

Chapter 21

Can Technologies Advance the Integration of Restorative Pedagogy into Teacher Education Curricula?

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ABSTRACT

Educators across the globe familiar with the principles and practices of restorative justice have been changing the relational ecology in their schools by embracing restorative pedagogy and praxis that address power and status imbalances caused by authoritarianism and punitive discipline policies. This chapter introduces teacher educators and teachers to the philosophy and practices of restorative justice as implemented in school settings and projects an image of how teaching and learning technologies might facilitate the incorporation of restorative justice modules into a variety of teacher education course curricula. The chapter conceptualizes how technologies can provide a continuous source for professional growth and community-building in teacher education for teachers willing to explore and adopt restorative approaches and relational pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

Behind every curriculum is a rationale that “establishes the parameters and directions for all other curriculum components” (Gay, 2001, p. 31), and the social curriculum is no exception. The social curriculum refers to social relationships within the school, such as the nature of teacher-student relationships, student-student relationships, and the organization of classes (Smith, 2000). Vygotsky’s

zone of proximal development demonstrates the extent to which modeling and adult assistance can influence the cognitive abilities of a learner, and was a forerunner to the curriculum movement now centered on creating a more collaborative and cooperative classroom aimed at improving students’ higher order thinking skills (Henniger, 2002). The social curriculum contributes to the relational ecology of a school (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012), which calls even greater attention to the

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6046-5.ch021

important role that relationships play in teaching and learning. Technologies, such as texting and email, have changed the way people relate to one another, and have certainly affected the nature of communications within the school.

Although theories emphasizing the importance of caring relationships and the social curriculum are introduced in teacher preparation programs (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Noddings, 2005), the pedagogy and praxis of caring remain elusive, and therefore, sometimes undetectable in schools and classrooms where data-driven instruction, assessments, and teacher accountability measures dominate the learning environment. Teacher education courses espousing outdated modes of classroom management that emphasize social control contribute little to the praxis of relational pedagogy, as they typically fail to equip teachers with the relational skills needed to create and sustain classrooms where students from all backgrounds can develop, learn, and coexist peacefully (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Raible & Irizarry, 2010). The rising popularity of online courses presents an additional challenge to teacher educators; they must now create an empathetic community of care in a virtual environment, yet are rarely equipped to do so (Fuller, 2012).

The efforts of caring teachers to model pro-social relationships with their students are eroded by zero tolerance school discipline policies. In the 1990s, schools began implementing such policies in response to the Gun-Free School Zone Act of 1994, and were further encouraged after the 1999 Columbine High School massacre (Simon, 2007). The reactionary policies imposed upon schools in the past three decades have replaced the power of social control (Dewey, 1938) with repressive and oppressive disciplinary measures that alienate both students and teachers. The punitive rationale eschewed in political, educational, and criminal justice discourse, and implemented in the form of zero tolerance policies, is detrimental both to child development (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008) and

to the creation of positive school climates. Zero tolerance policies emphasize rule-breaking and exclusion based on authoritative control and fear (Morrison, 2002), and are now standard in schools where little thought is devoted to individual student responsibility and care; as a result, schools now more resemble correctional institutions than institutions of learning (Bazemore & Schiff, 2010). Schools that ignore the heart, mind, and spirit of a student (Montessori, 2009) are frequently plagued with discipline problems and disruptive students.

Although contemporary educational discourse does not address the social curriculum in anything other than punitive terms, the fact remains that the connections children make between concepts and the sociocultural context in which they occur are as important as the content itself. Students use the interpersonal and relational tools developed from interactions between the content and school culture to relate to others in later social situations (Henniger, 2002). Therefore, it is vital that the relational ecology of a school reflect care, community, and accountability to one another so that students may effectively learn how to work cooperatively to solve problems and advance knowledge (Dewey, 1938; Eggen & Kauchak, 2006; Montessori, 2009). Students and teachers must learn how to productively engage in dialogue in which debates between opposing platforms are conducted in a civil and respectful manner (Freire, 2008). Currently, social networks, Skype, email, and texting are but a few technologies that allow students and teachers to dialogue and collaborate in different and exciting ways.

Educators across the globe familiar with the principles and practices of restorative justice (RJ) have been changing the relational ecology in their schools and classrooms by embracing restorative pedagogy and praxis that address power and status imbalances caused by authoritarianism and punitive discipline policies (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Restorative approaches and practices require a philosophical shift away from the overly harsh and punitive zero tolerance model,

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