A Case for Restorative Discipline

Social Justice Advocacy Assessment

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What advocates see as we advocate for children is very disheartening.

It is appropriate, since October is anti-Bullying month, to say that when we look at the areas of suspension we see most of the suspensions are for disruptive behavior and physical aggression. Mimicking what we see when bullying is left unaddressed.

The problems of aggressive behavior existing among elementary students mostly begins with bullying, harassment and mental health diagnosis that educators have no idea as to how to address other than suspension. PBIS is not working for black, brown and poor children because of insensitive responses. The following videos are what advocates see.
REACTIONS FROM ADULTS NUMBER ONE REASON WHY CHILDREN DON’T REPORT
BULLYING LEFT UNADDRESSED IS AT THE VERY FOUNDATION OF REFERRALS RELATED TO SCHOOL DISRUPTION AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR
LONG TERM - EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE
The Culture of Bullying Un-Addressed
ADULT BULLYING AND HARASSMENT
“I've been Bullied”
Bullying Can Become Intergenerational
2015 - 2016 STATS ON BULLYING
It doesn't have to end like this!

- Michael Morone
- 2014
- Attempted a Failed Suicide Because He Played With My Little Ponies

Suicide Bullied
I asked the community to come together to have a conversation about how we move from a divided community, pointing fingers and casting blame; to a united community coming up with solutions. As an education advocate I see the many different sides to what’s happening in our education system and I intentionally look without bias even though I know there are some very deep rooted problems that are structural and cultural and decisions that come from a lack of knowledge, unintentional consequences and intentional; problems that arise from implicit and explicit bias on the side of educators and parents. I also see the fragmented pieces that work separately, and ineffectively in our community all pieces working together to maintain the STPP or criminalization of students.

We all are stakeholders because we all have a vested interest in making sure all children receive a quality education and are given fair and equitable treatment in a safe environment. The Children are indeed our future.

So, let us lay the boxing gloves down, and have some real dialogue and conversation about suspensions in Wake County; Why is a majority poor, black and brown students being suspended? What can we collectively do? Can we be open to “Truth-Telling?”

We want to work along beside WCPSS to provide alternatives to suspensions. We want to be service providers and develop solutions, programs, processes being transparent and holding each other accountable. We have to begin with Truth-telling, Building
HISTORY OF INEQUITY IN DISCIPLINE - THE ARKANSAS NINE
Sixty years ago today, Minnijean Brown and eight other black students walked into all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Ark., as angry white protesters shouted obscenities, spat on them and threatened violence in full view of television cameras.

The Little Rock Nine were escorted by soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division at the order of President Eisenhower, a moment that is rightly celebrated as a triumph in civil rights history.

But a few months after taking her historic steps, Minnijean was suspended for dropping a cafeteria tray after white students obstructed her path. She was later expelled for calling other tormentors “white trash,” after they threw a purse full of combination locks at her. Although these were not major transgressions, and she was not the instigator, Minnijean was the one harshly disciplined, not the white students.

Back then, inequitably harsh discipline was a tool used by resistant white schools to make sure that racial integration would not mean equal education for black students. The racial discipline gap is now a firmly established reality in Arkansas and around the country.
Introducing the Punishment Gap

Data and Research nation wide speaks to the disproportionality in school discipline among black brown poor students and students with disabilities as opposed to their white counterparts. It is so widespread across the nation that an article written by scholars, Edward W. Morris and Brea L. Perry from Oxford University calls this gap “the “Punishment Gap.” The report state this gap contributes to many of the social problems we face within our community.
Restorative Discipline: (RD)

A community based alternative to reducing the number of suspensions, teaching and helping children grow and learn responsibility. Discipline is not about punishment but teaching empathy, or training rather than punishment. It is a communication and dialogue, understanding and removing biases, it is about giving children a voice, and not feeling forced to lie because they are going to get in trouble, or when they make mistakes but to be truthful and accept responsibility.

RD is a process, not a program and is developed by the community specifically for the needs in that community. RD processes include community circles to foster communication and create dialogue, builds trust, provide support, gives voice and promotes sensitivity. Like Restorative Justice, it is about repairing harm as much as possible, And eventually bringing victims, offenders, schools and community members together; to be a part of restoring peace and a sense of remorse and concern for the victim and community. Program models are often differ in components, depending on the community adopting the program. Some do not include the recommended elements originally included in early restorative justice programs.

Discipline is not always punishment but rather training.
I come from a very large family that had American Indian Roots. “Look at me, I am a black woman”, I not Elizabeth Warren claiming I’m Indian’, but my great grand father was Blackfoot Indian and his daughter my grandmother kept a lot of his traditions. We used to go out in the woods and find the tooth brush tree and she would use her knife to whittle the perfect Y from a branch and smaller lite twigs she whittled to chew on them, I had to crack them first with my strong teeth. My family was so large and we talked over each other to get a word in edgewise. There was a lot of screaming, yelling, fussing and fighting. So the talking stick was used to make sure everyone was heard and not talked over. The women in my family were strong women and wise. They cared for the women and children on the plantation the villages they lived. They provided the school and the teachers and the food for the community. They taught the young ones to be making baskets and panel chairs with hemp twine. They taught us to stand firm on what we believe, the saying was “Argue with the sign Post if you know it’s wrong information.”

We were told to be strong and don’t let anything stop you from getting where you need to go, no matter how long it takes. That was the example sat before me. I didn’t know “they” would someday discover it and give it a name. My grandmother would call us all together in a circle and use the Bible as the book of judgement, knowledge and wisdom. She used the forked tree branch because she use to say there were three sides to a story, my side, your side and then there is the truth.

So I followed her tradition, only I didn’t use the forked tree branch or the circle, but I would use the same questions they use to begin with. I would always ask my son “why did you do what you did?” That question always led to a teaching moment, as we went through the different possibilities of why he had done what he did. Who did you hurt? and what can you to different and what are you gonna do to make u for your wrong doings? So we talked, build a great relationship; he learned to think critically and was a great debater. Though I was a single mother, my son was not a problem to anyone, loved everyone, and almost everyone loved him. So I know a little something about training young black males and I know the obstacles that come with it. It is scientifically proven, because I lived it.
The Benefits of Restorative Practices

To respond to challenging behavior:

1. WHAT HAPPENED?
2. WHAT WERE YOU THINKING OF AT THE TIME?
3. WHAT HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT SINCE?
4. WHO HAS BEEN AFFECTED BY WHAT YOU HAVE DONE AND IN WHAT WAY?

Restorative Practices:

- Address and discuss the needs of the school community
- Build healthy relationships between educators and students
- Resolve conflict, hold individuals and groups accountable
- Reduce, prevent, and improve harmful behavior
- Repair harm and...
Data and Research:

Restorative justice is a major cultural shift from a punitive model to a restorative model,” said David Yusem,’ Program Manager of Restorative Justice for the Oakland Unified School District, (one of the first districts in the nation to embrace the practice), says that,” Restorative Justice is a major cultural shift from a punitive model to a restorative (teaching) model.”

Oakland first introduced the program in 2006 at its Cole Middle School. District leaders planned to close the school due to low test scores when it started a restorative justice pilot program. In the three years since embracing the practice, suspensions dropped by 87%, violence decreased dramatically and expulsions became non-existent. The district took notice and in 2009, it overhauled its system and made restorative justice the new model for handling disciplinary problems. In 2011 it hired a program manager and created a system to roll it out to all the schools in the district.

Suspensions at Bunche High School, a continuation school in a high-crime, high-poverty community of Oakland, Calif., dropped by 51% last year. Disrespect for teachers has declined; the school is safer. Students are more focused on their studies and many have stopped cutting class.

Teachers at the school say these positive results are due in large part to a radically different approach to discipline called restorative justice: a bold alternative to the typical zero tolerance policies that lead to mandatory suspensions and expulsions. “
There is a three-tiered model of prevention/intervention/supported reentry.

**1st Tier: Community Building as a Preventive Measure.** Meet in a regular classroom circles in which the students sits in with a restorative justice coordinator, or a peer facilitator and share their inner most feelings.

**2nd Tier: Intervention**
Family Group Conferences
Mediation
Conflict Resolution,
Emotional Literacy
Character Education

“The circles are based on indigenous practices that value inclusiveness, respect, dealing with things as a community and supporting healing; All of this sharing builds the foundation in which restorative discipline thrives. in which teachers use restorative discipline practices like mediation and family/group circles to discuss and mend the harm that was done.

**3rd Tier** is for the more serious offenses and supports the reentry of students who have been out of school due to suspension, expulsion, truancy or incarceration. Oakland schools aim to create a “wraparound” supportive environment when these students return. The goal is to set the kids up for success no matter what their past.
In the restorative justice model, children play an integral part in creating the climate. The parent, the student and their teacher create a classroom respect agreement and all agree to be held accountable. In her classroom, Roxanne Classsen worked with students at the beginning of every year to write a “Respect Agreement.” Together they determine how they will treat each other to create a positive classroom community.

The contract is an extremely effective way of maintaining harmony in the classroom. “Teachers can’t say, ‘Here are my rules, sign them,’” said Yurem. “That doesn’t work. There’s no ownership for the students in that. If the children help create the rules, then they have ownership. And if they break them, they can be referred back to them.”
The Restorative Process

It includes students, parents and community whenever necessary and social engagement over control, and meaningful accountability over punishment.

If a student misbehaves and a restorative justice system is in place, the offending student is given the chance to come forward and make things right. He sits down in a circle and works together with the teacher and the affected parties to work it out.

To facilitate the process, the teacher or mediator asks non-judgmental, restorative questions like, “What happened? How did it happen? What can we do to make it right?” Through their discussions, they all gain a better understanding as to what happened, why it happened and how the damage can be fixed.

“They’ll talk about what can be done to repair the harm,” “The person that has done the harm and circle participants come up with a plan and fulfill that plan. It’s really all about relationships—building and repairing them.”
Restorative Discipline allows the offense become an opportunity to train or teach children to have empathy, instead of making the punishment fit the offense.

RD includes the use of Character Education, conflict resolution, Trauma Informed Sensitivity training, mediation, community and family circles, School Family and Community circles,
Consequences that are Fair and Not Punitive

If a student violated the respect agreement, Roxanne Claassen would remind the student of the agreement and ask him if he wanted to honor it. Ninety percent of the time, the student did, and the problem ended there. If further action was required, Claassen would work with the student to find a solution. “You try to work together with the student to find a solution. You say, ‘Here’s the problem, what can you do to fix it?’ The message you’re sending the child is, ‘I’m not against you. I’m for you. I want you to succeed,’” said Claassen. And that message is very effective at building trust between teacher and student.

In one instance, two of Claassen’s eighth grade boys broke a paper towel dispenser in the bathroom. At first, no one admitted responsibility. So Claassen told them, “We have a restorative discipline system here so we accept responsibility and can make things as right as possible. But we can’t do that unless someone accepts responsibility.”

The boys admitted they’d done it. Claassen called a meeting with all the people involved or affected by the incident, the boys, their parents and the custodian. They talked about what happened and everyone was heard. “In that process the custodian had a chance to let the students know how difficult it is to replace a dispenser,” said Claassen. “It gave the students incredible knowledge of a real-world situation in a way a suspension never could, and relationships improved instead of being damaged.”

One of the students couldn’t afford to pay to replace the dispenser. So the student himself suggested that he could work with the custodian to pay his debt. He did. And he enjoyed it so much he continued to help the custodian long after he finished his restitution.