

Teachers

"WHERE THERE IS NO VISION, THE PEOPLE PERISH" | PROVERBS 29:18 |

SPRING | 2015
VOL. LX, NO. 4

of Vision

CREATIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM



CAMPUS
CONFLICTS

CAMPUS CONFLICT AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS

by Dr. Marian Fritzscheier, Ed.D.

Campus conflict can happen anytime, anywhere. Put-downs, name calling, threats, gossip and bullying are all examples of student conflict that educators deal with on a daily basis. Add sexual harassment, physical aggression, and violence, and the school culture can feel unsafe, even hostile, to both students and staff.

Campus conflict is typically handled using a traditional discipline model that defines misbehavior as breaking school rules (Ashley & Burke). The focus is on the details of the particular incident, and establishing the blame. The educator is the authority figure wielding the power. The educator typically adheres to the rules in an impersonal way, decides on a penalty, and holds the student accountable through punishment. Sadly, this often results in an adversarial relationship with the student. This traditional model is called Retributive Justice or punishment. It's the way educators have been trained for generations.

But what if there was a better way to deal with campus conflict? Schools sprinkled across the U.S. are implementing Restorative Practices (RP) as an alternative to punishment and zero-tolerance policies with resounding success. In RP misbehavior is defined as harm done to one person or group by another (Ashley & Burke). The focus is on problem solving, dialogue, and negotiation with everyone involved in the conflict as part of the process.

What is Restorative Practices?

"Restorative practices is an emerging field of study that enables people to restore and build community in an increasingly disconnected world." (www.iirp.org)

RP, which has its roots in Restorative Justice, is a new field of study used in schools to improve students' accountability and competency development, as well as community safety. Howard Zehr, the founding father of Restorative Justice explains, "Restorative Justice is a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible." Schools recently began using the term Restorative Practices to differentiate from the Restorative Justice legal system.

RP is not a "one size fits all" solution. But rather a model that provides strategies with the potential to enhance the school environment, change the school culture, and restore relationships after conflict arises. It complements other positive movements taking place in schools, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) and Social Emotional Learning (SEL). It offers educators new tools for handling school misconduct. These tools can reduce the need for school exclusion and juvenile justice system involvement, which many times is a frequent consequence of zero-tolerance policies.

Zero-Tolerance Policies

Zero-tolerance was originally applied during the 1980s in the criminal justice system to reduce violent crime and drug related offenses. Schools began instituting zero-tolerance policies in the 1990s in response to gang shootings and school shootings, despite

statistics demonstrating that school crime rates were either stable or declining. The 1995 Gun Free Schools Act responded to educator's fears of increasing violence, drug problems, and firearm issues. Administrators began harshly disciplining students with consequences, such as long-term suspension and expulsion. It was also applied to minor, or non-violent offenses, such as tardies.

Unintended Results: The School-to-Prison-Pipeline

Students were suspended and expelled in alarming numbers. Students of color and special education students were disproportionately represented. Problems ensued as a result of unsupervised students at home, spending time with other unsupervised students, thus learning new misbehaviors. The more students missed school, the lower their grades dropped, and the greater the risk of not graduating increased. Furthermore, the lack of attendance and academic success leads to disenfranchised students. "School suspension is the top predictor of contact with the justice system for students who become incarcerated by ninth grade." (5) These students often ended up in the juvenile justice system and subsequently the prison system, hence the school-to-prison-pipeline reality.

Need to Change Lenses

"A whole school approach is the best way to provide restorative justice, with the entire school community using Restorative Practices in its daily work." (Kiddle & Alfred, p. 18)

The current system focuses on addressing what rules or laws were broken? Who broke them? What do they deserve? Whereas, RP asks, what is the harm caused, and to whom? What are the needs and obligations that have arisen? Who has the obligation to address the needs, to repair the harms, to restore relationships? (Kiddle & Alfred).

Educators will need to learn how to view their students and their misbehaviors through a restorative lens, rather than a retributive justice lens. One Vice-Principal I work with said, "I pretty much discipline by the book. I'm not sure how this will work, but I'm willing to try."

Many educators may have difficulty changing lenses. It is a process that takes time because the RP approach contrasts what educators have been taught for generations. When a student is sent to the office, teachers want to know how the student was punished. But this zero tolerance policy of the past clearly demonstrates that punishment does not change behavior. RP provides a course of action, where over time, the student can learn more responsible and respectful behavior that has the potential to change his or her life's trajectory from prison, to graduating from high school, and beyond.

Conflict: An Opportunity for Learning

RP offers opportunities for learning when dealing with campus conflict. The goal is to rectify the dispute through restitution: restoring both parties, with the goal being reconciliation, and acknowledging responsibility for actions. Accountability is a key element, as it requires the student to understand the impact of their actions, take responsibility for their choices, and suggest ways to

Continued on page 29

CAMPUS CONFLICT AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS

Continued from page 13

repair the harm done to others or property. Sometimes choosing forgiveness is part of the process. As a Christian educator, these principles are easy to support whole heartedly.

Restorative Questions

One way for educators to immediately implement the use of RP, is through the use of restorative questions. In a traditional discipline model, teachers focus on the student misbehaving and administer consequences accordingly. In RP, both the offender and student harmed (the victim) are given the opportunity to participate. RP is always voluntary. This is especially critical when serious situations potentially require family involvement from both sides. If students chose not to participate, then traditional discipline is used.

The first set of questions is for the offender, or the person who harmed someone else. To respond to challenging behavior, the educator asks the offender these questions in front of the victim(s):

- "What happened?
- What were you thinking about at the time?
- What have your thoughts been since?
- Who has been affected by what you did?
- In what way have they been affected?
- What do you think you need to do to make things right?" (3)

Note that the student is not asked why. Students do not usually know why. If they think about it and state why, they use it to justify their actions.

The second set of questions is for the person harmed by others' actions, the victim. These questions are also answered in front of the offender:

- "What did you think when you realized what had happened?
- What have your thoughts been since?
- How has this affected you and others?
- What has been the hardest thing for you?
- What do you think needs to happen to make things right?" (3)

The educator facilitates a discussion between the students. Depending on the situation, not all questions are asked. To help guide this process, The International Institute of Restorative Practices sells business size cards that list the questions so educators can easily access these questions (www.iirp.com).

I recently observed two sixth grade students participate in this process. A girl, the victim, was scared and hesitant to stand up to a boy, the offender, who had tripped her and then he and his friends laughed. The Vice-Principal first empowered the girl by having her stand next to her while the boy sat on a chair. At first, the girl's voice was soft and shaky, but the more she talked, the more powerful her voice became. At one point she said to the other student, "Speak up. I can't hear you."

The Vice-Principal didn't spend time refereeing whether or not the boy actually tripped the girl, but in the end he apologized for tripping her. He indicated that if she was hurt in the future, he would help her instead of laughing at her. I wasn't convinced of the boy's sincerity, but the girl left the office six inches taller. This is the same VP who was willing to try. She's discovered results just like this one. A year after she learned about RP, she wouldn't consider returning to the old model. She's now a RP leader for other administrators.

The Challenge

This week, when campus conflict occurs, consider Restorative Practices: accountability, responsibility, restitution, and forgiveness. It's the right thing to do.

Educators can access my web page www.fromdiaperstodiamonds.com and discover lists of RP books, resources, and videos.

RECOMMENDED READING:

- Costello, Bob, John Wachtel, and Ted Wachtel. *The Restorative Practices Handbook: for Teachers, Disciplinarians and Administrators*. International Institute for Restorative Practices, Bethlehem: PA, 2009.
- Kiddle, Jon and Rita Alfred. *Restorative Justice: A Working Guide for our Schools*. Alameda County Health Care Services Agency, 2011. healthyschoolsandcommunities.org/Docs/Restorative-Justice-Paper.pdf. Accessed 1/10/2015.
- *Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relations & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools. A Guide for Educators*. March 2014. Download a PDF of this toolkit: www.otlcampaign.org/restorative-practices.

WORKS CITED:

1. Ashley, Jessica and Kimberly Burke. *Implementing restorative justice: A guide for schools*. ICJIA (Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority). State of Illinois, [no date]. www.icjia.state.il.us/public/pdf/BARJ/SCHOOL. Accessed 1/9/2015.
2. IIRP. International Institute of Restorative Practices. www.iirp.org.
3. IIRP Graduate School. ©2013. Restorativeworks.net. Permission granted from Ted Wachtel, IIRP President, January 12, 2015.
4. Kiddle, Jon and Rita Alfred. *Restorative Justice: A Working Guide for our Schools*. Alameda County Health Care Services Agency, 2011. healthyschoolsandcommunities.org/Docs/Restorative-Justice-Paper.pdf. Accessed 1/10/2015.
5. *School to Prison Pipeline: Zero Tolerance for Latino Youth*. NCLR, Models for Change: Systems Reform in Juvenile Justice, 2011. www.sccgov.org/sites/pdo/ppw/pubs/Documents/ZeroTolerance_Fact... Accessed 1/10/2015.
6. Zehr, Howard. *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*. Good Books: Intercourse, PA, 2002, p. 37.



Dr. Marian Fritzemeier, Ed.D. is a long-time Christian public school educator. Most recently she was a child development college professor. Currently she's an author, speaker, and Restorative Practices trainer in schools. Visit her web site www.fromdiaperstodiamonds.com where she features her speaking topics and resources.