

Chapter 10

A Restorative Approach to Culturally Responsive Schools

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ABSTRACT

Restorative practice is inspired by the restorative justice movement in the criminal justice system, which puts repairing harm and relationships over and above the need for dispensing blame and punishment. Restorative practice refers to a broad range of principles and processes with the aim of developing healthy relationships and building community. Schools report that whole school implementation of restorative practice can lead to positive outcomes including improved school climate, increased academic achievement, and reduced racial disparities in school discipline. This chapter will explore how a whole school approach to restorative practice can transform schools and classrooms and create an inclusive, safe, and culturally responsive school community.

INTRODUCTION

Restorative practice offers a framework for building community and responding to challenging behavior through authentic dialogue, coming to understanding, and making things right (Morrison, Blood & Thorsborne, 2005; Wachtel, 2016). Restorative practice aims to build healthy communities and restore relationships when harm has occurred (Morrison et al., 2005; Wachtel, 2016). Emerging research indicates that restorative practice implemented in school settings can lead to a decrease in behavior-related referrals, improved problem solving and conflict resolution skills, and reductions in bullying and violent behaviors (Anyon, 2016; Fronius et al., 2016; Gonzalez et al., 2019; Morrison, 2007; Passraella, 2017). Further, schools implementing restorative practice report increased perceptions of school safety, a more positive school climate, and increased school connectedness (Anyon, 2016; Jain, Bassey, Brown, & Kalra, 2014; Swain-Bradway, Maggin, & Buren, 2015). Data reported by Public Council (2017) and others indicate that implementation of restorative practice contributes to a reduction in exclusive discipline practices, such as suspensions and expulsions, and decreased discipline disparities among minority students (Fronius et al., 2016; Gonzalez, Sattler, & Buth, 2019; Jain et al., 2014).

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The aim of restorative practice is closely aligned with the ideals and values of culturally responsive schools, which are often described in the literature as ‘inclusive,’ ‘equitable,’ ‘trusting,’ ‘reciprocal,’ ‘engaging,’ ‘positive,’ and ‘safe’ (Archibald, 2016; Bal, King-Thorius, & Kozleski, 2012; Hopkins, 2015; NASSP, 2017). The growing popularity of restorative practices in schools, coupled with promising research findings, has prompted the National Education Association (NEA) and the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (2014) to recommend the adoption of restorative practices as an effective and culturally sensitive approach to discipline and behavior intervention (Swain-Bradway et al., 2015).

Nuri-Robbins, Lindsey, Lindsey, and Terrell (2012) define cultural proficiency as “the policies and practices in an organization or the values and behavior of an individual, that enable the person or institution to engage effectively with people and groups who are different from them” (para. 1). This chapter will explore how Restorative Practice can provide a framework for schools to achieve a culturally responsive climate and strengthen practices that foster cultural competence and equity. The chapter will be organized into five sections: (a) background and introduction to restorative practice, (b) an overview of restorative practices in schools, (c) restorative classroom management and school-wide discipline, (d) a whole school approach to restorative practice, and (e) restorative practice within a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS). It is hoped that the reader will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of a restorative approach as a foundation for culturally responsive schools and classrooms.

Objectives

1. To identify the key values and principles of a restorative approach.
2. To describe a continuum of restorative practice ranging from informal to formal.
3. To explore restorative practice as a positive alternative to exclusive disciplinary practices such as suspension and expulsion.
4. To discuss examples of culturally responsive restorative practices in school and classroom settings.
5. To examine the implementation of whole school restorative practice within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS).

BACKGROUND

Restorative Practice is grounded in the values and philosophy of the Restorative Justice movement initially implemented in the criminal justice system in the late 1990’s, which puts repairing harm done to relationships and people over and above the need to assign blame and dispense punishment (Hopkins, 2011, 2015; Wachtel, 2016). Howard Zehr, a pioneer of the early restorative justice movement in prisons, identified three essential pillars of restorative justice: focus on harm and need, obligation to put things right, and engagement of stakeholders (Zehr, 2003, 2014). Restorative Practice is also inspired by community-based practices among indigenous populations, in which affected individuals come together as a community to build consensus and collectively resolve an issue. (Wachtel, 2016; Hopkins, 2015).

Whereas Restorative Justice historically refers to a structured process that is applied in response to wrongdoing, ‘Restorative Practice’ describes a broad range of proactive and responsive processes that focus on community building and a relational approach to problem solving (Blood & Thorsborne, 2005; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Wachtel, 2016). Restorative practice emphasizes prevention and early intervention through community building and developing social capital as a means of preventing and

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