

2014

# A Study of the Implementation of Restorative Justice at a Public High School in Southern California

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## Recommended Citation

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**A Study of the Implementation of Restorative Justice at  
a Public High School in Southern California**

**Brian Robbins**

In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology, 2013-14  
academic year, Pitzer College, Claremont, California

Readers:

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Abstract

This thesis begins with an introduction and methodology that presents two major research questions: “Can restorative justice exist within a zero-tolerance framework,” and, “What are the challenges that stand in the way of implementing restorative justice ideologies fully at Glenside High School?” The author provides an autobiographical statement to give context to his positionality within this research. A comprehensive literature review highlights a brief history of restorative justice, a description of the harmful effects of punitive discipline, and results from different communities that have implemented restorative justice. The three major respondents are introduced in order to provide context to their positionality within this research. The author presents his research findings based on qualitative field notes from site visits to a public, Southern California high school in addition to responses from interviews with teachers and a restorative justice expert. The author concludes by arguing for the implementation of restorative justice in a widespread manner in individual schools, in addition to comprehensive teacher training in pre-professional programs for prospective teachers and the need to shift from “teach to the test” ideologies to holistic student development pedagogies.

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### Acknowledgements

Thank you to my family and friends for supporting me throughout the past four years at Pitzer College. My life has been completely changed during my time at Pitzer, and I want to thank the entire Pitzer College community for existing and being the best college in the world. I want to give special thanks to my respondents for your insight and for taking the time to help me dig into this important issue. Thank you to the Pitzer in Ontario program and Susan Phillips for assisting me in creating a vision for this research. Thank you to the Community Engagement Center and Tessa Hicks-Peterson for granting me the Senior Thesis Award. Thank you to the Pitzer College Writing Center staff for allowing me to fill up your appointment slots and meticulously reviewing this work. Finally, thank you to my readers: Roberta Espinoza and Gilda Ochoa. Your advisement and care for this work has made this process a huge blessing in my life.

## Chapter 1-Introduction

In my study of Sociology at Pitzer College, I realize that societal systems of oppression are deliberately connected to prevent upward social mobility. The power elite is able to control these systems of oppression by protecting their wealth generationally through membership in the upper class and gaining ostentatious amounts of more wealth through membership in the corporate class. (Mills, 1956) The corporate class eliminates any possibility of allowing other people to share in the wealth by dominating policy-making institutions. I was gripped by the social realities that I began to understand in my introduction level Sociology classes. A concept that I struggled to accept was the myth that lies behind “the American dream.” I am the product of a single mother from a working class background that dropped out of high school. She was able to experience upward mobility by becoming a real estate agent. I grew up with a deep, engrained ideology that anyone can achieve the American ideal of success in this country with hard work and dedication.

Fascinated by my mother’s experience in class advancement amid her lack of access to educational resources, I entered my studies in Sociology to better understand how education relates to class position. I realized that the concept of “the American dream” is completely fictional. Education is the greatest possibility for upward mobility for populations that have been traditionally marginalized in our society. However, public education is in a poor state. Policy dictates that school funding is based on the property values in any given community, therefore students in working class communities automatically have fewer resources than their peers in middle or upper class communities. (Augenblick, J. G., Myers, J. L., & Anderson, A. B., 1997) How can our

society expect everyone to have an equal shot at “success” when students in wealthier communities have a giant advantage in their educational communities?

The punitive discipline systems that we have in our public schools mirror the current criminal justice system in the United States. (Hirschfield, 2008) The concern is primarily placed on providing swift and harsh responses to rule violations with the presumption that the unpleasantness of the sanction will deter future rule violations. The ideology behind this presumption can be traced to the “Broken Windows” criminal justice theory that was implemented in New York City during the Giuliani mayoral administration. Security cameras, metal detectors, and armed security guards had the ability to perform “stop and frisk” searches. This school of thought affected New York City public schools in a drastic way. Although criminal justice experts and sociologists alike have disproved the efficacy of this theory, “zero-tolerance” policies like “Broken Windows” prevail because of the existence of the prison industrial complex, which provides a constant inflow of inmates to privately run prisons through the criminalization of small offenses.

Through punitive discipline policies in our schools that mirror punitive criminal justice practices, the “school-to-prison pipeline” is a reality. Students in communities of color with lower socio-economic status are treated in ways that are similar to the way inmates are treated within our prisons. Through school suspensions and expulsions, students are pushed away from the school communities that they belong to. Zero-tolerance policies only promote misunderstanding and a sense of disconnection for all parties involved. Our nation desperately needs to address the issue of punitive discipline

policies in our schools in order to provide a healthy and sustainable population for our society in the future.

“Restorative justice” looks to provide an answer to the problem of punitive discipline norms surrounding criminal justice, school discipline policies, and general conflict resolution. This ideology can be traced back to indigenous Maori cultures of New Zealand, and has been emerging in the United States by way of Fresno, California, where local Mennonites have implemented sophisticated conflict resolution programs in Fresno public schools. For this thesis, restorative justice is defined as: “...holding individuals accountable for their actions within a system of encouragement and support with an eye to reintegrating (or integrating for the first time) the individual into the broader community.” (Braithwaite, 2002; Morrison, 2002; (Zehr, 2002) These restorative practices have reduced suspension and expulsion rates in Fresno public schools, and are widely endorsed by local law-enforcement officials. Restorative justice ideologies have spread to places such as Oakland and Los Angeles. While preliminary research on the implementation of restorative discipline techniques have shown promising results, scholars have called for more research on the topic of restorative justice in schools. In this thesis, I will add to the emerging and exciting conversation about the possibility of radically changing public school discipline culture (and in turn, the overall criminal justice system) through restorative justice.

This thesis begins with an explanation of my research methodology, which draws from a post-positivist framework. In the spirit of post-positivism, I will provide a brief autobiographical statement that will disclose my own positionality in order to be perfectly transparent as to how my intersections may affect my research. I will continue with a

literature review that looks more closely at the research that has been done on restorative justice in school communities. This literature review will a description of practical conflict resolution techniques used by the pioneers of restorative justice in the United States. I will present my research findings from my four site visits to a public school where restorative justice discipline techniques are being implemented.

At the request of the school district, I will be referring to the Southern California high school where I have conducted my research as Glenside High School (GHS) for its pseudonym. The most recent data comes from the 2012-13 school year, and GHS had a student population that was 83.5% “Hispanic or Latino,” 10.2% “African American or Black,” and 2.6% “White.” Approximately 22% of the students at GHS are English Learners (ELs) in the same academic year. In addition, 70.01% of the total student population at GHS qualify for free or reduced school lunch. The most recent demographics of the staff come from the 2011-12 academic year. 34.9% of the teachers were “Hispanic or Latino,” 22.9% of the teachers were “White,” and 21.7% were “African American or Black.” GHS’ faculty possesses greater racial diversity than it’s district’s averages.

This will be supplemented by insights from a phone interview with Roxanne Claassen: a schoolteacher who is credited with inspiring the implementation of restorative justice conflict resolution techniques in Fresno, California. Mrs. Claassen agreed to share her identity in this research. This thesis will conclude with my final recommendations for effective implementation of restorative discipline techniques in public schools and final reflections of this research.

## **Methodology**

In this thesis, I will employ critical ethnography methods and post-positivism methodology with semi-structured interview questions. Within a critical ethnography framework, this thesis will critically analyze the discipline systems at the public school where I will be conducting the research and the public school education system as a whole. I am a firm believer in restorative justice, and through a critical ethnography framework, I will be examining what challenges arise with a public school community that tries to implement it, and make suggestions on how other schools can effectively implement restorative practices. My field notes will also be critical in that they will allow me to wrestle with my observations to construct the best recommendations possible. The critical ethnography framework allows for a disclosure of my own positionality through my lived experiences through an autobiographical statement. In order to conduct effective qualitative research, I will analyze my own subjectivity within it. A full disclosure of my positionality will allow readers to understand my preconceived notions and existing biases that may have affected the research outcomes. Semi-structured interview techniques will provide an opportunity to maintain a focused interview while still allowing the freedom for other questions to arise from the interview.

I visited the school three times to conduct interviews with teachers Hector Martinez and Sheila Anderson. I spent most of my time with Mr. Martinez while observing him in the Alternative Learning Center. This is where most of the school's disciplinary action is taken. Mr. Martinez and I had two two-hour long interviews during my first two visits to Glenside High School. We had our interviews in his classroom while his students were working independently on their schoolwork. Both interviews with

Mr. Martinez were transcribed exactly from audio recordings. I met with Ms. Anderson for a 45-minute interview in her classroom during her prep period. This interview was transcribed exactly from an audio recording. I was interested to hear the opinions of Mr. Martinez and Ms. Anderson concerning the current discipline system that is in place and what they think can be done to improve discipline ideologies at the school. Using the insights from these interviews and field notes, I was able to contextualize the climate at this particular school. This was particularly helpful during a phone interview with Roxanne Claassen, a schoolteacher who implemented restorative discipline ideologies in Fresno, California. I collected her insights on how restorative justice can be best implemented at Glenside High School.

For this thesis, I sought comprehensive answers to two research questions. My first research question is: “Can restorative justice exist within a zero-tolerance framework?” Restorative justice and punitive ideologies are polar opposite; therefore, it is important to discern if restorative justice can function within a school where zero-tolerance ideologies are dominant. The second research question is: “What are the challenges that stand in the way of implementing restorative justice ideologies fully at Glenside High School?” Using the example of Glenside High School, it is the goal of this thesis to identify potential challenges in the implementation of restorative justice in order to provide context for readers who may be interested in implementing restorative justice in their own communities.

### **Autobiographical Statement**

I would identify myself first and foremost as a white, cisgendered male. In my study of Sociology at Pitzer College, I have been made fully aware of the societal

privileges that white males experience in this society. In addition, I have had access to a wide array of educational privileges as described in Annette Lareau's theory of 'concerted cultivation.' (Lareau, 2003) My parents were able to provide me with plenty of extra-curricular activities, which provided me with the opportunity to excel in academia. In addition, I attended a Quaker boarding school in rural Pennsylvania for my high school education. In the Quaker tradition, restorative justice practices (or, "restorative practices") that rely on consensus were commonplace in my school community. I believe that restorative practices can be incorporated into our nation's public schools as well. I would consider myself a member of the upper-middle class. I also identify as a homosexual.

It is important to identify that my personal intersections do not align with the individuals and the greater school population represented in this research. Glenside High School serves a student population that is majority Latino. The vast majority of students at this school also come from working class backgrounds. I understand that this research can be problematic. Traditional power dynamics surrounding race must be addressed. I am a white male that has entered a primarily Latino school community in order to conduct academic research. I took every step to remain as ethical as possible in this research by providing pseudonyms for the city, school, and each person interviewed. I worked to accurately represent my respondents through meticulous analysis of my observations and interviews. An environment of open-dialogue where I seek feedback from my participants was created.

## Chapter 2-Literature Review

### Restorative Justice Versus Zero-Tolerance

As restorative justice is becoming more prominent within the realm of academia, work is being done to investigate the traditional discipline methods that are prominent in our nation's public schools. These policies are often referred to as 'zero-tolerance' or 'punitive' discipline policies. These types of policies can be defined by their swift responses to rule infractions without providing context to the external factors behind the infractions. Dorothy Vaandering uses Nicholas Wolterstoff's theory of *right-order justice v. justice as inherent rights* to illustrate the current debate surrounding justice in this country. "Right-order justice" can be associated with zero-tolerance policies for the perception that it holds up the ideals of a society by removing the people who break the rules of that society. "Justice as inherent rights" can be associated with restorative justice because consequences have the potential to be more holistic and effective when rights can be considered as inherent for every individual. (Vaandering, 2010)

While this simple argument illustrates human interaction with restorative justice, the argument for restorative justice often comes from displaying the shortfalls of zero-tolerance policies. Anita Wadhwa (2010) found that teachers and administrators often favor zero-tolerance policies because they require less work and time. In her qualitative research, Wadhwa found that students were often suspended for the sheer reason that teachers would not have to "deal" with that student and their misbehaviors for any given amount of time. Wadhwa also found that teachers used punitive methods because they were "direct" and addressed the situation in the shortest amount of time as possible, regardless of whether the sanctions were appropriate or not. Her analysis provides direct

support for the existence of the theory of “the school to prison pipeline” teachers and administrators would often “pass the buck” of discipline onto other officials in the justice system such as judges, police officers, and parole officers. (Wadhwa, 2010)

While public schools in America cannot fully fit sociologist Erving Goffman’s (1957) description of ‘total institutions,’ zero-tolerance frameworks bolster the similarities between prisons and public schools. Characteristics of total institutions include rigid schedules, “formal rulings,” and the expectation that the large population of participants in the institution will behave in exactly the way that is expected of them from the authorities in the institution. Goffman notes that a power dynamic is created between the authorities and the inmates in total institutions. Stereotypes and resentment towards members of the opposite group are rampant, and Goffman specifies that all people involved in total institutions are viewed as “untrustworthy,” therefore sustainable and productive relationships cannot be formed between the two groups. (Goffman, 1957) Goffman provides three characteristics of authority figures in total institutions that perpetuate negative feelings. The first characteristic is that authority in total institutions “is of the *echelon* kind.” Authoritarians have the power to inflict consequences to any inmate regardless of context. (Goffman, 1957) The second characteristic of authority in total institutions is that authoritarians have the power to dispense consequences on inmates in a wide variety of actions such as “dress, department, social intercourse, and the like.” (Goffman, 1957) The third characteristic of total institution authoritarians is that “misbehaviors in one sphere of life are held against one’s standing in other spheres.” (Goffman, 1957) In other words, inmates are labeled as their “misbehaviors” and are dehumanized. This labeling will negatively affect their position within the overall

society. Goffman asserts that the punishments in total institutions are much more severe than the inmates are accustomed to in their “home world[s].”(Goffman, 1957) He also notes that total institutions frequently claim the mission of “rehabilitation,” but that the practices in total institutions seldom rehabilitate, and even induce negative “permanent alteration.” (Goffman, 1957)

### **Benefits Surrounding Restorative Justice**

While a pinpoint definition of ‘restorative justice’ is hotly debated in academia, the leading experts of restorative justice define it as: “...holding individuals accountable for their actions within a system of encouragement and support with an eye to reintegrating (or integrating for the first time) the individual into the broader community.” (Braithwaite, 2002; (Morrison, 2002) Restorative justice is about showing the offender the depth of their transgressions by showing how the community as a whole was harmed. Vaandering argues that restorative justice shares the same ideology as bell hooks’ vision that the worth of all individuals could be realized regardless of their brokenness in intentional communities. This is possible because unlike zero-tolerance policies, restorative justice is more focused on the relationships between people instead of determining ‘right’ from ‘wrong.’ (Vaandering, 2010) One of the most employed techniques is the circle process. A circle process is the most widely recognized conflict resolution tactic in restorative justice where every stakeholder in any given conflict come together to collectively find a way to respond to a conflict. They will collectively create action plans to heal the community at large, and come up with ways to bring the offender back into the community. Vaandering notes that a crucial aspect of the circle process is that it is not a place for something to be *done*, but is an opportunity for all individuals to

just *be*. In other words, restorative justice disrupts the notion that there are clear “rights” and “wrongs” in determining justice. Restorative justice creates space to examine societal factors that influence people’s behavior. Justice is a process that takes time and energy in order to be truly effective. People involved in this process can rediscover the connections that are held between individuals in the community and what their values are.

(Vaandering, 2010)

Statistics show the positive effects that restorative justice can have in communities. Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY) is a district-wide initiative to implement restorative justice in Oakland, California. RJOY reports that a University of California at Berkeley study found that the 2007 pilot program of restorative justice in Oakland public middle schools “eliminated violence and expulsions.” In addition, suspension rates were reduced by 87% in the pilot school. The same study found positive results in another Oakland middle school that had trained faculty, staff, and students in restorative practices on a two-year trial period. Student suspensions were reduced by 74% in the two-year trial and disciplinary referrals for violence were reduced by 77% after the first year in the trial period. (Davis, 2014)

### **Concerns Surrounding Restorative Justice**

Proponents of restorative justice would argue that more research must be conducted to support its validity. Academia must create more space for further research supporting restorative justice in learning communities that will bring restorative justice from “...the margins to the mainstream of schooling.” (Braithwaite, 2006) ((Morrison & Ahmed, 2006; Sherman & Strang, 2007) Skeptics of restorative practices critique the tendency of restorative justice scholars to romanticize restorative justice and vilify

punitive justice in wide and sweeping generalizations. For example, Kathleen Daly (2002) has raised concerns that an over simplistic dichotomy has been created by restorative justice scholars in order to "...sell the superiority of restorative justice and its set of justice products." (Daly, 2002) Proponents of restorative justice even concede that restorative justice practices can be "distorted" because the punitive discipline system outside of the community that had embraced restorative justice has not changed. Vaandering argues that it is possible for a school's restorative justice system to be corrupted to "...serve hierarchical hegemonic power structures." (Vaandering, 2010) Vaandering argues that the traditional power structures are often re-created in schools when the schools remove themselves from the circle process, and act more as a facilitator of the circle process that has an ultimate goal of placing sanctions on the offender. (Vaandering, 2010) Of course, this cannot be considered as authentic restorative justice. Kathleen Daly also argues that the proponents of restorative justice create visions of the effects of restorative justice as "composite" that are "visions of the possible," but cannot be widely accepted as time-tested and proven academic truth. (Daly, 2002) In addition, restorative justice is being used to address "racial disproportionality" in school suspensions, but few theories surrounding the intersection of race and how it interacts with restorative justice have been formed. (Wadhwa, 2010)

Daly goes as far as to critique leading restorative justice scholar, John Braithwaite of "re-colonizing" indigenous cultures by claiming understanding of indigenous practices surrounding crime across many cultures and re-appropriating them for his own argument for restorative justice ideologies. (Daly, 2002) Daly cites Braithwaite's wide generalizations '...of ancient Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian traditions...' to assert

*“restorative justice has been the dominant model of criminal justice throughout most of human history for all the world’s peoples.”* (Daly, 2002 citing Braithwaite, 2002) Daly continues by asserting that the strategy of advocates of restorative justice is to construct “origin myths” of restorative justice that will create a narrative of crucial “recover[y]” of restorative justice from the “takeover” of white colonial “state-sponsored retributive justice.” (Daly, 2002) Daly finds this concerning because proponents of restorative justice are homogenizing the justice forms of indigenous cultures and that leads to a recolonization of “...indigenous practices by identifying them as exemplars of restorative justice.” (Daly, 2002) Even amongst her findings of the problematic conversations happening in academia surrounding restorative justice, Daly concedes that “empirical evidence of [restorative justice] conferencing in Australia and New Zealand suggests that very high proportions of people find the process fair; on many measures of procedural justice, it succeeds.” (Daly, 2002)

### **The Obama Administration’s Call to end Zero-Tolerance Discipline Policies**

The Obama administration has recognized that zero-tolerance discipline policies in schools are disproportionately applied to students of color. According to National Public Radio (NPR), 250,000 students in the United States were referred to law enforcement officials in the 2010-2011 school year. Ninety-five percent of those referrals were for non-violent crimes and Black and Latino students constituted 70% of the referrals. (Sanchez, 2014) In addition, government-sponsored civil rights research has found that while African Americans made up 15% of the sample pool, they made up more than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the students that were suspended once, 44% of the students that had

been suspended more than once, and a third of the students that have been expelled. (Hefling, 2014)

United States Attorney General, Eric Holder has voiced support for new discipline policies: “A routine school disciplinary infraction should land a student in the principal’s office, not in a police precinct,” United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan echoed Holder’s sentiment by stating that the “...first instinct should not be to call 911 when there’s a problem” in regards to school discipline policies. Daniel A. Domenech, representing the School Superintendents Association, pledged to educate members of his organization of the Obama Administration’s recommendations on reducing student removal from schools: “Superintendents recognize that out-of-school suspension is outdated and not in line with 21<sup>st</sup>-century education.” (Hefling, 2014)

In collaboration, the United States Departments of Justice and Education released recommendations and guidelines that rely less on zero-tolerance in January 2014. Specific examples include strengthening relationships between campus security officers and students, specifying responsibilities of campus security officers to a greater extent, and re-training teachers on their responsibilities in terms of school discipline. (Hefling, 2014) Other recommendations include more robust classroom management skills and comprehensive training in conflict resolution for teachers. (Sanchez, 2014)

### **Can Restorative Justice Exist Within a Zero-Tolerance Framework?**

Dorothy Vaandering draws from the “conceptual analytic frameworks about power dynamics” from bell hooks’ Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope and Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom and Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed to highlight the necessity of not just viewing restorative

justice in terms of conflict resolution, if a truly authentic shift in the “culture of schooling” is desired. (Vaandering, 2010) In fact, the implementation of restorative justice practices in “a piecemeal fashion” does not make the school “inherently restorative.” Some scholars even say that unless a commitment is made to radically shifting the culture in a school, change cannot happen through an occasional restorative justice practice. (Solinas, 2008; Wachtel, 2001)

Restorative justice can be an excellent tool that answers Freire’s call to remember contextual factors that perpetuate oppression. Our education system serves the wants of hierarchies that exist in society when dealing with school discipline through zero-tolerance policies. These systems of oppression strip people of their humanity. (Freire, 2005) If we can critically theorize restorative justice as an ideology for transforming the culture of our schooling system, each individual of a school community can have their humanity recognized and affirmed -- even in a society that has systematically oppressed the individuals in that community. Restorative justice has the potential to serve as a type of pedagogy that increases the use of dialogue in the learning community to increase the collective consciousness of power dynamics that can radically change the societies in which we live. This will require school leadership that is working towards revolutionary societal change. The implementation of restorative justice as the widely accepted political ideology of the school will create safe spaces for administrators, teachers, and students to critically analyze systems of oppression that have traditionally been perpetuated in public schools. Restorative justice can make sure that all individuals are held accountable to resist these systems of oppression. Challenges can arise and educators must truly ask themselves if they are willing to allow critical scrutiny of the education system in this

society, and grant agency to all individuals involved in the learning community because truly “restorative” communities require it. (Vaandering, 2010)

bell hooks raises the question if the replication of systemic oppression can occur in the practice of “undoing” systems of oppression. hooks calls for a system of *engaged pedagogy* in schools that intentionally creates curricula that:

“...emphasizes well-being, connects life to learning, values student expression, empowers students and teachers, and transforms the curriculum so that it does not reflect biases or reinforce systems of domination.” (hooks, 1994)

Engaged pedagogy places high emphasis on recognizing systems of oppression in our schools and societies, and works to end the cycle of those systems by creating curricula that directly confronts those systems. Vaandering and hooks argue that the best place to inspire social change is within the classroom. The mirrored practices in engaged pedagogy and restorative justice would create more sustainable schools and subsequently more sustainable societies. Restorative justice would socialize students to resolve conflicts in a more productive and healing manner. Vaandering notes that restorative justice is committed to “shifting paradigms” and that restorative justice as an ideology that cannot be enacted without pedagogical commitment to radical societal change through Freire’s critical theory and hooks’ engaged pedagogy.

This pedagogical commitment to radical societal change must also create room for school leaders to reflect on how schools have perpetuated social hegemony in the past in order to avoid making the same mistakes again. Sociologist Antonio Gramsci theorized that social hegemony is created through the interaction between “civil society” and the “state.” (Gramsci, 2005) The dominating class of American society sets the rules of

proper conduct. The dominating class directs schools (agents of the state) to socialize students to live up to the ideals of the upper class. Gramsci notes that every class has its own form of “intellectual activity,” but that the intellectualism of the dominating class is portrayed as the only form of intellect. Students begin the development of their intellects in the early stages of social experiences in their communities. Lareau showcases two distinctive childrearing ideologies: concerted cultivation and natural growth. Concerted cultivation is characterized by heavy influences on arts and athletics, parental training in interacting with adults, and intensive academic training. This ideology is found in predominantly white, upper-middle class communities. Children frequently creating their own social interactions in a less formal manner characterize natural growth. These children’s social lives usually are focused around their own neighborhoods, and these students often do not have access to comprehensive academic training outside of school. This childrearing ideology is found in communities with lower socio-economic status. (Lareau, 2003) Students that have grown in a concerted cultivation type of environment will be familiar with the type of intellect and conduct that is expected of them in schools. Students from natural growth environments are less familiar with what is expected of them, and many students struggle to adapt to a new environment. Thus, social hegemony in schools is perpetuated.

Vaandering also calls for an end to the use of shame within our schools. Shame is used in a variety of ways in our education system through suspensions, expulsions, and grading practices. Shame is used as a control mechanism in a hegemonic fashion. (Vaandering, 2010) Truly restorative practices will recognize the ongoing development of each member of the community and normalize these imperfections to productively

work towards the improvement and healing of the community. Shame tactics that offenders are subjected to will make the implementation process of “restorative” practices unsustainable and will recreate hegemonic structures. Schools that are unwilling to purge shame from their pedagogies will be “...characterized by boundaries and expectations,” instead of the characteristics that are possible through restorative justice: “...possibility, relationship, hope, and justice.”(Vaandering, 2010)

### **Arguments for Implementation Through Undergraduate and Graduate Pre-Professional Programs**

Jennifer Solinas (2008) has found that the implementation of restorative justice processes in schools often encounters challenges relating to the unwillingness of the school’s faculty to whole-heartedly embrace the ideologies. Through her qualitative fieldwork, Solinas found that members of the school community that implemented restorative justice expressed that teachers with more experience are “stuck in their ways,” and that mandatory restorative justice training for educators is not surprisingly wildly unpopular. This can become problematic when the leading scholars in restorative justice assert that restorative justice ideologies must become major themes in teacher professional development. (Braithwaite, 2002) While participants in Solinas’ study acknowledged the “lack of inclusivity” in zero-tolerance policies, teachers in the school found implementing restorative justice practices very difficult when their cohort was not actively supporting the implementation. Solinas argues that teachers “... on the “ground” need to be talking about restorative justice and using appropriate vocabulary.” (Solinas, 2008) Gayle Macklem (2003) provides a contrasting theory that teachers’ attitudes

toward restorative justice can change after the implementation of restorative justice when the positive externalities of the ideology become apparent. (Macklem, 2003)

Sara Ellen Kitchen (2013) argues that restorative justice is touched upon in education and criminal justice pre-professional coursework, but found the material to be fairly “scanty.” (Kitchen, 2013) Kitchen developed a “peacemaking” restorative justice seminar for her undergraduate Sociology students at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia. She created the course with the understanding that her students will learn peacemaking by actively engaging and modeling it in their coursework. (Wozniack, 2008) The course was constructed as a circle process within the context of restorative justice. By modeling the circle process in her classroom, Kitchen disrupted the traditional power dynamics that are found in a college classroom. Kitchen found that this course had excellent feedback and the students felt that they learned valuable skills in their future careers as educators. (Kitchen, 2013) This reflects Solinas’ finding that people will understand and implement restorative justice when they have significant experience of operating within the framework of it. (Solinas, 2008) This makes a compelling case for the implementation of restorative justice seminars like Kitchen’s in pre-professional education programs.

### *Discipline That Restores*

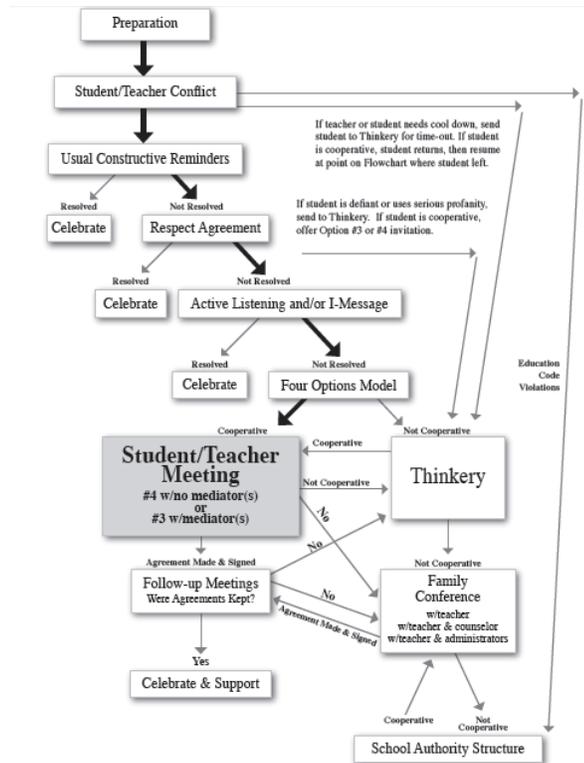
Ron and Roxanne Claassen (2008) provide an outline for a tangible school discipline structure from a restorative context in their book, Discipline That Restores (DTR). The Claassens argue that our school discipline systems have failed to evolve from “...Puritan Ethics and Skinnerian behaviorism” tactics that were necessary for training students for an industrial economy. (Claassen & Claassen, 2008) Discipline That

Restores provides an opportunity for the evolution of discipline tactics on a grassroots-level in the classroom by the implementation of the Claassen's conflict resolution structure that comes from the frameworks of Peace Education, Conflict Resolution Education, and Restorative Justice. The Claassens draw from Howard Zehr's definition of restorative justice: "...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 things as right as possible." (Zehr, 2002)

The Claassens note that conflict resolution from a restorative justice standpoint is more effective and constructive than punitive techniques because restorative justice provides long-term behavior change. The goals of our current discipline system claim to be restorative, but the tactics that we use demonstrate that restoration is not possible. The Claassens and Zehr call for a modification of the discipline that retains positive aspects of a democratic justice system such as: "...the rule of law, due process, a deep regard for human rights, the orderly development of law." (Zehr, 2002) While these aspects of our justice system are positive, our society has become obsessed with creating societal order through fear of punishment and litigation. Teachers must ask themselves if they would prefer to discipline students through fear of punishment or through productive strategies that can add to the overall development of the community. The Claassens argue that conflicts can provide a great deal of "potential" for community building if they are handled properly. (Claassen & Claassen, 2008) DTR uses the philosophy of restorative justice to ensure collaborative decision-making between students and faculty. The Claassens urge school officials to construct visions of ideal schools. A vision is necessary because it provides a framework for the administration to critically analyze the operations

of the school on a day-to-day basis. A vision will challenge teachers and administrators to make changes in order to realize their vision of an ideal school.

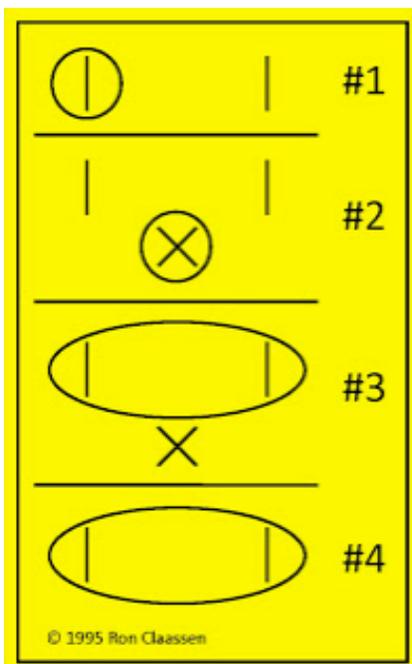
The DTR Flowchart (right)



begins with preparation at the beginning of the school year. The teacher and students co-construct norms for how the class should be run. The teacher begins by providing some expectations for her students, and asks her students to provide expectations for themselves. The process is repeated for expectations for how the teacher should treat the students, how the students should treat each other, and how everyone should treat the physical resources around them. The teacher will make sure that each student is comfortable with the expectations and each member of the community will sign it. This is called the respect agreement. The flowchart continues to a stop that describes how conflict between the student and teacher should be handled. Stops on the flowchart are the different procedures that are enacted as the conflict progresses. The teacher will now guide the student through the “Usual Constructive Reminders” stop on the flowchart. This stop usually includes non-verbal reminders when a student is being disruptive, such as eye contact with the student or gesturing toward the respect agreement. The Claassens

have found that this stop is the most used on the flowchart. If teachers can commit to being constructive in any situation, the students will respond positively.

The next stop on the flowchart requires a verbal interaction between the teacher and the student. While the teacher diverts the rest of the class to another activity, the teacher will ask the student if they are willing to follow the respect agreement. If the student is not willing to follow the respect agreement, the student has now turned down two opportunities to modify their behavior. The next stop on the flowchart is “Active Listening and/or I-message.” The teacher will let the student know what behavior change they would like to see through an I-message. For example, a teacher will state their subjective feelings instead of accusatory feelings. It is better to say, “*I feel frustrated*, rather than saying, *you make me mad*.” (Claassen & Claassen, 2008) The teacher will then give an opportunity for the student to state their I-message to try and identify the root cause of the disruptive behavior. The Claassens stress the importance of active listening skills at this stop. Students must truly feel as though they are being heard in the exchange for a behavior change to occur.



If the student still chooses not to cooperate, it is time to hold a meeting outside of class using the Four-Options model (left). In the figure, each vertical line represents the conflicting parties (the teacher and student). The ‘X’ represents an outside party that can assist in the mediation process. The circle represents which party will make the decision to resolve the conflict. For example, Options #1 and #2 are not

desirable because the voices of each stakeholder in the conflict do not have the opportunity to constructively find ways to correct the situation. At this stop on the flowchart, the teacher will invite the student to participate in either Options #3 or #4. Option #3 includes an outside party to make sure that everyone's voices are heard and understood. Option #4 involves the parties that are engaging in the conflict. Of course, option #4 is the most ideal because the parties are able to solve their conflict swiftly. A follow-up meeting is required in order to make sure that the agreements that were made are being kept. As Ron Claassen frequently says, "...it is when people make and keep agreements that trust grows." (Claassen & Claassen, 2008)

At any time during the flowchart, the student may be sent to the Thinkery. The Thinkery is an area for the student to calm down with an adult and think about their conflict. The Thinkery is a crucial component of the flowchart so the teacher can continue to teach the other students. If agreements have not been kept during the four-options meeting, the next stop on the flowchart is a family conference. This is a serious affair where more extreme options such as removal from school are discussed, but the teacher and administrators must continue to be constructive and emphasize that those options are not ideal for anyone. If the student still refuses to cooperate, the punitive school authority structure will take over and punish the student. The Claassens note that conflicts rarely go this far on the flowchart.

The Claassens have found that resistance to restorative justice in schools often come from teachers who feel as though students are being "let off the hook" by avoiding immediate punishment. However, this system encourages ownership of conflicts and promotes accountability and responsibility by requiring students to constructively create

solutions to their conflicts. (Claassen & Claassen, 2008) While restorative practices are absolutely more time-consuming than punitive punishments in the short term, ideologies like DTR teach students important life-skills and critical thinking, which should be the main goals of our education system. This type of pedagogy will in fact save more time and resources in the long run by decreasing the demand for criminal justice resources in the future. In fact, the Claassens have found that DTR has inspired critical thinking in the academic realm. For example, students in a United States History class can examine past conflicts and imagine what the outcome could have been if the stakeholders had used Options #3 or #4. This type of restorative curriculum has the potential to transform society: “You will be creating a social curriculum that will encourage your students to grow into more mature people who are independent enough to practice their individual freedom as well as to recognize and practice their community responsibility.” (Claassen & Claassen, 2008)

### **Chapter 3-Respondent Introductions**

#### **Hector Martinez**

Hector Martinez is a “teacher on assignment” at Glenside High School. Mr. Martinez is the director of the school’s Alternative Learning Center. He serves as the main liaison between students who are having discipline problems and their teachers. He challenges students to come up with their own solutions to correct their behavior. Mr. Martinez describes his job as multi-faceted: teaching requires that you also take on the roles of “...parent, caregiver, counselor, and punching bag,” depending on the day.

Mr. Martinez describes himself primarily as an immigrant, and cites the lived experiences that he shares with the immigrant families of his students as a major

advantage in building sustainable relationships with his students. Ethnically, Mr. Martinez prefers being identified as “Latino or Hispanic” to “Mexican,” although he is of Mexican descent. He makes this distinction because, “Hispanic or Latino account for everyone that speaks Spanish.” Mr. Martinez describes his socio-economic status as “probably” being “middle-income.”

### **Sheila Anderson**

Sheila Anderson is a teacher at Glenside High School. She directs the school’s peer counseling program. This includes teaching a full-time class on the mechanics of being an effective counselor to fellow students. Ms. Anderson places heavy emphasis on comprehensive nurturing of student’s emotional health in tandem with academic growth. She holds high expectations in exchange for providing a safe space where students can genuinely be themselves. She has three characteristics that are crucial for any effective teacher: “Firm, fair, and consistent.”

Ms. Anderson identifies as “female” and “middle-class.” She also describes herself as “middle-aged” and cites this as a significant factor in how she relates to her students. She says that her lived experiences were closer to her students when she was a younger teacher. She includes “Midwestern white values” as an identifying factor in her life. She describes these values as very different from the values in Glenside. She says that these values come into conflict with the prevalence of teenage pregnancy in the community. She comes from “older parents,” and frequently has to deal with young parents who have not had a chance to develop any “common sense.” Politically, Ms. Anderson describes herself as “very liberal.” She finds that her political ideologies make it very easy to “talk to the students about anything.” As a result of free and open dialogue

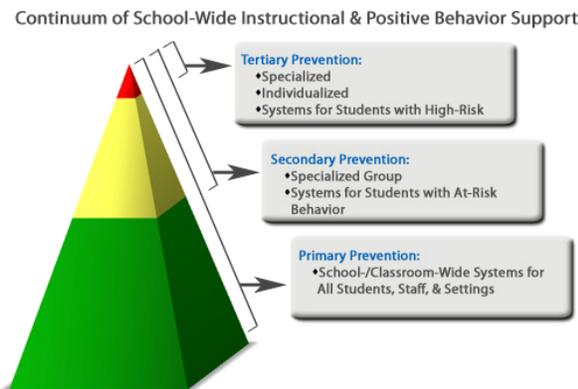
in her classroom, Ms. Anderson is able to build meaningful relationships with her students.

### Roxanne Claassen

Roxanne Claassen is the co-author of the Discipline That Restores model. She identifies as “European American.” Roxanne also identifies as being a member of the middle class. She cites her membership in the Mennonite church to be very important to her since she has the desire to live simply and make the world a better place due to her religious beliefs. She cites her experience of living in Nigeria as an influence of “how she looks at things.” Roxanne also says that her ability to connect with students of color has helped her be a more effective educator.

## Chapter 4-Research Findings

### Outline of the Discipline Structure at Glenside High School



Like the Discipline That Restores model, Glenside High School just recently created a flowchart that describes the actions that should be taken in regards to school discipline. The national movement for Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions (PBIS) informs this flowchart.

PBIS has been endorsed by United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan: “PBIS is important preventative approach that can increase the capacity of the school staff to support children with the most complex behavioral needs, thus reducing the instances that require intensive interventions.” (Duncan, 2014) The structure of PBIS can be found in

the figure above. Glenside High School has recently modeled their discipline structure that fulfills PBIS goals by integrating peer services with disciplinary sanctions in order to identify and resolve the root causes of negative behavior among the student body. The following is a theoretical process of how PBIS is intended to function at GHS. At the request of my respondents, I am not able to provide a visual of this flowchart, but will describe it in detail.

The flowchart contains three levels of interventions and each level is matched to an estimation of success rate to solve the disciplinary conflict with each level. The primary level is made up of low-level interventions that take place between the teacher and the student. The main goal of the primary level is to create a school-wide culture of positive behaviors that all members of a school community are expected to be knowledgeable of. Guidelines and resources are provided for teachers to employ during conflict so that the conflict does not need to escalate and become a bigger issue. Examples include seemingly obvious strategies such as creating a seating chart that will minimize distractions and walking around the classroom to keep students on-task. GHS also provides teachers members with the opportunity to invite fellow faculty members who have a stronger rapport with students to act as a “teacher buddy” to maintain order in the classroom. A Teacher’s Encyclopedia is provided to every instructor that provides strategies to teachers to employ in very specific situations. Other solutions for the low-level interventions include “one-on-one” talks and lunch detentions. GHS estimates that 70% of student conflicts should be resolved after the primary prevention level.

The secondary prevention level indicates that the student has now entered formal disciplinary procedures with the school. At this point, a pupil is usually removed from

class, and the student's situation will be assessed to create a comprehensive action plan to correct the behavior under the guidance of Mr. Martinez in the Alternative Learning Center or Ms. Anderson in the peer counseling program. Teachers must be able to document that the student's behavior was not changed through various low-level interventions in the primary intervention level. The student's situation will be handled through the Alternative Learning Center, the Peer Counseling program, or a combination of both. Mr. Martinez also serves as a mediator to the student and the teacher in any given conflict to foster mutual respect and facilitate a plan for the student to re-enter the classroom in a successful manner. If a student is dealing with social or emotional issues that are informing negative behavior, Ms. Anderson will send a trained peer counselor to speak to a student. The peer counselor will work closely with the client to construct a comprehensive plan to correct behavior and offer access to resources that will assist that student with their emotional issues. Ms. Anderson and Mr. Martinez work closely to share information and collaborate on how to best serve their students. They work with a third teacher, who will work with the family of the student to assist the student in correcting their behavior. This team of three meets as a department to collaborate and create strategies to keep students from continuing on the discipline structure to the tertiary prevention level. The working relationship between Mr. Martinez and Ms. Anderson is the key to the effectiveness of the discipline structure. Prior to the 2013-2014 school year, Mr. Martinez and Ms. Anderson worked separately. They have found that their collaboration has given them the opportunity to share information and develop the most effective service that they can for their students. GHS estimates that 27% of disciplinary issues will be handled in the secondary prevention level.

The tertiary level of the discipline structure dictates that the student will undergo high-level interventions. Students may only be considered for high-level interventions if it is proven that the student's behavior has not changed in response to lower-level interventions. High-level interventions include creating attendance plans with school truancy officials and working closely with school social workers or guidance counselors. Other interventions include assessing the student's family for MediCal welfare benefits. If none of these high-level interventions are successful, the student will likely be considered for suspension, expulsion, or transfer to another school. Glenside High School must have extensive documentation of the interventions performed and resources offered to the student and their family. The history of the student's interaction with the school's discipline structure must be presented to the school district in order for consideration for removal from the school. GHS estimates that 3% of disciplinary issues will make it to the tertiary prevention level.

### **The Functionality of the Primary Prevention Level at GHS**

Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions dictates that the primary prevention level is crucial for establishing a culture for high expectations for positive behavior in schools. It is up to the school's administration and teachers to reinforce the expectations throughout the year and to integrate positive behavior ideology in the curriculum. The ideology behind PBIS is that a strong and vibrant culture surrounding the primary prevention level will result in fewer students advancing to higher forms of discipline. At Glenside High School, it is crucial that the teachers collaborate to create this culture for their students, and transition away from the punitive practices to transition into the new discipline policy.

The primary prevention intervention that Glenside High School usually requires of the teacher is an intervention is to address negative behavior that is happening in the classroom. As stated, the school has provided numerous strategies for teachers to use in the event of a conflict with a student. These strategies include referencing the Teacher's Encyclopedia or requesting the presence of a "teacher buddy." Teachers can place students in lunch detention and hold a "one on one" conversation with them. If implemented correctly, the chances of students continuing to the secondary prevention level are relatively slim. However, if the interventions are executed incorrectly or not attempted at all, the result is basically identical to the effect of a punitive discipline policy being used.

Mr. Martinez is quick to state his appreciation for the teachers at Glenside High School who have fully embraced the low-level interventions. He says that Glenside High School has plenty of instructors who are fully committed to the wellbeing of their students and are willing to adapt their pedagogical styles in order to provide the best possible education for the students. However, he believes there are teachers who just "don't care" and refuse to implement low-level interventions in their classrooms. According to Mr. Martinez, these teachers are usually white, older in age, or come from different schools and are unwilling to adjust their pedagogies. He says that there are "four or five" teachers who are particularly notorious for this refusal of this adaptation of school disciplinary policy.

An issue with the teachers who refuse to perform low-level interventions in the classroom is that they will send the students directly to the Alternative Learning Center. Students are removed from class without any context as to why they are being removed,

and resentment is fostered between the teacher and the student. Mr. Martinez cites the daily challenges that a teacher has to face in conjunction with the lack of resources at GHS as a reason why teachers are unwilling to implement low-level interventions.

As stated by Wadhwa in the literature review, zero-tolerance discipline ideologies provided teachers with a “quick fix” in response to negative behavior exhibited by students in the classroom. Before the rise of zero-tolerance policies, teachers were expected to work with the student to correct behavior. Now, teachers are able to absolve the responsibility of discipline to Mr. Martinez and Ms. Anderson. Mr. Martinez says that this is problematic because some teachers aren’t even interested in the context of negative behavior. For example, Mr. Martinez says that if a student came late to a class with a particular teacher, the teacher could send the student to the Alternative Learning Center right away without asking for an explanation. In Mr. Martinez’s experience, the students often have legitimate reasons for being late, such as the responsibility of taking their younger siblings to school because both parents in the family must work to make ends meet. Mr. Martinez provided another anecdote where a student was sent to the Alternative Learning Center for taking notes in an ink color that the teacher did not allow. When Mr. Martinez talked to the teacher to gain context for the situation and offered to have the student re-write the notes in an acceptable pen color, the teacher said that that wouldn’t be necessary because she didn’t even collect the notes that students take. Mr. Martinez expressed his frustration because situations like this are a waste of precious time and resources for every party involved. More importantly, they have negative impacts on the student because they are being punished for an extremely small infraction without any context provided by the teacher who enforced the sanction.

All of my respondents reported that they have seen students internalize the negative behavior and begin to believe that they are “bad kids.” Roxanne Claassen states: “Every single thing we do as teachers sends a message about what we think of them and what we think they are going to do in the future.” Punitive consequences make students feel as though they are “bad,” and will disidentify with positive expectations. Ms. Anderson sees this same trend happening at GHS. She feels as though students with recurring issues of negative behavior pick up reputations as “bad kids” and take on a label that is defined by their behavior. Mr. Martinez echoed Ms. Anderson’s exact sentiment and agreed that students continue to act out when they internalize the negative behavior.

Roxanne Claassen has also found that zero-tolerance policies tend to be more popular among teachers for the sheer fact that they are less time-consuming. At her school, the teachers petitioned the administration to make discipline “quick and easy” through punitive policies. In addition to the “efficiency” that comes with punitive consequences, Roxanne noted that zero-tolerance policies abstain the teacher from having to discipline students at all. She feels as though teachers “pass-the-buck” of discipline onto other school entities, such as administrators. Zero-tolerance ideologies allow teachers to abstain from the responsibility of discipline, which on a grander scale is the premise of the school-to-prison pipeline. The teachers at Roxanne’s school found that the effects of zero-tolerance policies were largely negative. Students would be sent home for any given amount of time, would be unsupervised, and return to school only with a sense of resentment and negative feelings towards the school and the faculty. Roxanne said that while the school had to experience the negative effects of zero-tolerance policies on a

higher level, it ended up being a positive experience because the faculty saw how ineffective punitive consequences are. Due to the fact that discipline problems were only exacerbated by a widespread acceptance of zero-tolerance policies, the faculty at Roxanne's school took "radical" action to adopt restorative justice ideologies. Roxanne noted that teachers need hefty amounts of preparation for any given discipline problem that may arise within a classroom. Proper execution of low-level interventions in the primary prevention level could be the key to resolving conflicts before they grow even bigger.

In addition to sending students to undergo procedures at the secondary prevention level of PBIS without the pretext of the primary prevention level, teachers are not providing proper documentation of the incident that had occurred to the Alternative Learning Center. During a staff meeting, Mr. Martinez directly appealed to the faculty to fill out proper referral forms before sending students to the ALC. He needs this documentation in order to maintain meticulous records of the interventions that the student has undergone in order to provide the best service to the student body. In addition, diligent records of student discipline records can be used to qualify GHS for federal and state governmental resources such as mental health grants. Ms. Anderson manages these grants for the school, and explains that these grants can be used to train teachers and peer counselors on how to better navigate student mental health issues. At the staff meeting, she alerted the staff that GHS is losing four mental health grants in the next school year that could have been saved by teacher diligence in writing student referrals.

In the moment of the negative behavior, primary prevention level interventions are time consuming, and take away from instruction time. However, more time and resources are expended when teachers abstain from using potentially restorative low-level interventions. It is crucial that 100% of the faculty at Glenside High School fully embrace and employ the primary prevention levels for the discipline structure to operate at it's highest potential.

### **The Functionality of the Secondary Prevention Level at GHS**

The entities that operate the secondary prevention level at Glenside High School are the biggest proponents of implementing restorative practices in the school. Ms. Anderson operates the peer-counseling program, Mr. Martinez operates the Alternative Learning Center, and a third teacher serves as a family liaison when their child is undergoing interventions at this level. My respondents have found that the high functionality of this level has reduced suspension and expulsion rates and has improved the overall climate of discipline at GHS. However, teachers often send students to receive interventions at the secondary level, which creates an unnecessary hindrance to the possibility of the restorative discipline structure from operating at it's highest efficiency.

On my first visit to Glenside High School, I sat in on a Friday morning faculty meeting where Ms. Anderson, Mr. Martinez, and two students who served as peer mentors were presenting an informational workshop on how to properly use the peer mentoring system. As we were walking over to the classroom where the meeting was to be held, Mr. Martinez explained to me how difficult it could be to work as a faculty member in conjunction with the rest of the faculty. "If you rub one person the wrong way, it can affect the whole staff," he said to me. Mr. Martinez spoke to me as a mentor

giving advice to an aspiring teacher. He noted that the faculty was probably not thrilled to be spending their staff meeting working on professional development, but that it is an important aspect of working to be the best teacher possible.

As we entered the room, three students were chatting with Ms. Anderson and preparing to present to the faculty. They were two Latina students and one Latino student whom all seemed to be taking their jobs seriously. Mr. Martinez explained to me that these students were some of the leading peer counselors, and that they all had very different paths in their high school careers. Mr. Martinez explained that the female students had very high records of truancy during their first years of high school, but now never missed a day of school. He said that the male student was a former drug dealer who led a massive drug operation at the school, but was able to turn his actions around after undergoing restorative practices in the secondary level. Mr. Martinez says that having peer mentors that go through the discipline structure at the school are much more effective at assisting students to correct their negative behaviors because students are much more willing to share their issues with a peer rather than an adult. Ms. Anderson expands on this theory by stating that much of the stress in a struggling child's life is due to the actions of adults. Many students do not trust adults because they have little to no incentive to do so. As human beings, we tend to individualize our problems and have a sense of feeling alone with our issues. Peer counselors make themselves vulnerable as well, so that their clients will feel safe to share their issues.

The students began their presentation by introducing themselves. They showed a video that they produced for the faculty that had a scenario where a teacher asked for the assistance of a peer counselor. In the video, they explained that a teacher could call a peer

counselor after primary level interventions had not been effective in correcting the behavior. The peer counselor will come to the classroom and remove the student from class to discuss the issue. After explaining the confidentiality limits to the client, the peer counselor will discuss the issue and file a comprehensive intake form that describes the interaction. Ms. Anderson takes the intake form, and creates an electronic record so that the school can keep track of all of the interventions that the student has undergone. The peer counselor will hold subsequent follow-up meetings with the client and work towards having the client construct an action plan to correct their behavior.

Ms. Anderson explained to me that the peer counselors are campus leaders at Glenside High School. They must apply to be a part of the training program, and they receive academic credit for their work. Participation in the peer mentor program also fulfills some Common Core standards for the students because it gives them opportunities to create lesson plans and programming for the wider school community. Prospective peer mentors are required to undergo comprehensive training to be as effective as possible in assisting to change their client's behavior. This includes 20 hours of community service and training in baseline counseling techniques endorsed by the American Counseling Association.

The peer counselors that presented at the staff meeting demonstrated their passion and high competence for this work when they answered questions from faculty members. A male, African American teacher asked the peer counselors to identify trends among the client base of the peer counseling program: "What are the main reason students are acting out? Is it gang-related?" The male peer counselor responded by explaining that the peer counselors work to create a safe space by not interrogating their clients. When the client

can arrive at their own interpretations of the cause of their misbehavior, there is a much greater chance that the behavior will change positively. The peer counselor continued by stating that the peer counselors play the “what if” game with their clients. In other words, the peer counselor will throw out suggestions for creative ways for the student to construct their action plans to correct their behavior. While the peer counselors assist with the construction of the action plan, the client ultimately drives it so that they can take ownership. Seemingly not satisfied with the answer, the teacher restated his question and asked for a generalization of root causes of student misbehavior. Hesitant to provide a single generalization for a wide array of students, the peer counselor cited familial reasons as the main cause of student misbehavior. Another African American male teacher drew attention to the issue of poverty and how it takes a toll on the student population at GHS. He asked his fellow teachers to be more mindful of the circumstances that their students are in.

A white, female teacher wanted the peer mentor program staff to understand the daily challenges a teacher faces. She said that peer counselors interrupting class to meet with a student is extremely distracting and inconvenient. She asked the peer counselors to understand if the teachers if they are rude when a peer counselor asks to meet with a student. Ms. Anderson responded to this teacher by saying that discipline was not convenient to anyone, especially the student who is removed from class. Some teachers began to become defensive and argued that the system of referrals is flawed. A white, male teacher argued that his phone calls go unanswered when he requests support. This teacher continued by saying that a student picked up the phone, and he was offended that the student was “explaining school policy” to him. As the meeting was called to adjourn,

Mr. Martinez tried to ask about the specific incident to gain context, but the teacher did not have interest in speaking with him. All of my respondents have stated that zero-tolerance discipline ideologies have removed the teacher's responsibility in discipline processes.

The interaction between Ms. Anderson and Mr. Martinez and the rest of the staff opened dialogue on the way the programs on the secondary prevention level are viewed at the school. Ms. Anderson conveyed a sense of feeling demeaned by her fellow faculty members because they do not take the peer-counseling program seriously. She feels as though some faculty members do not even consider her as an actual teacher because she does not teach a core academic subject. She conveyed a sense of disappointment that the attitudes of the school's administration mirror the teachers' in respect to the peer-counseling program. She said that the administration allows her to operate the program, but takes no real interest in it and will send students that they do not feel like disciplining to her. She said that a "top-down" ideology of support from the administration must be present in order to change the attitudes of her fellow faculty members. Mr. Martinez believes that his fellow faculty members misrepresent the restorative practices on the secondary prevention level. He explained that the teachers that remove themselves from conflicts defer the discipline processes to the secondary prevention level, and then view the restorative practices as "too easy." A culture has been created that sends a message that zero-tolerance discipline is the only acceptable form of discipline among teachers at GHS. Mr. Martinez stated that some of the teachers believe that if a consequence is not punitive, it is not effective. Mr. Martinez disagrees, and argues that employing restorative practices allows him to "be a decent human being" in his interactions with his students.

He is frustrated that the teachers at GHS do not take into account the outside factors such as poverty that their students must face on a daily basis. He uses other descriptors such as “childish” and “a waste of time” to describe his colleagues’ approach to restorative practices at GHS.

Mr. Martinez and Ms. Anderson make it very clear that their actions towards implementing restorative practices will not fully replace punitive policies that remove students from the school. For example, acts of violence will not be tolerated at all because the physical safety of all students is of the utmost importance. They are extremely honest with their students about the possibilities of suspension or expulsion, and ask the student to cooperate and work to restore their negative behaviors so that they never have to experience suspension or expulsion. Roxanne Claassen echoes this ideology of complete honesty with the students, and wants her students to know that the zero-tolerance system still exists within the school and even more so in the greater society. Opportunities to undergo restorative interventions will allow the student to reflect on their behavior and work to change it with the support of the community.

The success of the secondary prevention level at GHS is dependent on the way that Mr. Martinez and Ms. Anderson interact with their students. In the Alternative Learning Center, Mr. Martinez disrupts the traditional power dynamics between teacher and students by speaking to the students as if they were adults. He maintains high expectations by listening thoughtfully to his students and working with them to correct the conflicts with their teachers. He gives respect to his students, and expects it in return. The Alternative Learning Center is run with the philosophy that every student’s situation is unique and requires different plans of action for restoration. Mr. Martinez relies

heavily on focusing on realistic options for each student. For example, while college attendance for every student at GHS is an aspiration, he realizes that it may not be possible for every student. Mr. Martinez views his main objective as socializing his students to be “functional members within society.” While observing his classroom, he stresses to his students the challenges of just getting by in this country. One of his students was on a pre-expulsion track, and I observed the very serious interaction that he had with this student. This student, an African-American male, was stating that he was ready to be expelled from school so that he could find a part time job and earn money. Mr. Martinez responded by pulling up statistics about the cost of living in California, and asked the whole class to assist in creating a budget for this student. He demonstrated to the student how a high school degree would make his life significantly less challenging than if he were to drop out. Throughout this interaction, Mr. Martinez directly confronted zero-tolerance ideology by choosing to not discipline students through shaming on every minor infraction, such as cursing. Understanding that shame is used as a tool of social control as Vaandering noted, Mr. Martinez chooses to “pick his battles” in order to focus on more important issues and employ restorative tactics. Mr. Martinez’s ability to be realistic with his students fosters mutual respect and constructive changes in behavior.

Ms. Anderson also places high emphasis on building relationships with her students. She actively creates a collaborative environment in her classroom where students are free “to be themselves.” The physical space of her classroom is warm and inviting. She has allowed students to paint artwork on the walls and invites students to eat lunch with her. She asks her students to “leave their personas at the door.” She is empathetic of the posturing that high school students must perform on a daily basis. By

fostering individuality and self-assurance in her students, Ms. Anderson can ensure that her students feel comfortable in their vulnerability and maintain healthy communication. She says that having fun and having a sense of humor with her students is crucial in being able to have the strongest peer-mentoring program possible. She holds high expectations for her peer mentors because she believes that the program is crucial for the overall mental health of the wider student population. While she describes herself as “strict” when it comes to the expectations she has for her students, she understands that her students will not reach those expectations every single day.

Mr. Martinez and Ms. Anderson collaborate and share information and tactics on how to best serve their students. Prior to this year, they had worked independently of one another, but they argue that their collaboration has drastically improved the effectiveness of the overall discipline structure. They have created their own “department” with one another, and meet to discuss possible plans of action for the students that are most at-risk. Ms. Anderson and Mr. Martinez interact with their students in a calm and constructive way, but maintain a sense of urgency. Every student that is referred to the Alternative Learning Center will be assigned a peer counselor. Mr. Martinez and Ms. Anderson value honesty, and make sure that their students understand that they have an opportunity to change their behavior before they have to deal with more finite consequences at the tertiary prevention level such as suspension or expulsion. They work on joint programming such as Saturday school assemblies for students with chronic misbehavior issues. In these assemblies, they expect the students to spend ample amounts of time in self-reflection by facilitating activities that ask students how they see themselves, and how they think society at large views them.

Mr. Martinez and Ms. Anderson work tirelessly to create consequences that are not just punishments. With every action that is taken on their part, they want to make sure it will be of maximum benefit to the student. For example, a popular consequence that is employed is community service work. This can include picking up trash at a local park or assisting the school's maintenance crew. Mr. Martinez explains that community service hours provide an enrichment opportunity for students that will benefit them in their college applications. Mr. Martinez serves alongside his students during their community service hours to foster self-reflection and growth.

### **The Functionality of the Tertiary Prevention Level**

Students that have progressed to the tertiary prevention level must undergo interventions with school social workers, truancy officers, and/or governmental agencies. If these final interventions fail to produce a positive outcome among an at-risk student, expulsion proceedings will be performed. Obviously, the aspiration at Glenside High School is that this prevention level is used as infrequently as possible. This can only be possible with high functionality in the secondary prevention level, and even higher functionality in the primary prevention level.

Mr. Martinez and Ms. Anderson report that there is very little communication between themselves and the different individuals and agencies that perform the interventions in the tertiary prevention level. Mr. Martinez believes that his meticulous record keeping of the interventions that the student has gone through would be paramount in providing context for constructing the best plans of action in the tertiary level. Ms. Anderson reports that she has had several meeting requests with the school's social worker in order to collaborate, but her requests have gone unanswered. The entire

functionality on the PBIS structure can be negated if the student's history in the discipline system is ignored.

Mr. Martinez has reported lower rates of suspensions and expulsions since the PBIS model has been implemented. He notes that the teachers that have been performing low-level interventions on the primary level are instrumental in making sure that students rarely progress to this level. It is important to note that some students do need to be in different learning environments, and Mr. Martinez and Ms. Anderson do everything in their power to transition students as seamlessly as possible. Every student that is being considered for expulsion must appear before a school district sponsored expulsion board for the district's final approval. Mr. Martinez explained that the expulsion board will often deny expulsion requests from other schools in the district because there is not enough evidence that the school has performed comprehensive interventions to avoid expulsion at all costs. Since implementing PBIS with a heavy emphasis on integrating the processes of the Alternative Learning Center and the peer-counseling program, the expulsion board has accepted the four expulsion requests that GHS has had in this current school year. GHS has been able to demonstrate that each student that has been removed from the school has undergone multiple interventions in the secondary and tertiary level and that there has not been any positive change in behavior. Mr. Martinez notes that these proceedings are extremely difficult, but he is optimistic that these proceedings will be less necessary as the PBIS discipline structure grows stronger with time.

### **The Role of the Teacher and Administration in the Discipline Process**

Glenside High School has not been spared from the damaging cultural norms that have been created by zero-tolerance and punitive discipline policies. In addition to the

negative externalities that zero-tolerance has had such as the school-to-prison pipeline, it has radically re-defined what it means to be a teacher. Teachers now expect consequences to be easy and swift for them personally, regardless of the effects that it may have on the student. Meeting standards and raising test scores have superseded the responsibility of fostering the social and emotional growth of each student.

Ms. Anderson believes that teach-to-the-test ideologies have removed the humanity from the teaching profession. She even went as far as to say that it has come to the point in education where we do not see students as people—we only see them as test scores that we need to achieve. Ms. Anderson is quick to note that there are very real consequences for teachers and schools that do not reach their Academic Performance Index (API) or achieve the standardized test scores benchmarks. This directly confronts the work that the peer-counseling program does, because teachers are less willing to allow students to meet with their peer counselor during class time. GHS also qualifies for federal Title I funding, and therefore is under even more pressure to meet their academic standards. Ms. Anderson says that the very definition of what it means to be a teacher has changed: “A lot of times it’s just, ‘I just want to be an English teacher. I don’t want to have to talk to you. I just want to teach you English. I want you to turn your stuff in. I’ll grade it. I’ll hand it back.’”

I asked Ms. Anderson how we as a country could go about changing the culture of teaching so that more emphasis can be placed on the emotional development of the student through restorative justice, and she immediately said that nothing would change unless it comes from a top-down ideology. The school administration must actively support and bolster restorative practices in order for the teachers to support it and

effectively perform low-level preventions on the PBIS structure. Ms. Anderson believes that the administration at GHS allows her to maintain the peer-counseling program, but that they are completely detached from it. She argues that this detachment sends a message to the teachers that they can be detached from the discipline structure as a whole. There is a lack of ownership among the school's leadership in disciplining students. The administrators and teachers must understand that they play a crucial role in providing sustainable and effective tactics for discipline.

Roxanne Claassen argues that teachers can begin to be effective disciplinarians by actively working to build community among themselves and their students. This is especially important in intercultural communities like Glenside High School. Mrs. Claassen cites her experience as a public school teacher in Fresno to explain that the student body at any given school needs to feel unity among the faculty. As a white teacher in a predominantly Mexican-American school, Mrs. Claassen understood the necessity of learning about the cultures that her students and fellow faculty and staff members came from. She says that she learned about her community by eating lunch with staff members who come from different backgrounds than her own, and "enlisted the help of teacher's aides, the cafeteria staff, and the custodians" because she wanted to create an environment where every adult in the school had a stake in educating each student. Mr. Martinez echoes the sentiment that all teachers, especially white teachers in communities of color, must take proactive steps to get to know the community that they are working in.

## **Chapter 5-Conclusions**

Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted the potential of restorative justice in schools to repair the damage that zero-tolerance and punitive discipline ideologies inflict on students, teachers, schools, and societies-at-large. I analyzed the challenges and success of the implementation of restorative justice at Glenside High School from the viewpoint of the school's two biggest advocates of restorative justice: Sheila Anderson and Hector Martinez. I drew connections of the shared experiences of these GHS teachers with the experiences of Roxanne Claassen, a restorative justice expert to demonstrate the universality of common successes and challenges in the implementation of restorative justice in public schools. I will now conclude this thesis with recommendations to make the implementation of restorative justice as seamless as possible in any given school and the wider society.

### **The Need for Widespread Institutional Support for Restorative Justice**

Ms. Anderson made it very clear that it is very difficult to ask teachers to implement restorative practices and implement low-level interventions in the classroom without "support coming from the top." School administrations and school districts must actively support restorative justice and expect their teachers to practice restorative methods. Zero-tolerance discipline policies have removed the expectation that teachers have disciplinary responsibilities. My respondents have reported that teachers have a tendency to "pass the buck" of discipline onto other school authorities. At Glenside High School, this is manifested when teachers automatically send students to the Alternative Learning Center or peer-counseling program without attempting any primary level interventions.

Educational policy is constantly evolving in terms of pedagogical practice, academic standards, and the very definition of what it means to be a teacher. It goes without saying that teachers are under a great deal of stress to adapt to the constant evolutions that public education in this country experiences. However, this stress is not an excuse to refuse to adapt to practices that can greatly improve the overall emotional climate in a school, such as restorative justice. My respondents have reported that many teachers, especially older teachers with more experience, are more reluctant to adapt to new ideologies and practices in education. School authorities must hold high expectations that teachers will adapt to new initiatives and must evaluate teachers on their ability to adapt and implement new practices in their classrooms.

School administrators must also be willing to assess and confront school policies that are not working and take active steps in order to correct the faulty policies. Roxanne Claassen reports that she and her husband, Ron, were contracted by a high school in Madera County, California to work with the faculty in order to implement the *Discipline That Restores* model. Roxanne reports that before the implementation of DTR, this school of 500 students had an average of 60 suspensions and 20 expulsions for any given school year. In one year after comprehensive training in this restorative justice model, the school had reduced their suspensions to six, and had only one expulsion. This current year saw a reduction of suspensions to four, and currently has zero expulsions. These promising statistics demonstrate how crucial it is for schools to adapt to the progressive and evolutionary ideologies and practices in education, especially practices that will improve the social and emotional health of the student body at large.

### **The Need for Comprehensive Training for Teachers in Restorative Justice Practices**

As demonstrated in the positive effects that the *Discipline that Restores* model had at the high school in Madera County, comprehensive teacher training in restorative justice can create lasting and sustainable change for the entire school. Mr. Martinez noted that most teachers have a disdain for professional development, but that it is absolutely necessary in order to provide the best possible education for the student population at the school. Glenside High School is a testament to the fact that all schools are filled with teachers with various ideologies and levels of experience. Mr. Martinez and Ms. Anderson reported that the teachers who are most adamant about changing their discipline practices are the teachers with more experience in the classroom. They describe these teachers as being “set in their ways.” Again, this shows the necessity of administration support of new initiatives (such as restorative justice) and the necessity to hold the expectation that all teachers will adapt to the new initiatives and embrace them.

On a grander, societal level, teacher preparation programs have an enormous opportunity to train the next generation of public school teachers to be well versed in restorative justice practices and ideologies. As demonstrated in this thesis’ literature review, even skeptics of restorative justice, such as Kathleen Daly, acknowledge that in most cases of implementation, restorative justice is successful. This success can be bolstered to be more effective and sustainable if prospective teachers are well trained in restorative practices before they enter the classroom. Pre-professional programs can use the tactic of holding classes in the restorative practice of the circle process so that prospective teachers can learn experientially and see the benefits of employing restorative practices first hand. In addition to learning restorative practices, prospective teachers will

gain experience in building the relationships that are necessary in order to collaborate and provide the best education for the students possible. Practices like these will change the modern definition of what it means to be a public school teacher. Less emphasis will be placed on standardized test scores and meeting standards. More emphasis will be placed on the social and emotional development of each student so that they can be as successful as possible in their future lives, regardless of their outside contexts or position within society.

### **The Need to Redefine What it Means to be a Teacher**

Ms. Anderson stated that the responsibility to educate a student on the part of the teacher has been reduced to making sure that student achieves high standardized test scores: “It’s not about (the development) the person. It’s about the test score.” Education has been commodified to the point where teachers must place the majority of their attention and resources into making sure students achieve their benchmarks. There are very real consequences, such as a loss of funding, for teachers and schools who do not meet these requirements. In turn, the demand for public school teachers in this country seeks anyone with the minimal requirement that they can teach to the test. Ms. Anderson finds it shocking that there are so many teachers in this country who do not even like kids. Our nation must re-define the responsibilities of a teacher to include the capability to foster the development of healthy and vibrant citizens.

Roxanne Claassen argues that our national obsession with standardized test scores has been “detrimental” for the profession of teaching. She explains that teachers know that the standardized test scores that their students receive are in no way a reflection of the student’s growth or their pedagogical capabilities. Roxanne has found that the role

that teachers play in the development of students is crucial. If the time is spent working on students' social skills and emotional health, the students will be more willing to take ownership of their academic careers. Students will be more willing to produce quality academic work when they feel as though their teachers have personal investments and interests into who they are on a more humanistic level. Ms. Anderson expands on Roxanne's argument by stating that the majority of stress in a youth that demonstrates risk factors comes from adults. Teachers need to be positive and caring adults for their students, because it is not always guaranteed that the students have these types of adults in their home lives. If students have no one to believe in their capabilities to be a functioning member of society, they will not take actions to make positive decisions.

Mr. Martinez knew of my aspirations to be a public school teacher, and made it very clear to me that I (especially as a white male) must take the steps to learn about the community of the school and the culture of the students. He has found that too many novice teachers expect students to adapt to their cultural norms and expectations. The teacher must take the initiative to get to know the community that they are working in. The most effective way to do this is to build relationships with your students and fellow faculty and staff members that come from that community. As a white teacher, Mrs. Claassen said that building relationships is crucial in order to be an effective teacher in a multicultural community. With high emphasis on building sustainable and productive relationships, restorative justice can provide a supportive framework for teachers to take necessary steps to learn about the communities that they are working in.

### **Final Reflections**

The first research question is: “Can restorative justice exist within a zero-tolerance framework?” The answer to this research question is not finite. As stated in the literature review, radical theorists such as bell hooks and Paulo Freire argue that a truly sustainable shift in society towards restorative justice cannot be completely statically. The rationale is that employing some restorative practices in a community does not necessarily make the whole community restorative. In fact, if used incorrectly, restorative practices can reproduce hegemonic ideologies if the overall ideology of the community is hegemonic.

From the standpoint of my respondents, restorative justice can be used as a tool to promote collective consciousness among the student body. Mr. Martinez has a standing goal of educating his students about the injustices that exist within society, especially for people of color. Through restorative justice ideology, Mr. Martinez is able to establish trusting relationships with students and he is able to be open and honest with them about possible inequalities that they may face in their lives. Ms. Anderson explains that her role is to direct a peer-counseling program that will very communicate the severity of the extreme consequences that they may undergo if they do not accept help to change their negative behavior. Roxanne Claassen explains that a major tenet of her restorative justice ideology is to make it very clear to students that the criminal justice system in this country is inherently unjust, and that students can learn how to navigate inequalities in society through restorative justice. Grassroots practices in restorative justice can be effective. Of course, widespread societal change cannot be expected overnight, but if restorative practices can be implemented in schools, this generation of students can enter

adult with a new social skill set that places heavy emphasis on human connections and a sense of responsibility to care for fellow members of our society.

The second research question seeks to identify potential challenges that communities, specifically public schools may have in the implementation process of restorative justice: “What are the challenges that stand in the way of implementing restorative justice ideologies fully at Glenside High School?” It has been demonstrated in this thesis that restorative justice has the potential to greatly improve the overall social and emotional health of student populations in any given public school as demonstrated by the reduction of serious behavioral problems at Glenside High School. The potential of progress for restorative justice is often curbed by inaction and apathy on behalf of administrators and teachers. While teachers can individually implement restorative practices in their classrooms and see positive effects, there must be widespread support and practice in order for restorative justice to reach it’s full potential. Just as it is unlikely to implement radical restorative ideologies in society automatically, the next generation of public school educators can be trained in their pre-professional programs to practice restorative justice.

In conclusion, the most effective practice that we as a society can do is to celebrate successes that restorative justice has had in numerous public schools in this country, like Glenside High School. Individuals who are committed to renewed discipline practices in public schools must demand further academic research into the potential that restorative ideologies in schools can have on the future overall health of society at large. Teachers and administrators must affirm the spirit of collaboration in education, and

work to develop new curricula that integrates restorative justice as a cornerstone of pedagogy in American education.

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