractions from T1 ($M = 29.74, SD = 24.27$) to T2 ($M = 11.5, SD = 11.28$).

High school. As indicated in Figure 2, at the high school level, there was also a significant difference between Time 1 and Time 2 with regard to the number of total infractions: $t(1) = 42.81, p = .015$ where T2 ($M = 31.33, SD = 5.18$) had significantly fewer total infractions than T1 ($M = 69.15, SD = 6.43$). Further investigation revealed a significant effect for reported insubordination infractions, $t(1) = 16.33, p = .039$, where T2 ($M = 8.08, SD = 1.77$) had fewer reported insubordinations than T1 ($M = 26.33, SD = .21$). With regard to the number of safety infractions, a non-significant trend, $t(1) = 8.11, p = .078$, demonstrated a reduction in the number of reported safety infractions from T1 ($M = 10.70, SD = 1.98$) to T2 ($M = 5.83, SD = 2.83$).

Office visits. With regard to office visits, no significant differences were

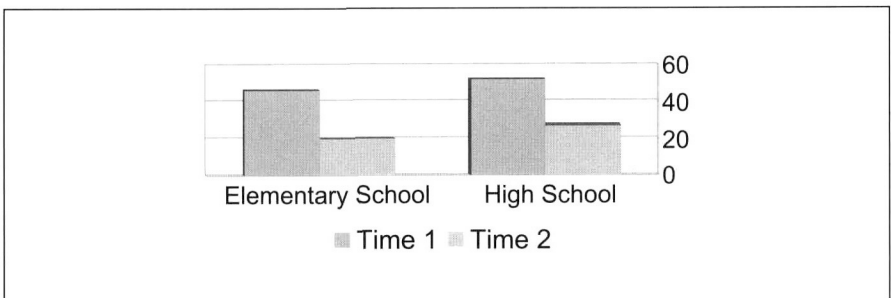


Figure 3. Non-RJ office visits.

found in the number of RJ responses administered as a result of students' trips to the office for disciplinary reasons. This was true for both the elementary and secondary school level.

As illustrated in Figure 3, there was a significant difference at the elementary level, $t(4)=3.04$, $p=.038$ with regard to office visits. The number of non-RJ responses decreased from T1 ($M=46.56$, $SD=16.9646$) to T2 ($M=20.37$, $SD=16.96$). Similarly, at the high school level, there was a non-significant trend, $t(1)=6.56$, $p=.096$. The number of non-RJ responses decreased from T1 ($M=52$, $SD=6.36$) to T2 ($M=27.42$, $SD=11.67$).

It appears that the number of RJ office visit responses did not increase, but the number of non-RJ responses decreased. This may be an indication that the RJ intervention showed school personnel responsible for student discipline at the office level what not to do, but did not necessarily allow them to feel adequately able (maybe due to a lack of support or uncertainty in implementation) to use RJ strategies. This may suggest that further instruction and skill development on how to implement RJ strategies might be in order. Alternatively, it is possible that the teachers are using RJ strategies without reporting them to the office and that these interventions do not find their way into formal counts of office visit responses.

Attendance. As illustrated in Figure 4, with regard to the number of absences, significant effects were found only at the senior high-school level, $t(1)=72.65$, $p=.009$. Fewer absences were reported for senior high school students at T2 ($M=1081$, $SD=270.00$) than at T1 ($M=1190.58$, $SD=272.13$).

Academic Achievement: Grades. As illustrated in Figure 5, with regard to student achievement, a significant effect was found at the elementary level, $t(14)=2.81$, $p=.014$ for students' grades. Specifically, grades decreased from T1 ($M=73.44$, $SD=3.07$) to T2 ($M=71.46$, $SD=4.13$).

At the high school level, a non-significant trend was identified, $t(2)$, $p=.072$ for the students' grades. Grades increased from T1 ($M=72.90$, $SD=2.40$) to T2 ($M=73.20$, $SD=1.88$).

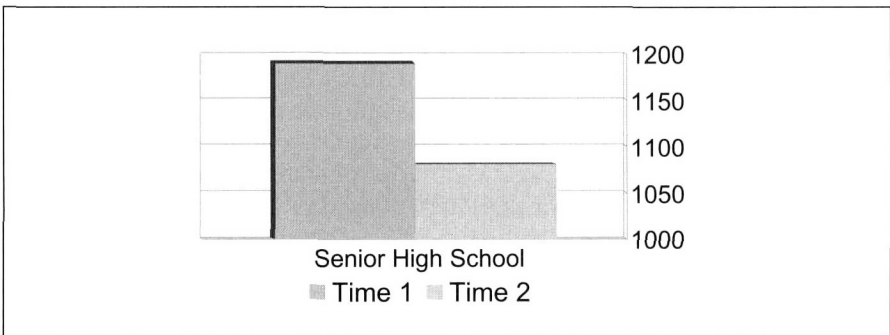


Figure 4. Attendance

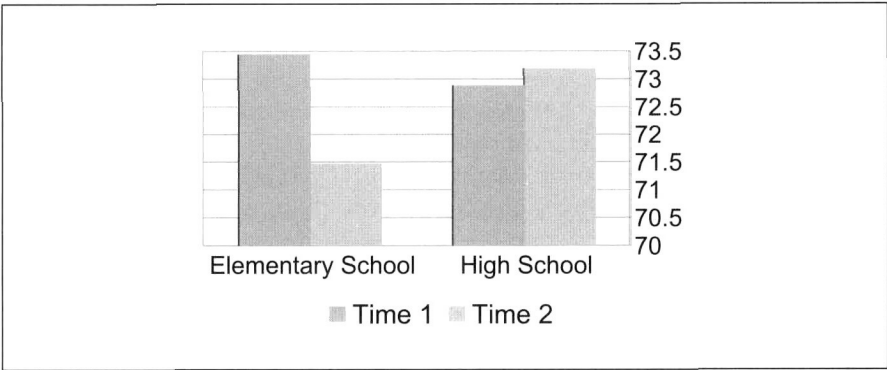


Figure 5. Grades

It appears that based on the RJ intervention, the response was mixed to the effect on grades between T1 and T2. This may be due to the difference in semester structures between elementary and high schools. Elementary grades that were reported for T2 may have reflected the effect of formative assessments that occur throughout the early months of the school year, whereas the grades reported for high schools reflected summative outcomes at the end of a completed semester (end of February). Perhaps a more accurate measure would have been gained by examining grades at the end of the school year for both groups when the effect of summative assessments might have been reflected for both in the outcomes reported. The structure of this pilot study precluded this procedure.

Stage 2 (Predictors)

In this phase of the data analysis, potentially predictive variables, primarily teachers' perceptions of (transformational) leadership style and (humanistic and custodial) PCI were examined to determine the degree to which they may have accounted for the variance in RJ aims-based outcomes. Due to the multiple levels of analysis involved in this pilot study (e.g., classroom levels, grade levels, division levels, school level) the individual teachers' questionnaire responses were aggregated to the school level in an attempt to draw inferences between these responses and the outcome data for Stage 1, Phase 1. Given this, the sample size was not large enough to conduct significance tests, so Stage 1, Phase 2 data were used as descriptive statistics to gain a better understanding of the Stage 1, Phase 1 data. Based on the rationale provided below, primary interest focused on the PCI questionnaire responses.

Transformational Leadership

The Transformational Leadership measure represented the teachers' opinions of school leadership styles. Therefore, this measure was useful in this study

only when examining scores across schools (i.e., it is not really meaningful for examining these scores for across schools regarding teachers' years of experience or across schools at the classroom level). Ultimately, the responses were found to be relatively consistent across the schools (Table 5).

With regard to the potential interaction of these two predictive variables, no statistically significant relationships were found between Pupil Control Ideology and Perceived Transformational Leadership. This finding might suggest that perception of school-level leadership is unrelated to individual teachers' pupil control ideology. If pupil control ideology is theoretically linked to acceptance of RJ strategies, it is possible that leadership styles may not have an influence on RJ strategies at the classroom level. This finding appears to be consistent with Ross and Gray's (2006) finding regarding the effect of principals on students' outcomes at the classroom level. In their study, they attributed 17% of the variance in such outcomes to the effect of the principal. As is the case for each of the following school-level and class-level analyses, further research is needed to gain a better understanding the role of principals in these relationships.

Pupil Control Ideology (PCI)

PCI (Willower et al., 1967) represents teachers' approaches to classroom control as measured on a humanistic to custodial continuum. The findings in the present study, as discussed below, are addressed at the school and class levels and in relation to student attendance.

School level. A significant difference was found between elementary-level schools for PCI, $t(21)=-2.17, p=.04$. Teachers from the higher SES school (elementary school A) had a more humanistic PCI, whereas those from the school with a lower SES (elementary school B) had a more custodial PCI (see Table 6). No significant differences were found for grades by school, and the sample size was too small to conduct further analyses using infractions or *trips to the office* response strategies.

Table 5
Comparing PCI and TL Among Schools

<i>Schools</i>	<i>Pupil Control Ideology</i>		<i>Transformative Leadership</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Elementary School A	44.75	10.26	31.63	1.07
Elementary School B	53.67	8.94	31.73	2.69
High School A	48.86	3.63	31.86	3.24
High School B	50.22	8.57	35.25	3.20

Table 6
Means and Standard Deviations by Class Level

Class Level	Pupil Control Ideology	
	Mean	SD
Primary	50.14	9.14
Junior	47.54	11.33
Intermediate I	56.40	2.61
Intermediate II	47.50	11.79
Senior	49.56	3.97

Class level. Regarding the Stage 1, Phase 2 outcomes data, a significant difference ($T=3.152$, $p=.034$) at the intermediate-I level (grades 7 and 8) was noted in relation to GPA. The mean GPA for T2 (73.62) was significantly higher than that for T1 (72.96). These differences were not found for any other specific class levels. As noted in Figure 2, when the PCI responses were examined from a descriptive perspective, the Intermediate-I level teachers had the highest PCI ($M=56.40$). Although significance tests could not be computed, from a descriptive perspective it appears that the differences in Intermediate-I grades may partly reflect more custodial teachers at this level.

Attendance. In the Stage 1, Phase 1 outcomes data, a reduction in the number of absences was found for the senior level (grades 11 and 12). The PCI descriptive statistics for the senior-level (Table 6) indicates that these teachers tend to be more humanistic than custodial. This finding could be seen as providing some evidence that more humanistic PCI, in conjunction with RJ practices, might lead to improved attendance at the senior high school level.

In addition, a non-significant trend $t(4)=-2.23$, $p=.09$ was noted, where elementary school A absences per month ($M=74$, $SD=19.78$) were fewer than those for elementary school B ($M=100.97$ $SD=4.4$). With regard to PCI, elementary school A teachers' PCI tended to be more humanistic ($M=44.75$), whereas elementary school B teachers' PCI tended to be more custodial ($M=53.67$). Taken together, these findings suggest that PCI may influence how the RJ intervention predicted attendance outcomes, where more custodial PCI may have been related to increased absences. Further research is needed to determine the strength of this relationship.

Beyond this, the use of PCI descriptive statistics does not appear to augment understandings of office responses, behavioral infractions, or academic outcomes for RJ schools.

Phase 2 Findings (Context)

To explain the significant findings and trends identified in Phase 1, during Phase 2 qualitative data were collected via focus group interviews. These focus groups provided an opportunity for participants in the RJ pilot to tell the researchers their perceptions, attitudes, and ideas.

Emergent Themes

Relationships, community, and empowerment/accountability emerged from the analysis of the focus group interview data as key themes. The theme *relationships* referred to concepts of empathy, respect, and relationship-building and underscored the sensitivity and care associated with the development of respectful and trusting relationships in schools. The theme *community* embodied those aspects that had an effect on the reduction of behavioral infractions: how RJ practices supported students' engagement in learning by supporting healthy relationships, alleviating stress, and increasing students' efficacy as a result of membership and opportunities for student reintegration in the learning community. Furthermore, the engagement of parents as members contributed to this sense of community and was perceived as a highly supportive and valuable component of successful community-building, thereby creating positive relationships and a positive school climate. The third theme, *empowerment/accountability* referred to the dual aspects of RJ practices in schools, which provided a *voice* for students in reporting issues/concerns and moving toward conflict resolution, as well as enabling students to take ownership for their behavior and the effects of their actions on others. Students were perceived as gaining efficacy in problem-solving given the focus of RJ practices on finding resolution, rather than on punishment.

Predictive Factors

The following four themes emerged from the analysis of the focus group interview data relative to potential predictors of RJ success: (a) school/classroom climate; (b) communication; (c) division level; and (d) leadership style. The theme *school/classroom climate* referred to the socioeconomic status (SES) of the school community, the size of the school population, and the presence of RJ advocacy in the school. The theme *communication* included how the RJ intervention was framed by administration, the use of a common language, and the application of restorative-practices questions. The theme *divisional level* identified the differences in RJ integration in the curriculum and assessed the success of RJ implementation at various developmental levels. The theme *leadership style* identified leadership traits of school leaders that participants believed were likely to support RJ practices.

Discussion

Contextualization of Aims-Based Outcomes

During Phase 1, Stage 1 of this study, quantitative data were collected and analyzed with regard to the aims of the investigation: reduction of students' behavioral infractions, support for the creation of a culture of positive relationships, and improvement of student achievement. The results of these analyses are reported and discussed above. This section discusses key findings arising from the qualitative data analysis, also presented above, as they pertain to these aims and the predictive factors. The intent of this discussion is to develop a clearer understanding of the effect of restorative justice practices as experienced by teachers and students in the classroom and school. The focus group questions were divided into two sections. The first focused on the aims-based outcomes.

Reduction of Students' Behavioral Infractions

Students' behavioral infractions. The quantitative analysis revealed a significant reduction in the number of behavioral infractions at both the elementary and high school levels. Focus group participants suggested that a sense of community was enhanced by what they perceived as a reduction in behavioral infractions, particularly suspendable infractions. One practitioner indicated that RJ practices fostered a "sense of community not just self-interest." Another indicated that RJ students felt "more comfortable," and that student stress was alleviated. For example, students did not take issues home, offenders were able to resolve issues, and those involved in the conflict were able to engage in learning sooner.

Attendance. At the senior high school level only, the quantitative analysis uncovered a significant reduction in the number of absences. Practitioners reported that RJ positively affected relationship-building in the school through the development of trust and confidence: these practices may have been particularly effective with at-risk students who were perhaps most prone to absence. The reduction in the number of absences may also be partly accounted for by the aspect of RJ that focuses on the reintegration of the student into the learning community. This sense of community is identified by one teacher's statement that it is a "philosophy of the school that students are able to begin again," and another's comment that "students feel they have a 'clean slate' when they return."

Creation of a Culture of Positive Relationships

Office visits. The quantitative analysis indicated that with regard to students' trips to the office for disciplinary purposes at both elementary and secondary levels, RJ responses remained the same and non-RJ responses decreased. Overall, the number of office visits tended to decrease. RJ practitioners re-

ported during focus groups that they believed issues tended to be handled in the classroom community, which resulted in fewer office visits, and that there were more impromptu RJ circles in the classroom. One teacher indicated that RJ practices facilitated, “students policing themselves.” They also indicated confidence in the decisions they made that may have reduced the number of office visits and confidence in the decisions made at the office level that resulted in the reduction of non-RJ responses at the office level. They also reported fewer repeat visits and that “frequent flyers” were able to go back to the classroom faster. In terms of student empowerment, practitioners reported a focus on resolution rather than punishment, with one teacher stating, “Students reach answers and are not given answers.”

RJ response to office visits may reflect a school’s approach to the development of positive relationships and culture and a school community that embodies RJ beliefs and values. As identified above, during focus group interviews three key themes emerged. With regard to the first theme, relationship, participants talked about the emergence of mutual respect and a positive school culture in which students protected each other and understood the effect of their behavior on others. With regard to the second theme, community, participants indicated that they saw RJ as restoring relationships. This was exemplified by the engagement of parents in the school community and by the use of a *common language* that reflected RJ values and beliefs. With regard to the third theme, empowerment/accountability, practitioners asserted that RJ provided students with opportunities to solve problems, use a voice (“their words have power”) and believe that they would be heard. Positive relationships among students were thus facilitated as they took ownership of problem-solving and worked things out with peers and administration.

Improving Student Achievement: Grades

The quantitative analysis demonstrated a small but significant reduction in grades at the elementary level and an upward trend at the high school level. Despite this anomalous elementary school response, focus group participants indicated their belief that RJ fostered increased engagement in learning as students’ need to dwell on conflict was reduced. In addition, participant teachers reported that RJ approaches provided students with a second chance in a setting where positive outcomes of the teaching and learning process were more likely to be realized.

Contextualization of Predictive Factors

The second set of focus group interview questions explored the participants’ perceptions of factors that might influence the success of the RJ intervention. The findings, described above, indicated that PCI was a predictive factor in relation to school level, divisional level, and attendance.

School level. The quantitative data analysis indicated that lower SES and a more custodial PCI tended to coexist. The participants' responses supported this finding. For example, teachers in lower SES schools indicated that they faced challenges in implementing RJ practices, "due to a transient student populations and the fact that other fundamental needs have not been met." Participants stated that the success of RJ would probably be contingent on a "non-hierarchical approach." Speaking in terms of a humanistic PCI, community-focused orientation, a participant said, "Teachers are seen as part of the process; every voice is heard." Furthermore, they underscored the importance of in-school support positions such as child and youth workers, psychologists, and social workers.

Class level. Teachers reported that there was a focus at the JI and IS levels on curriculum-based instruction. This perhaps accounted for the anomalous outcome with regard to the lower GPA at Time 2 at the intermediate level. Given the developmental level of students in these grades (participants noted that older students were more affected by peer pressure), participants noted that RJ practices might be more successful if they were embedded in the classroom pedagogy as opposed to being implemented as a reactive measure. Teachers and students may have seen such interventions as separate from the teaching and learning processes of the classroom. As one participant said, "they can't learn the lesson if they are worried about an issue at recess ... frees the student up to learn." If there were a smoother integration and potentially a resulting shift to a more humanistic PCI (teachers at this level were seen as having the most custodial PCI, $M=56.4$), then personal, social, and academic student success might be more likely to be realized. In support of this conclusion, teachers indicated that they required more time to implement RJ more effectively, and those with a more custodial PCI needed to be more involved, to have a higher degree of "buy-in" of the RJ approach.

Attendance. As noted in the quantitative analysis, reductions in the number of absences were found only at the senior level. This was in concert with a more humanistic PCI ($M=49.56$) and what teachers reported as a sense of student empowerment and community. Teachers indicated a belief that "a more humanistic approach was more likely to support RJ because it acknowledges students' feelings and encourages active listening on the part of the teacher ... every voice is heard."

Conclusions

The Ontario Minister of Education Leona Dombrowski outlined the importance of "safe and inclusive learning environments" (Ministry of Education, 2010). In this regard, focus group participants in the pilot study reported that RJ measures were seen as proactive in that they enabled students to anticipate issues and put tools for solving them into the hands of the students themselves. Three aims of the pilot project were consistent with Minister Dom-

browski's statement. These were reduction in behavioral infractions, support for the creation of positive relationships, and improvement in students' academic achievement.

With regard to behavioral infractions, it was hypothesized for RJ schools that regardless of level, at T2 significantly fewer behavioral infractions would be reported. Statistically significant evidence of a drop in reported behavioral infractions provides promising support for the RJ intervention. Specifically, at the elementary and high school level, there was clear statistical evidence of less bullying, fighting, hands-on and throwing objects (safety); and harassment, language, racial slurs, insubordination, and smoking (insubordination). This in turn supported another aim, the creation of a culture of positive relationships. Results of the study appear to be consistent with the underlying RJ philosophy in which restoration and strengthening of relationships is essential for building community in schools.

It was hypothesized that in RJ schools, regardless of level, at T2 there would be a significant increase in the number of RJ office visit response types and a reduction in the number of non-RJ office visit response types. Although the number of RJ office visit responses were not reduced over T2, as was noted, the number of safety and suspendable infractions were. As suggested in the discussion, teachers involved in RJ practices were more likely to deal with issues requiring RJ responses in the classroom community. This aligns with the research on RJ, confirming that students are accountable to others in the classroom and are provided with a clean slate to start over (Lockhart & Zammit, 2005). This conclusion also demonstrates the benefit of a restorative as opposed to a zero-tolerance response. Focus group interview participants at all levels shared perceptions of strengthened relationships among students and empowered students' voices regarding the resolution of behavioral issues involving themselves and others, including making amends to the victim and restoring the offenders to the community. It was also hypothesized that for the high school level, at T2 there would be significantly fewer absences. For all other levels, there would be no significant differences. Interestingly, absences were reduced at the senior level. Students at this level choose to attend or not. If the climate is inclusive and safe, it makes sense that they would feel more welcome in the classroom, which would reduce their selective absence.

In addition, regarding the third aim of the pilot study, for RJ schools, regardless of level, it was hypothesized that at T2 GPA would increase significantly. The findings in this regard were unexpected. GPA did not increase at the elementary level, but it did decrease at the intermediate 1 level. The analysis of the qualitative data from the focus group interviews provided insight into the probable reasons for this drop. Students at this level succumb to peer pressure, and this may result in disconnection to the curriculum. As well, teachers involved in the RJ initiatives at this level were more custodial

in their teaching, which created a barrier to effective RJ integration. Furthermore, instead of applying RJ as a pedagogical strategy infused in all lessons, these teachers appeared to believe that RJ was used only when a situation arose. Thus the lesson would be stopped, RJ circles would form, and the situation would be handled. This is positive in that it reduces behavioral infractions, but it is not an indication that the RJ approach has been fully integrated into these teachers' teaching philosophy.

However, at the senior level, GPA increased and attendance improved. This may suggest that RJ practices are better infused by teachers who have a more humanistic approach as demonstrated by the quantitative findings about senior teachers. Consistent with the humanistic approach, the classroom learning environment became more democratic as students saw that their words had power, that they were able to take ownership of problem-solving, and that they were able to affect decision-making as it pertained to negative-behavior situations. Participants in the focus group interviews indicated that following a removal from the classroom (disciplinary trip to the office), students now returned to class more quickly and were on task sooner. Particularly at the elementary level, the research findings indicated that it was not unusual for students involved in a conflict situation to request a circle because they knew that this would be the most likely forum for taking responsibility, making amends, and restoring relationships. At the intermediate and high school levels, participants in the study indicated that following an RJ classroom intervention, it was not unusual to see former adversaries working together on a project or sharing a social moment together. Social bonds appear to have been strengthened. Furthermore, study participants reported a higher degree of sensitivity for cultural and equity issues among students and an improved moral tone in the school.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this pilot study, the following recommendations may enhance the effect of restorative practices in schools by supporting the development of a positive school climate and also in providing a framework for ongoing assessment of the RJ intervention strategy.

Supporting a Positive School Climate

Lockhart and Zammit (2005) assert that restorative practices in schools build community; RJ practices strengthen relationships through opportunities for meaningful dialogue and empowerment, which involve all members of the community, not just the victim and offender. At the core of this philosophical approach is that RJ involves building capacity to ensure that all voices are heard. Therefore, care must be taken not to mandate restorative approaches in the school, but rather to create an environment that supports an RJ culture

developed at a grassroots level. This would involve the infusion of RJ principles and practices with all members of the school community including administrators, staff, teachers, students, and parents. The following recommendations may support the implementation of a non-hierarchical approach to the development of an RJ culture.

As a first step, it is recommended that RJ advocates in the school be identified; then that the support of these advocates be enlisted by mentoring members of the school community on how effectively to implement RJ practices. As a leadership initiative, this mentorship role may be developed through inservice educational opportunities hosted by, and in collaboration with, faculties of education. In addition, these RJ mentors as core members may support a communication strategy with which to infuse the message of restorative practices, not only at the individual school level, but also system-wide.

Ongoing Assessment of the Effect of Restorative Practices

An effective communication strategy is essential to ensure that a common language (O'Callaghan, 2005) is used in the implementation of RJ to create a philosophical shift that affirms human dignity and incorporates the tenets of forgiveness and the restoration of relationships in disciplinary practices at all educational levels: the classroom, administration in the school, and the board. Therefore, it is recommended that committees at both secondary and elementary levels be created to provide strategies for implementation in everyday classroom procedures both curriculum-based and learning skills-based. Furthermore, it is recommended that an annual schedule of RJ inservices be created to provide opportunities for administrators, staff, and teachers in their own schools and at the system level to share best practices and lessons learned, as well as suggestions for future implementation. As part of an ongoing assessment process, it is important that topics at these inservice meetings be open and wide-ranging; however, in the interest of maintaining an authentic RJ philosophy, they should also underscore the restorative framework of the RJ questions. This approach may ensure the use of a common language in the consistent and effective implementation of RJ practices.

This pilot study provides evidence of the effect that RJ intervention may have had in supporting a positive climate in schools. Ongoing assessments of RJ practices are recommended at both the aims-based outcomes and predictive-factors context levels.

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