

CREATING RESTORATIVE SCHOOLS



Setting Schools Up to Succeed

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Discussion & Reflection Guide

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Discussion & Reflection Guide

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This guide is meant to help readers connect the book's content to themselves and their work in schools. Readers may choose to write responses in personal journals, or hold reading Circles, book clubs, online discussions, etc. Working through these questions alone or with a group will help to clarify your own vision of a restorative school. This guide is organized by chapter. I recommend you read the chapter first, then reflect on the question.

Intro & Chapter 1

Chapter 1 calls for rethinking our beliefs about punishment. Many educators at all levels, when introduced to restorative justice in education (RJE), immediately ask, "How will we hold students accountable?" As you learn more about RJ and RJE, you'll learn that making things right is how to hold people who commit harms accountable. This is the paradigm shift. But for now, consider your definition of the following words. How do you define them? What do they mean to you? What do they mean to you in an educational setting? Please be honest with yourself. This is where the work begins.

Accountability

Consequences

Punishment

Justice

Classroom management

After speaking to or writing your answers, reflect on what you observed or noticed. Do you see thought patterns emerging? Do you see anomalies or contradictions? Note them.

Chapter 2

What is the connection between implicit bias and zero tolerance discipline policies? What is your lived experience with both? Have you developed a habit of examining your own implicit biases? Can you think of an example drawn from observing your own thoughts and feelings?

Chapter 3

RJE centers relationships and connection with self and others. In the high school where I work, I've seen an increasing number of students disconnected from themselves, from peers and adults, and from the school. What are you seeing in your school? Has it changed since COVID? How can RJE help rebuild connections and foster relationships in a COVID world that forced and normalized isolation and disconnection? How has technology (phones, online learning etc.) helped and/or hurt connection and relationships? What ways of managing these new realities do you find practical and working for students and staff?

Chapters 4 & 5

Using the subheadings in Chapters 4 & 5 as a framework, briefly describe your school like I described Grant and Davis. If you're not in a school, compare Davis and Grant to a school you are familiar with.

Chapter 6

Use the themes in Chart 6.1 as a framework to think about your school. Also consider the survey statements. In your opinion, and without doing deep research, where do you think your school's strengths and weaknesses lie? Given what you know about your school, what do you think would emerge as themes if your school was studied like Grant and Davis?

Chapter 7

How do *you* delineate what is RJ and what is "not RJ?" What's happening in your school that is being referred to as RJ when it's not?

Are there structural barriers or programmatic initiatives that water down RJ into something else?

Chapter 8

If you're doing RJE at your school, what changes have you noticed in adults and students? What do you hope will change? What contributes to making these changes? What makes change more difficult?

If some adults and students in your school "remain unchanged" (i.e., wed to punishment in dealing with mental illness & trauma, etc.), how is implementation affected? What responses or adaptations might be possible in these circumstances?

Think about how much RJE can do (p. 191). What are some realistic expectations for your school or district?

Chapter 9

Even if a school or district will not embrace whole-school RJE and continue to practice “sharp-end” RJ (p. 52), teachers still have the opportunity to transform their own classrooms. If you are a teacher, what can you do—or what are you doing—to create a more restorative classroom? (Think about the 3 pillars of RJE on p. 48. Perhaps you want to use those pillars as a framework for your response.) What more would you like to do? What support do you need to do it?

Chapter 10

We’re going to focus on pp. 221-235. Adults play a major role in the relational ecology of a school, and often set the tone – which students immediately pick up on. Racial and gender biases cause harm and disconnection. RJE asks all educators to look inward and confront beliefs and values that alienate students, families, and colleagues. What changes could your school community make to meet everyone’s needs to engage in the learning process in respectful, positive ways? Feel free to dig even deeper and reflect on all the questions on p. 229. What is your role in this? What support do you need? What do you think your school needs?

Chapter 11 & In Closing

Look at the 27 recommendations in Chapter 11. Which ones do YOU have a hand in, or have some power or influence to make happen?

If you could create a team of people to implement school-wide RJE in your school or district, who would be on it & why? Think about who would make the most effective and inclusive team.

How can you construct a team that can influence both horizontal and vertical change? Think about horizontal as within your school and vertical as outside your school – like on p. 241). Create your own diagram depicting your structure of support, then think about who needs to be involved in creating a strategic plan (Recommendation #4).

Appendix 1 & Methodology

Not every school or district can do the level of research that I did. After all, this was my doctoral dissertation and it did not cost the OUSD a single dime. Think about what data is available to you now to help you gather information so you can set goals and monitor change. Can teachers do action research? How can you collect and use data to inform your next steps? Remember, I’ve already debunked discipline data (i.e., suspensions, etc.) as the only, the main, or even the most important way to determine if RJE is “working.”

Additional Readings

Since writing “Creative Restorative Schools” I’ve published 2 more articles. One may help you think about evaluating RJE and the other may help you think about systems change.

Brown, M. A. (2021). [We cannot return to “normal”](#): A post-COVID call for a systems approach to implementing restorative justice in education (RJE). *LAWS: Ambitions and Critiques of Restorative Justice (Special Edition)*, 10(68), doi.org/10.3390/laws10030068

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Brown, M. A. & Di Lallo, S. (2020). [Talking circles](#): A culturally responsive evaluation practice. *American Journal of Evaluation*. 41(3), 367–83
doi:10.1177/1098214019899164

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