Guidebook for the People

Integrating Multi-Tiered Systems
Activating Restorative Practices

pivot LEARNING

Foreword

The Humble Truths of Restorative Justice Circles
By Lawrence "Torry" Winn & Maisha T. Winn

Often, when discussing the power of restorative justice circles, one curious and thoughtful soul asks the critical question, "What are we restoring back to?" This inquiry always leads to an engaging conversation about justice, healing, racism, hope, and community. There is never a right or wrong answer. The truth lies somewhere between the perspectives, experiences, histories, and possibilities that each person brings to the circle or conversation. These humble truths are the essence of *Guidebook for the People*. This guidebook is an essential resource for any educator or practitioner committed to building healthy relationships with students and transforming learning within schools.

Nicodemus Ford and Monica Ng have assembled a brilliant group of educators, organizers, and practitioners who share their insights, strategies, and visions for building a culture of restorative justice within our schools and local communities. Over the past two decades, schools have not always been safe and welcoming spaces for youth—especially for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other students from historically marginalized communities. As the authors here note, students will have experienced some or all of the following at their schools: racism, suspension, bullying, unqualified teachers, police brutality, systemic underfunding, and COVID-19. In California, school districts employed several approaches—in particular Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)—to rectify the harm caused to these students, their families, and their communities. Despite the evidence that some of these approaches are sometimes working, anti-racist and community-rooted educators struggle with the fact that restorative justice can lose its authenticity when it becomes a prescribed program for administrators to follow.

Guidebook for the People offers insights into the challenges and promises of restorative justice circles. Over twenty contributors from large urban school districts to small rural schools discuss their experiences creating humanizing spaces for students to share, grow, examine, and heal. The collection of writings based on lived experiences, research, and practice provide the reader with firsthand knowledge of daily interactions between educators and students. Similar to restorative justice circles themselves, some of these chapters are full of hope and healing while others reveal the unresolved hurt and pain experienced by youth and facilitators. For educators with lingering questions about restorative justice, such as, "What can restorative justice circles look like in my classroom?" and "What are common challenges to classroom circles?" and "How does one sustain?", this is the perfect book. Each chapter is powerfully authentic, with various writing and storytelling styles illuminating and distinguishing the voices of the contributors.

Guidebook for the People best answers the question, "What are we restoring to?" This guidebook offers examples and stories that restore us back to humanizing spaces in which we all can examine our histories, grow from our experiences, heal from our various oppression and marginalization, and discover and share our humble truths. The book highlights the many ways educators can transform education so that schools can be(come) places of community and reflective learning for our young people.

Gift from the People, to the People

Launched in downtown Oakland in the spring of 2019—a group of educators, healers and restorative justice practitioners convened to explore how we might integrate Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), a data-driven approach to tiered academic and behavioral supports with restorative practices, in an embodiment of building community and peace making. To start, it was evident that we clearly had more questions than answers to what this project and work would look and feel like. It was also apparent that as a community we could only move at the "speed of trust," rooted in anti-racism, as one member so eloquently put it.

Working in close collaboration with Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth, we had three goals that we set out to accomplish as part of a two year grant provided by the California Endowment: 1) convene a design team comprised of a coalition of educators and restorative practitioners from across California, 2) recruit partner school districts to prototype new ideas in designing integrated systems of support, and 3) produce a guidebook that would assist educators in exploring the implementation of restorative practices within a system of support for our youth and families.

Two major events impacted our ability to drive this work: 1) the murder of brother George Floyd and sister Breonna Taylor and the scores of other Black bodies threatened, terrorized, and mudered during that summer and 2) the COVID-19 pandemic. As we watched the world grieve and experience so much loss, we as a team did the same, and spent time practicing self- and communal care and supporting our schools and students with the same approach we do with our loved ones.

Our planned in-person convenings were replaced by video calls, but rather than decrease participation, we sensed a desire for greater connection from the members of this emerging team to offer and accept support, to consider the value of restorative practices as our world experienced deep fractures, and to build community in spite of our physical isolation.

We turned to storytelling as a means of capturing our hopes and fears in this moment, but in a way that feels timeless and honors the Indigenous roots of restorative practices. We are deeply grateful for the time and trust that each of our contributors offered in producing this guidebook and our project, and to our student photographers visually capturing experiences essential for systems to support to flourish and thrive.

In this guidebook, we offer you a unique set of personal narratives, stories, and honest and open reflections on our journeys to implement systems of support and restorative practices. There are plenty of high-quality guidebooks, many of which are referenced in our resource section, but we want to offer you our voices, our hearts and minds, often raw and unfiltered, honest and transparent. The only best practices we offer are to listen, feel, and share.

If restorative practices are able to grow in California and beyond, we believe we must lead from a place of honest reflection about our beliefs connected to our students, families, and communities and the role of schools in their lives. If we are to guide you we want to guide you to start authentic conversations, and reflect upon the ideas and stories offered in our voices so that you might find ways to share your own.

The guidebook offers a framework of four essential questions, with our teams serving as authors on each section, that we believe best integrate Tier 1 practices and those of restorative practices:

- How are you showing up? (Relationships)
- What practices elevate students in Tier 1 practices? (Strategies)
- How do we team and collaborate? (Collaboration)
- How might we grow and sustain this work? (Growth)

We hope that each reader approaches the guidebook in an intuitive way that speaks to them. Perhaps, you would like to choose a section to read and reflect on individually. Perhaps, you choose to read a story and answer the reflection questions as a grade-level or administrative team. Or perhaps you read an entire section based on your journey and invite someone to read and reflect with you to start examining your current practices and how your systems might interact.

Regardless of how you use this guidebook, we believe and trust in the power of bringing our full selves and learning as part of building systems that connect us. We believe and trust that the heartfelt stories, reflections, and narratives from our hearts to yours will resonate to inspire and build the school systems that our youth and communities deserve.

With full love, respect, and tenderness,

Nicodemus Ford
Senior Program Manager
Pivot Learning

Monica Ng
Vice President
Pivot Learning

Acknowledgments

This guidebook is possible with the contributions and efforts of so many wonderful and thoughtful people.

Angelica Otero is a licensed social worker, long-time Angeleno and loving organizer who is fiercely committed to youth and families. She brings tenderness and justice to her work in the community.

Antoinette Bailey is a dedicated servant to youth and families currently working in Rialto Unified School District as a therapist. She understands that this work is in collaboration with people and families.

Anthony Ceja is a wise and compassionate facilitator and convenor of restorative practices. He brings life to spaces and lifts up the room with new ways of being and existing with one another.

Bettina Graf has worked in restorative practices for years and recognizes her power comes from the conversation and discussions and the healing that can occur when people work together for the greater good.

Dr. April Clay is a licensed health practitioner, parent, and grandparent whose work with restorative justice reflects a truly inclusive and equity-centered environment where all community members play a vital part in healing and transformation.

Dr. Chris Pinkney is a former football star turned professor and experienced facilitator and culture and climate expert; he combines intellect and love to transform schools and communities for both kids and adults.

Dr. Kai Mathews is an innovative teacher and systems thinker with a unique ability to see education as a means for both liberation and freedom.

David Yusem comes to this work from the world of conflict resolution; he is one of the early advocates for restorative justice practices in the groundbreaking Oakland Unified School District.

Dena Oneal is a speech therapist equipped with passion and knowledge for innovative ways of looking at collaboration with everyone at the table supporting young people.

Dr. Felicia Singleton is an experienced educator whose practice is guided by the Maasai greeting, and "How are the children?" She believes restorative justice practices create culturally affirming and equitable systems where adults can authentically answer, the children are well.

Hannah Chauvin is a recent Harvard graduate and light-seeker sharing her knowledge of culture building and creating inclusive spaces where young people are seen and valued.

Jerry Elster is a environmental and restorative justice practitioner who brings his lived experience with love and advocates strongly that a better world is possible and necessary.

Dr. Jessica Swain-Bradway is a respected and well-established practitioner and expert in Positive Behavioral and Intervention Supports; she brings humility, experience and a strong equity lens to this work that compliments the hopes and dreams of the systems we seek to create.

Lisa Bohórquez is an abolitionist and teacher and works daily at creating learning environments for young people where students feel valued, seen, and heard for their unique gifts and talents.

Lizeth Bendaña is an experienced teacher, parent, and restorative justice practitioner rooted in anti-racism and in service to community. Her love for her students radiates naturally and effortlessly.

Meggan Mertz is a behavioral specialist serving both youth and families in a holistic and restorative way; she brings to life data that can be used to change and transform how we treat and serve one another.

Melissa Rubio is fiercely committed to teaching and learning and placing the needs of students, families, and communities in how we make restorative justice central to our work.

Mikki Cichocki is a thoughtful and experienced teacher and youth court restorative justice facilitator who is one of the pioneers in facilitating community based solutions to repair harm and restore dignity for everyone involved.

Reuben Roberts is a loving, kind and compassionate restorative justice leader with Restorative Justice of Oakland Youth; he advocates for a whole school approach to implementing restorative practices and creates environments for all to thrive and excel.

Dr. Rhonda Beasley is an experienced systems thinking and school leader; she facilitates spaces so that people can feel empowered to use the data to drive real change that makes a difference in the lives of our youth and their families.

Vicenç Rul·lan is an international restorative justice practitioner who honors vulnerability, sensibility and dedication to his craft and his school communities to prioritize and value this essential work.

Many thanks to our brilliant student photographers:

Juana Mendoza Cruz was a senior in the Media Academy at Fremont High School. She was born and raised in Oakland, California and is a proud Latina and indigenous Maya Mam woman of color. She has interests in photography, cooking, and helping others through community services.

Ingri Mendoza Matias was a senior in the Media Academy at Fremont High School. She was born in Oakland, California and raised between Guatemala and the U.S. Ingri is proud of her extra-curricular activities with the non-profit REAL HARD that allows her to contribute to the positive change of improving school culture for both students and staff.

Kimberely Higareda is a senior at the Media Academy at Fremont High School. She is a strong writer who recently celebrated having her perspective produced as part of KQED's Youth Takeover week. Kimberely is a solid advocate for student voice and choice who enjoys her work as a youth mentor/peer educator for Teens on Target Youth Alive.

Contents

How do we sustain this work? — 64

Guiding Questions — 83

Resources — 91

Chapter 1: How are we showing up?

Roots of Restorative Practices

Anthony Ceja, Senior Manager, System of Supports Department, San Diego County Office of Education

Bettina Graf, Restorative Justice Practitioner, Half Moon Bay, California, and

Lisa Bohórquez, Teacher, San Francisco, California

Indigenous wisdom is at the heart of effective restorative justice (RJ) practices. European colonizers established their dominance in the Americas using all forms of oppression that dehumanized and brutalized the original Indigenous residents of these lands. The education system of the colonizers imposed their own language and culture and asserted their delusion of superiority by force on the native people and, ultimately, on all people of color and anybody seen as inferior to the colonizers. Today we see the harmful results of an educational system that continues to allow a colonizer paradigm to guide it.

The data is clear from past decades that people of color and those different from the colonizer's model citizenry have been disproportionately punished, using exclusionary practices that have served to dehumanize people and make them feel unwelcome in the school community. This has created a harmful "snowball effect" where youth leave the school community traumatized to search for their sense of belonging and meaning, and this void is oftentimes temporarily satiated in relationships where they are exploited and retraumatized. To make things worse, many of these harmed youth are retraumatized by the way they are treated by public agencies (e.g., law enforcement and child welfare services) paid to protect and serve the community.

We promote restorative justice practices as a way to meet a critical need to transform education so that schools can be places of healing, restoration, and deep learning for our young people. We believe that this is a social justice and human rights issue. This is an opportune time in our country's history to reflect on our educational system and embrace an Indigenous mindset of education which is relationship-based and gives honor and value to students above all else. Our educational system needs to restore the Indigenous wisdom rejected from the beginning of this country's history. It is time for our schools to become communities dedicated to the healing and restoration of our young people. These restorative communities will be staffed by educators who clearly understand their primary role is to help students understand their value and importance in relationship to the school community.

Educators who embrace Indigenous wisdom understand that we must act with humility in order to serve as effective restorative practitioners. Service to the community with a humble attitude is essential for adults to model for the students so that students can begin to discover their calling to serve each other. We ask questions and listen rather than assuming and judging. We believe that students are essential to the restoration of a thriving community. We help students to remember their important role as healers and restorers of our community.

Approaching this work with humility also means understanding the levels of educational and emotional experience which need to be brought to the restorative community and to remember that we ourselves

have much to learn from all. It means being willing to learn from others and listening from our hearts—whether the speakers are colleagues, peers, students, underrepresented communities, parents, or any other stakeholders. It means treating and advocating equity for all, recognizing their level of experience and education, their position in our societal community, their wealth of knowledge and experience in community building, and the harm they may have caused to that community as equal in worthiness and significance to all members of the community.

Our current educational system does not promote equality or equity for all. We do not look through the lens of social justice, healing, and respect for our students. Teaching students while modeling the ability to bring vulnerability, humility, empathy, equity in voice, and honor for all who sit in a circle is paramount if we are going to create a restorative school community. We recognize, honor, and celebrate educators who are on the front lines working to create a more just, free, and loving environment for our youth and communities.

The intent of the restorative circle is to build relational trust where all members can know that they will be heard and valued by others. In building that space we seek to create agreements that reach and serve each participant in the circle and the community as a whole. The fundamental practice of circle is based on the idea that there is equity of voice, meaning that each and every member of the community is heard and their perspective is equally important. The intent of the restorative circle is to build relational trust where all members can know that they will be heard and valued by others. In building that space we seek to create agreements that reach and serve each participant in the circle and the community as a whole.

Contrast this with our present social system, which is formed and enabled to act as a hierarchical system in which the voices of individuals—"leaders" who hold positional power—are heard and respected as though they are of more value than those who are in positions of less hierarchical power in that community. These "leaders" form the constructs of our society often without fair regard for the voice of those being affected. In the criminal justice system, juvenile justice system, and the traditional educational system, we mete out punishments for actions with the belief that a swift hard punishment will convince that person not to break the rules again and will deter others from resisting authoritarian rule. We have seen this mindset fail over and over again.

Restorative justice practices allow for those who have harmed and those who have been harmed to sit in a circle to repair harm and restore relationships with a belief that it is essential for us to create a strong community of humility, vulnerability, empathy, support, and accountability. In our educational system, this is imperative to promote academic learning as well as social-emotional learning. One surely cannot function without the other.

Guiding Questions

- What are the traditional lands in which you read this section? In what ways are you currently practicing this idea of reciprocity?
- What came up for you as you read this piece? What do you notice about the roots of restorative practices? How does this connect to what you already know and value?
- Do you have relationships with local tribes? How can you continue and/or start to foster those relationships?

- In what specific ways have we acknowledged and honored the Indigenous roots of restorative practices? How might we make Indigenous roots a more central part of our practices?
- What have we done to welcome and affirm voices from across our community to participate in our restorative practices and be honored as members of our community?
- What is an example of a humble attitude or a sign of humility that we have witnessed that we want to share with our community? How did that example of humility impact how we have shown up in spaces? What might foster greater humility in our approach to restorative practices?

Proud

Ingri Mendoza Matias

"I want my classrooms to feel like a place where I can be proud of my culture and make everyone see how their own cultures are not something that they should hide."

On Being Vulnerable

Bettina Graf, Restorative Justice Practitioner, Half Moon Bay, California

Authentic storytelling is one of the key principles of an effective restorative process. My story is about the power of restorative circles and community building.

I was working in a local high school facilitating restorative circles in a tenth-grade classroom designed for students who were receiving two or more failing grades. I facilitated restorative circles one day a week for the class of 35 students. The teacher and a wellness counselor also attended each circle and brought powerful support, empathy, and voice.

This particular circle was towards the end of the spring semester, so the students were very familiar with the circle protocol. One student, Christopher, would always make a joke about what he was saying when it was his turn to speak his truth. He was respectful and engaging and did answer the prompt directly and the students all enjoyed what he had to say. He created a safe role for himself in building relationships with the other students. And in return, the students validated and accepted him based on this role. Happy to have him engage, we thought it was better to have him participate than to correct or redirect him and have him go silent.

Christopher was well-liked and for the most part always had a positive attitude. He was one of my favorite students. Deeply ingrained in Christopher's story, however, were his painful memories of his trauma as his mother and father had abandoned him and his two siblings. When Chris was a baby, Chris's mom abandoned him and his siblings without explanation. Several years later, Chris's dad moved to Mexico and left the kids with his sister and her partner who later adopted them because neither parent returned. In his 16 years, Christopher had not had an opportunity to heal from his trauma. Chris never learned the story as to why his parents made those decisions (perhaps "had" to make those decisions, but nonetheless it happened).

I was blessed to have a close relationship with Chris as his counselor, so he had shared a lot about his life with me. The other students in the class were not aware of this piece of Chris's story. He hid his story through humor.

This particular day in the circle, I had made an origami box with a lid on it and the prompt that went with this box said: "If you could open this box and see anything you want in this box, what would it be?" The students had various different answers from wanting a million dollars, to good grades, to more friends, etc.

When the box came to Chris, he opened it and looked around the circle and said, "If I could open this box and see anything I want, I would want to see my parents. I am adopted and I haven't seen my mom or dad since I was little. I always wonder where they are and if they think of me at all. I would ask them why they left us." Christopher then passed the box to the next student.

But the amazing connection that happened that day in the circle among the students was one of the most powerful restorative moments I have ever witnessed in a circle. Chris was ready to be vulnerable. He had sat in the circle the entire year with a "mask" on and he now trusted this community enough to share his

story. The empathy through looks and comments for Chris was life-changing. It changed the way the students saw Chris through his pain and also changed Chris in that he felt he could feel trust again, which had been lost for so long in his life.

That is the power of our restorative work. The ability to be present with each other, to be patient with each other's readiness to be vulnerable and humble. To listen with an open heart and speak with an open heart. This was life changing for that entire circle of students. Chris received a gift that day and I know the change was taking hold for him.

Chris passed away that summer. He suffered an accidental overdose. I often think of Chris at the beginning of each summer and I am so thankful he was able to share his story.

I wonder if restorative healing circles had been more a part of his and his family's lives earlier on how that would have made a difference for him. I wonder if restorative practices had been more of an honored practice in school, would Chris have been able to heal and how that could have changed his life...

I continue to have hope and believe that our purpose in this restorative work that we do is present in so many capacities for so many.

Guiding Questions

- Reflect upon the last time you had a student and/or staff member demonstrate vulnerability. What did that look and feel like for you? For the person sharing? For the community?

- What are the ways that we hold each other when being vulnerable?

- What does "being vulnerable" mean to you? When was the last time you felt vulnerable? What feeling resulted in your body?

- What's the role of being vulnerable in facilitating healing- and justice-centered spaces? How do you find the right balance between vulnerability and being brave?

- Reflect on a time when you may have deflected attention from a difficult feeling or experience. What did that behavior allow you to do and what did it prevent you from doing?

- What are some specific conditions, actions, or words in your practices that promote greater vulnerability and what conditions, actions, or words might prevent vulnerability? What change might you initiate as a result of this reflection?

- Christopher's story highlights that "to be patient with each other's readiness" was a gift that generated more gifts. Think of a person who might need that patience and what support you might need to offer that.

Justice Denied

Jerry Elster, Restorative Justice Facilitator, Monterey Bay, California

Growing up in the skin of a Black male it was impossible for me not to be aware of the sub-categories of race. The concept of restorative justice ("RJ") was not even a thought. The mantra "If you're white you're alright, brown sticks around, but Black gets back" was an implication of what the U.S. and its educational system had in store for Blacks.

The world has always represented a threatening and hostile environment that required nothing short of an equally hostile response. South Central LA treats Black youth like a petri dish situated to produce the bounty for the politically and socially endowed. "Home is where the heart is" is a cliché that attempts to deceive the masses with a nursery rhyme. The reality of the competition between street hustlers and the gestapo tactics of the LAPD (Los Angeles Police Department) burst that bubble.

The continual expansion of the prison industrial complex is Exhibit A. The White House, depicted in the American dream, with the picket fence was replaced by rat-infested projects with a crooked leaning gate topped with rusty barbed wires, leaning inward, to keep the inhabitants in. My community was not a resourceful and welcoming environment as portrayed in the media. When it came to aid or authentic economic relief our parent(s) had to rob Peter to pay Paul for day-to-day survival. Educators have the audacity to question why I did not take school more seriously?

The words immortalized by Curtis Jackson (aka Fifty Cent), "Get rich or die trying," resonated in the imagination of, practically, every ghetto child. Crime was a narrow option of escape. To put it simply, the County of Los Angeles is a segregated public school system. Where you live determines the level of education you can obtain.

El Camino Real out in the San Fernando Valley was my first real contact with a large portion of the white community. Everything was different. The school didn't look like jail, it looked like college. The staff didn't talk to students like inmates in the wards.

I used to wonder when I was a kid: "You got to be putting on a show, is it really this comfortable for you?" The combination of the condescending interaction between white teachers and students and air of superiority infuriated me. This was the wrong time to try and reinforce the "the greatest contribution of Blacks was slavery" concept. My rebellion spewed out in sharp words of content and profanities and physical blows. Of course, this resulted in my first interaction with the criminal justice system. Three years of summary probation with a promise to never step foot in a San Fernando School again was the deal. This was my introduction to the school-to-prison pipeline; restorative justice was most definitely missing from my life.

Guiding Questions

- What resonated with you most in Jerry's story? Why?

- Are there students in your classroom, school, and/or community whose experiences echo the story you read? How do you know?

- At what point in Jerry's story could there have been a positive interaction with his situation or circumstances?

- Jerry states that "the world has always represented a threatening and hostile environment that required nothing short of an equally hostile response." What resonates with you about this phrase?

- Jerry's entry shows an acute awareness of oppression and inequality in his community and schools. What opportunities have you seen or experienced to confront and discuss these conditions in classrooms and the community?

One Image No Words
Kimberly Higareda

I feel supported and connected to my school when I can tell others these words 'School is a chaotic and colorful place where I can be myself and not one picture can describe the 1000 words I have for school'"

On Belonging

Vicenç Rul·lan, School Psychologist, Restorative Trainer, Palma, Mallorca, Spain

During my adolescent years, I remember feeling that whenever I was with my peers, I needed to play some sort of character, so I would fit and be accepted by the other kids. My comments and behaviors were often made as a way to make and maintain friendships, with the goal of being "in" a group: being "out" of the group seemed scary, lonely and—to a certain point—dangerous. This way of being in groups was stressful, because unless I was with family or with close friends, I often felt the pressure to impress others, more than to be true to myself. I would say something and wait for the effect of my words on other people, crossing my fingers, expecting them to accept me because of my comment.

On some occasions, I remember witnessing some kids making fun of a new kid, just because he had a sweater of a particular color. I did nothing to support this kid or to make the other kids stop their teasing: I was only trying to look wise and worthy of being part of the group. It took me years to understand that I could be myself and be accepted—maybe not by everybody, but at least by the people I cared about.

When I see the way middle/high school students are represented in TV series, I think that not much has changed since I was a student. There is the "popular crowd," the "jocks," the "nerds," the "dorks"... There are different groups, each with their own rigid code of conduct and a place in the student body hierarchy. My guess is that many students feel the way I was feeling when I was their age: nervous about fitting in, at the cost of being a true and caring person. Feeling accepted and included are primal needs of every person, and this is particularly acute in the tween years, when identity is forming and young people are not sure yet of who they are and who they want to become.

One thing they believe for sure: they need to fit and belong. The relational and restorative approach places a great emphasis on building community, on promoting belonging and inclusion. We want a safe and caring space for students and staff, where everyone is welcome and people who feel left off receive the support of the community and are lovingly accepted. In these environments where building community is of foremost importance, members of the community flourish and are able to give the best of themselves. On the other hand, toxic environments, where there is a rigid hierarchy that controls who belongs to each group and who says what, are fertile grounds for bullying and abuse and are not apt places for people learning and thriving as human beings.

Restorative approaches will take root in contexts where community is highly valued, where supporting inclusion, care, trust, and appreciation of all the community members is a main goal of school programs and interventions.

Guiding Questions

- Can you think of a time when you tried to "fit in"? What did that look like? What did that feel like? How are your students trying to fit in with what is currently happening in your community?

- How effective are you at articulating your faults and failures with those around you? What spaces in your community are safe to do so?

- What kind of container are you creating for yourself and for others as it relates to belongingness? What does that look and feel like to you and for others who traditionally have been left out of such conversations and opportunities?
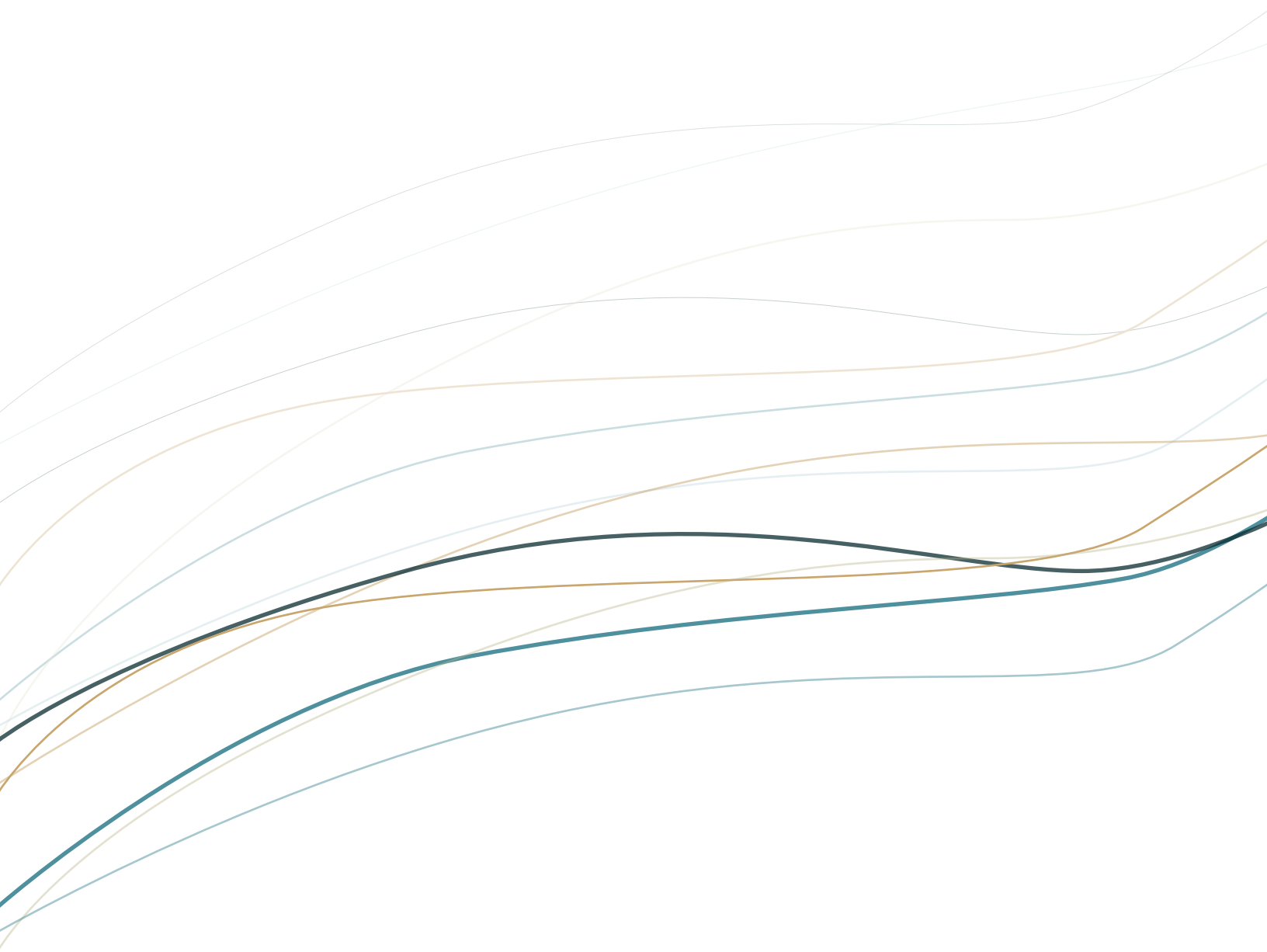
Living Outside the Circle

Lizeth Bendaña, Pilarcitos High School, Half Moon Bay, California

Before the challenges of COVID, our small staff of five grappled with how to grow our practice of restorative justice (RJ) in a public alternative education setting. For the last several years, I had been trying to implement restorative justice practices during a very tumultuous time in the history of our school. The school was torn down and rebuilt in the span of two years. This meant that we changed locations three times and for most of the time our students were housed in a one-room portable. Also, during this time our school gained and lost its first principal. Although RJ was not implemented district wide, we were able to grow and learn through working with Rita Alfred from the Restorative Justice Training Institute. When we lost the ability to fund that project, Pivot stepped in and guided us through our next stage of growth.

It was also difficult for us to quantify and communicate our observations regarding the benefits of using a RJ approach to people outside of our school. When we had an administrator, there was a push to standardize our students and our school into a general ed model since many of the students we receive are often not served very well by that system of education. It appears the solution for our students was to conform to a general ed model that they had already rejected or been rejected from. We would get outside feedback from people who work with us who would make comments like, "You coddle them. That's not how the real world is." The negative comments couldn't negate what the teachers and office staff could see and feel during and after circles. The circle was a tool for us to navigate the push to conform to a system that is patriarchal and systemically racist.

Although there was always a focus on the relational component of RJ, the procedures of circles and how they were implemented seemed to be where we kept getting stuck. When our administrator left, we had the opportunity to have the school be teacher-led. The three teachers split the administrative responsibilities; this was very challenging especially when there were issues with the students that required intense circle work. We were using the circle for healing, repair, and celebration; it became part of the way we welcomed new families to our school as well the way we helped students re-enter school when they were transitioning from the juvenile justice system. The palpable goodness that could be felt from our RJ work existed in tandem with the things we didn't want to address. We found it difficult to define our school and community by going years without really addressing what our unique culture offered to our students and families.

When the pandemic hit us we no longer had our circles. Instead, the student relationship with our school became one-on-one communication with a teacher. Some students were responsive, others weren't. Our school had moved to online-based learning a few years prior to COVID so our students were able to make the transition to that format with ease. They did not, however, take to Zoom classes with ease. Our Zoom classes often would have one or two students who would regularly attend. The one-on-one communication became our primary instructional and relational tool. For example, I became acquainted

with one new student exclusively through text. We were able to establish a strong student-teacher relationship even though we never met face-to-face.

The student shared all of his struggles with the new reality of COVID, his forced evacuation from wildfires, and his challenges with getting his school work done. He did not like Zoom and was shy about talking on the phone. Once we returned to in-person learning our relationship was established and he felt connected to our campus. It was great to see his natural leadership qualities in person. He often brings other hard-to-reach students with him to campus to encourage them to return to school.

What was really eye-opening was watching everyone have the same collective experience with COVID. Sometimes I would see people in their palatial home, or at their cabin in Tahoe, on Zoom, and then on the other side of it, I would have the student I have to text or call because there's no wifi at their home. Although our enrollment increased, our staff did not. We were not only experiencing the collective trauma that we were witnessing with our students and families, but we were extremely overwhelmed and overloaded.

I became the lead teacher during this time, as we no longer shared the administrative duties. The things that we didn't want to address prior to COVID soon became impossible to ignore the more the school year progressed. The social and political discourse during the election forced our staff to have extremely difficult and painful conversations with one another. This was especially difficult because I didn't have the circle to help us process the hard times. I'm not really sure why we didn't have virtual circles with one another, I just know that we didn't. What got me through the hard conversations was the memory of how to work through things in a restorative way.

Everything came to a head when our students were involved in a viral post on Instagram that was filled with racist, anti-Asian hate speech. When the incident happened, much of how we were going to respond fell upon my shoulders. One response was to look at it from a legal standpoint and another from a restorative one. I advocated that we can't ignore that we need to approach this restoratively and begin to seek how we repair together. Our superintendent sent a letter home to all families that racism and hatred had no place in our district. I reached out to our school board president for support as well. It was our first time experiencing this type of hatred so blatantly, so we did not have the process or protocols in place to bring about healing.

For the rest of the semester no real movement had been made to bring a restorative lens to this work. As the lead teacher and the only teacher of color at our campus this incident presented a dilemma. I had become weary at this point in the year because of our own internal staff issues and the social media incident triggered my own memories of childhood trauma with racism. I was hoping that other staff members would jump in and take the restorative lead, but that is not what occurred. Instead, I focused on my own healing and restoration.

The weight of everything made it clear to me that it was time to leave the teaching profession. There wasn't enough good to outweigh the bad. Focusing on my own healing forced me to make joy a part of my job and to open up to the staff about how I was feeling. Everyone could see everything was taking a toll on me. Our administrative assistant was my rock through everything. She was very new to all things RJ. Our closeness may have come as a surprise to some since we could be perceived as having different political and social viewpoints during a very divisive time in our country.

Our restorative conversations with one another not only helped me get through the darkest time, but

showed me that human-to-human relationships can supersede the divisions that are sometimes imposed on us. In the spring, the office staff and teachers started working on implementing trauma-informed practices with Matt Reddam, a therapist from the Butte County Office of Education. These sessions were transformative for our staff because they gave us a common language to talk about some of the things we had avoided, like our own trauma, feelings about race, and restorative justice. We were healing together and it wasn't easy.

We were informed that since all classes were remote at the time of the viral social media incident we were unable to require the students involved to have any consequences. Once in-person learning started, though, some of the boys began coming on campus. I was feeling frustrated that no one had addressed the students about the incident. I was not comfortable with pretending like nothing happened. Over the summer I was the only teacher on duty and one of the boys came in to ask if he could be part of the summer school program. There was no preparation and no circle process for the conversation that needed to be had. I just thought, "You're doing this, you're doing this now."

The student and I talked about the incident. I framed the conversation by stating that even though the incident occurred months ago, we needed to talk through some of the things that came up as a result. I wanted him to know that pretending like it didn't happen was damaging. We talked about how it impacted our school. I asked him if his views about Asian people were going to get in the way of him accessing his education, since I would be his teacher.

It was at this point that he told me that he is not the same person that was in that video, and it was important to him for me to know that he was not racist. I responded by saying, "We live in America. It was founded on racism. We all have issues with it. So you don't have to say that you're not, but what I do want you to take away from this is, this is how we move past it. The human-to-human conversation that we're having about it and being real with one another. This is part of the healing of it all." From that point on that student became the star student of the summer.

I shared the details of the conversation with the whole team, in hopes that they would feel empowered to have the same conversation with other students involved if given the opportunity. Once the school year started one of the teachers had a hard conversation with the main student in the video. The student shared that the "town" held him accountable and that he suffered backlash from his peers after the incident. That was a detail that our staff was not aware of.

Our campus is currently rebuilding our circle process. We have a small RJ class with two students who are new to our campus, so they were not part of the way we used RJ pre-COVID. The purpose of the class is to create ways for us to celebrate the good times and address the challenging times. They surprise me each week with their "cool ideas" and they give me so much hope for what is to come. I no longer want to leave the profession.

When things are going well, I feel like "it's not as bad as we think," but then we have those weeks when I am reminded of the realities of working in a system that is rooted in oppression. What keeps me going is the joy I have created for myself at work, and the ability to see the goodness, light, and love that comes out of restorative approaches and counters "-isms and schisms" that are all around us.

Guiding Questions

- Lizeth talks about using the circle to "confront a system that is patriarchal and systemically racist." What comes up for you as you consider this idea?

- What are the ways that you and your school and/or community intentionally establish relationships given that the pandemic has disrupted ways of sharing space in person? What have been your experiences that have resulted in growth? What are ways in which you could co-develop new ideas for areas that are challenging?

- Do you and/or others have spaces to discuss the current struggles in the teaching profession? The author discusses how she considered leaving the teaching profession and the shifts she made to stay. What are your experiences and how are they shaping your reality and relationships?

MadreNature
Juana Mendoza Cruz

"I feel best at school when we get to appreciate and learn about mother nature. Earth is a unique planet for having water, air, and land."

Chapter 2: What practices elevate and liberate students in Tier 1?

Are You Ready to Talk?

Hannah Chauvin, Educator, New Orleans, Louisiana

Positive Behavior Intervention "Systems" has gotten a negative rap in many educator circles around the country. Oftentimes it is seen as being synonymous with bribing students, rewarding bad behavior, rewarding students for just "meeting expectations," or even, most recently, as an early socializing force of capitalism. However, in my decade of experience working with both the most privileged of students and students from low-to-no income communities, Positive Behavior and Intervention Systems (PBIS) has been an incredibly valuable tool that has helped me build strong relationships with my students, develop their social-emotional learning, and meet the needs of ALL students. Within my classroom, I invest equally in the triad of PBIS, restorative conversations, and consistently clear expectations. Every day isn't perfect—and we have challenges just like any other classroom—but our outcomes after a disruption are often very different than in classrooms that rely on punitive consequences alone.

An example of a disruption can be seen when one student, Martin, decided that he was going to roll on the floor in the middle of my lesson, successfully knocking over his desk, in a bid for the class's attention. As he began to roll on the floor, it was as if time slowed down. I can remember a sense of dread, disappointment, and overall frustration washing over my body.

My pride wanted me to make him comply with my expectations, but my brain recognized that was exactly the attention he was looking for. I paused and took a few deep breaths. It became clear that I had two choices. One: I could engage in a power struggle with Martin, which would give him all the attention (not to mention my energy), leaving my other on-task students with little to nothing. Or two: I could focus my energy on acknowledging the good choices that most of my class were making by ignoring his behavior. By acknowledging and rewarding via our positive PBIS points system, I was keeping the attention on the positive and keeping my behaviorally "cusp" students from joining in.

As he wasn't a danger to himself or others, I decided to go with choice two and ignore his behavioral outburst for the moment. Taking another deep breath, I smiled and started a conversation with my other students. "Class, we are going to stay focused on the task at hand. Keep in mind that this lesson is important because..." I gave out tons of authentic positive praise, points, and attention to my students as we continued learning.

Martin rolled on the floor towards us and then away from us and even at one point kicked his desk over, but his bid for attention was short-lived. Within a few minutes, Martin got bored and just laid on the carpet, ignoring but no longer disrupting. Martin had realized that we (the teacher and the students) were not going to rise to his bait. Eventually, the lesson ended. As the other students lined up and began to make their way out the classroom door, I knelt next to Martin (ensuring I was on his level) and privately told him that he would be eating lunch in my room while his peers went to the cafeteria and recess. He stomped his feet but ultimately complied.

After about 15 minutes of him sitting silently at a desk in our classroom during lunch, I asked if he was

ready to talk. He nodded. I started with a very simple question: "What happened?" Martin told me how he had a terrible morning at home. He got into an argument on his way to school with his brother which he knew would just continue after school. He knew it was going to be a bad day anyway. Asking him if he was finished, I acknowledged that that was a tough way to start the day. I shared with him how much I look forward to having him in our lessons and how he is a vital member of our classroom community.

We would never be whole without him. I affirmed that I wasn't angry, and I still loved him. However, missing out on learning was not an acceptable choice as he is a smart and capable young man who needed this lesson to meet his academic goals. By building him up, I was able to ensure that his mindset was ready to come back into the learning environment.

Simultaneously, he was in a better place to understand and accept that there was a consequence for his behavior. He shared that he wasn't ready to apologize yet, which I said was fine, but he agreed he wouldn't have an outburst again. I explained to him that, after cleaning up the area he messed up, he would be writing positive lines to help him reflect on how he was going to handle the situation differently next time.

For a long time, "writing lines" was a traditionally punitive consequence for students to remind themselves of what they did wrong. I wanted to change the narrative about what writing lines could mean for empowering students rather than continuing to break down their self-esteem. The lines I required Martin to copy read: "I am smart and capable. I respect myself and my peers. We work to support each other. I can do anything I put my mind to. I will achieve my goals!" Martin wrote his assigned "lines" ten times and then surprised me at the very end by adding a little note to me, "I will listen to my teacher, follow directions and not yell at my teachers or my peers. Sorry for yelling at you Ms. Chauvin. I love you. Sorry Sorry Sorry Sorry Sorry Sorry."

Reading the note, I realized how we had successfully navigated and truly strengthened our relationship over what could have been a potentially disastrous moment. I reminded Martin that I loved him as well and that I appreciated the extra note. His smile could have lit up the room. He promised that the rest of the day was going to be better, and I confirmed for him that I believed this to be true.

As the first students trickled back into the classroom, I realized that it wasn't enough for Martin to be ready to come back or for me to be ready for Martin to join us. The other students had also experienced this outburst. As the students came back into the classroom after lunch, I made a deliberate choice not to jump into the lesson.

Now was the time to invest in a whole group conversation about what had happened. I wanted to highlight what positive behaviors I had seen. I shared with them how proud I was of their ability to prioritize their own learning and for allowing me, as the adult, to deal with what was happening instead of joining in. I also cleared the air that Martin had repaired the harm that had occurred and reaffirmed to the class that we are a team. Martin was welcomed back into the learning with open arms from myself and his peers and did not have another behavioral issue for over four months.

Guiding Questions

- In this section, the author speaks to some of the "negative" connotations that PBIS has solicited. What is your opinion of PBIS in general, and its role in your classroom and school?
- The student Martin exhibited behavior that was disruptive to the learning process. What was your initial reaction to the behavior?
- The author mentions a "sense of dread" coming over her body as she witnessed Martin rolling around on the floor; she went on to say that she "took a few deep breaths" and began to make some logical choices. What are some of your self-regulation techniques and strategies that you use in your classroom and/or practice to center yourself?
- What are your indicators that students are "ready" to come back to the classroom? Hannah mentions that she was "able to ensure that his mindset" was ready, but how do you know when students are ready to return after struggling in class?

Acknowledged

Ingri Mendoza Matias

"I feel supported and connected to my school when teachers acknowledge my efforts and being awarded for them."

Is PBIS Inherently Racist?

Dr. Jessica Swain-Bradway, Northwest Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions, Eugene, Oregon

Increasingly frequent criticisms of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SW-PBIS) assert that SW-PBIS both originated from, and sustains, a white supremacy monoculture. Educators have argued that SW-PBIS perpetuates inequities in the United States public school system for students of color, diverse languages, gender identity and expression, and dis/abilities.

There is some merit to the argument that PBIS has been utilized to "reproduce oppression," to borrow a phrase from Dr. Muhammed Khalifa, Professor of Educational Administration at The Ohio State University and author of the book Culturally Responsive School Leadership. Districts across the U.S. claim to be using PBIS, and yet continue to oppress and further marginalize students through highly disproportionate suspensions, expulsions, and academic outcomes. The main idea for this chapter is that any system can reproduce oppression, the culture of white supremacy, and implicit bias. While this chapter cannot adequately address the complexity of systematic racism in our school systems, the author openly acknowledges that across the U.S. districts claim to use SW-PBIS and yet continue to oppress and further marginalize students by failing to acknowledge and correct highly disproportionate suspensions, expulsions, and academic outcomes.

The assertion that SW-PBIS reproduces harm is concerning in and of itself, but even more so when one considers that SW-PBIS has become almost synonymous with school "improvement" efforts. Federal legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), endorses a multi-tiered system of support, such as SW-PBIS, to support improved outcomes for some of our most marginalized students: students receiving special education services and English language learners.

Through the framework of SW-PBIS, districts can center equity and disrupt oppression when they make a commitment to 1) implement SW-PBIS as it was intended to be used in school, with fidelity, and 2) purposely organize the entire system (policies, teaching practices, discipline rules, etc.) to prioritize student and community voices.

Fidelity and PBIS

One of the foundations of SW-PBIS is the understanding that student success and failure is connected to the daily behaviors created by adults in the school. SW-PBIS fidelity measures provide guidelines to shape the daily adult behaviors, and internal decision making, to set the stage for success. The fidelity measures examine both the prevention (robust teaching practices such as modeling, practice, and reinforcement) and response (discipline and intervention) to behavioral mistakes. The fidelity measures emphasize the removal of shaming and isolation practices and explicitly measure the use of scientifically proven, positive support strategies including:

- re-teaching missing skills (both academic and social),
- providing more structure to the school day, and
- increasing positive interactions with adults.

Student and Family Voice in Prevention

When implemented as intended, students and family are highly visible, purposefully prioritized voices in the plan for SW-PBIS implementation. The burden to create meaningful opportunities for students and families falls squarely on the school and district employees. At both the school and district level, SW-PBIS fidelity measures ask teams to identify how they systematically prioritize students, community, and families in the processes of (a) developing school and class agreements, (b) reviewing and shaping discipline policies, and (c) guiding the leadership team to ensure the SW-PBIS system fits the school community.

Establishing school-wide expectations, or agreements, is one way in which SW-PBIS schools can begin to establish a community of belonging. School expectations are the community agreements about how we will treat one another. They are social-emotional skills and they apply to ALL people in the school community: staff, students, administrators, and families. Expectations vary from school to school; two examples of expectations are: "Be Kind, Be Safe, Be Respectful" and "Persevere, Respect, Integrity, Diversity, and Excellence (PRIDE)."

A best practice in SW-PBIS is to create a regular process in which student and family voices are prominent in creating (and revising) school-wide expectations, as well as creating school- and classroom-specific agreements about what these expectations look like in practice. Co-creating agreements with students can help ensure the agreements reflect the perspectives of those most impacted by the agreements: the students. With student voices prominent, it is more likely that teachers will understand what expectations like "Respect" and "Kindness" look like to a student, and less likely that teachers will interpret deviance from their singular perspective as defiance or insubordination.

Establishing agreements about the expected ways in which we treat one another is the first step in creating a school community of belonging. Once agreements are established, educators have the responsibility of teaching and acknowledging these social agreements. Referred to as rewards, acknowledgements, or prizes, it is well-documented that paying attention to someone's behavior, after the behavior is performed, can increase the likelihood that the behavior will be repeated. The most powerful way to set up a system of acknowledging student efforts is to:

- Use a range of acknowledgements, from tangibles (such as stickers) to social connections (for example a basketball game with the vice principal);
- Get to know your student and families;
- Ask them what types of acknowledgement are most meaningful; and
- Recognize that acknowledgements should reflect student choice and not the limited perspectives of the teaching staff.

This system of acknowledgements to influence behavior is not as abnormal as some may believe. Many of us are reinforced for showing up to work by receiving a paycheck and benefits. In fact, schools have already established an elaborate, abstract system of acknowledging academic achievements in the form of grades, credits, and advancement to the next grade level.

SW-PBIS leverages this existing system for the reinforcement of social behaviors. The goal is for all students to experience far more success than failure, at a ratio of five positive experiences to one negative experience.

Student and Family Voice in Discipline

School-wide social agreements, explicit teaching of these agreements, and acknowledging student and staff use of these social agreements contribute to preventing social problems in the school environment. These practices can help establish the foundations of a community in which all students can see themselves and feel as if they belong. Maintaining a commitment to student belonging is most critical when they engage in a behavioral infraction. From the SW-PBIS perspective, social errors are just that: errors. They are not a personal affront to a teacher, or a categorical statement about the student's "character." When students make a social error, such as cursing, ignoring a teacher request, or even fighting, best practice in SW-PBIS is to treat this as we would teach an academic error: we would re-teach the intended skill.

One of the most unjust practices in schools, one that creates huge academic and social disparities, is the use of exclusionary discipline such as suspension and expulsion. Exclusionary practices can also include "buddy rooms," where students are sent to another teacher's room for a "time out," being sent out into the hallway, or a "time out" bench at recess. Exclusionary practices include any time a student is not in the intended educational environment. Exclusions deny opportunities to learn, as well as reduce opportunities to create positive relationships with adults and peers. The many negative impacts of shaming and exclusionary discipline makes the reform of disciplinary systems a non-negotiable priority for schools who implement SW-PBIS. Schools must move away from a zero tolerance, exclusionary approach to discipline.

Within a SW-PBIS system, discipline is organized, with equal dedication, to support staff to utilize prevention teaching practices (agreements, acknowledgements) and also respond with an instructional approach. Similar to correcting academic errors, all disciplinary strategies for social errors must include instruction. We would not give a student detention for failing to convert an improper fraction, even if they did it every day!

As with prevention strategies, best practices for discipline in a SW-PBIS framework include involvement of the students and community in the definition of problem behaviors and the review of disciplinary data as well as creating processes for family, student, and community input into the root of disciplinary problems and potential solutions for the school community.

Additionally, within the SW-PBIS framework, there are ways teachers can identify their own implicit bias. The Culturally Responsive PBIS Field Guide developed by the Center on PBIS provides activities for staff to examine their implicit bias and provides guidelines for policies and teacher supports that have evidence to reduce disproportionate use of discipline.

The process of student, family, and community partnership can be supported by establishing Fair Process as a part of the meeting process. As summarized by Kim & Mauborgne (2003) "...individuals are most likely to trust and cooperate freely with systems—whether they themselves win or lose by those systems—when fair process is observed." Fair process can be a helpful tool as schools develop some of the most visible components of their SW-PBIS implementation: expectations, acknowledgements, and discipline systems.

There is documentation that shows that schools implementing SW-PBIS do have lower rates of disciplinary disproportionality than schools that do not implement SW- PBIS (McIntosh, et al., 2019). The Wisconsin RtI Center has repeatedly shown, in their annual state-wide reports, the potential of PBIS

to close the opportunity and discipline gap. Throughout the country there are scholars and educators rethinking and reorganizing schools to be more student-centered and elevating students' voices. There is substantially more work to be done.

Creating a positive, predictable learning community is a conversation, an evolution of understanding one another as human beings. Oppression is a dichotomy; it thrives when we invest in school systems set up to define the "haves" and "have nots" without considering the wellness and belonging of all of our students. Instead of throwing out the framework of SW-PBIS with the practices people cling onto out of ignorance or explicit bias, we should instead be asking how we make the dismantling of oppression MORE visible by elevating student voice and choice and holding ourselves more accountable within the SW-PBIS framework.

The following resources may assist schools in implementing restorative practices as part of the SW-PBIS framework.

- One example of elevating student voice in the dialogue about inequities in schools is The San Diego County Office of Education Young, Gifted, and Black Youth Panel.
- The Culturally Responsive PBIS Field Guide developed by the Center on PBIS provides examples and activities to support co-creation of classroom agreements.
- The Wisconsin RtI Center has repeatedly shown, in their annual state-wide reports, the potential of PBIS to close the opportunity and discipline gap.

Guiding Questions

- The author argues that "any system can reproduce oppression, the culture of white supremacy, and implicit bias." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?
- In this section, Dr. Jessica speaks to the idea that PBIS could be utilized to "reproduce oppression" offers to center equity and disrupt such oppression. What are your initial thoughts on this topic? How can you and your team educate and activate your work to make sure you are centering equity in your PBIS model and implementation?
- Dr. Jessica suggests "co-creating agreements with students and families" to help with school-wide expectations. What might be some challenges that you might experience when crafting such expectations?
- Dr. Swain-Bradway suggests that "family voices are prominent" in creating agreements and school-wide expectations. What has been your experience in creating school-wide agreements with parents and families and students? What has worked well? What have you learned? What could be modified and/or adjusted?

Where I'm From

Reuben Roberts, Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth, Oakland, California

How did you come to this work?

I grew up in an environment where it was a struggle for many people to exceed or excel. My passion was basketball at the time, and I was good enough to go to college and play. I was originally in to graphic design and architecture, but when I was attending my classes I noticed that I was often the only Black person in the room. I thought there should be more of us. I also engaged more in Africana Studies, and my focus switched to wanting to open my own recreational center to provide resources and safe spaces for our young people to engage and work on their creativity. After I left college, I worked in a number of group homes and non-profit agencies, glass-ceiling type of work, and I was frustrated and tired. I moved out to California and worked at a school teaching/mentoring young Black men. After a year and a half, I then decided to move back to New York City in 2011.

Around this time in 2012, I was couch surfing and unemployed. A friend of mine told me I should apply for a position in Oakland Unified School District. I applied and then was called for an interview in July. I took a leap of faith and purchased a one-way ticket to Oakland, California to be interviewed not knowing if I was going to be hired or not. It was a big leap of faith, and thankfully I was hired a week after the interview. I was blessed that I was assigned two schools, Frick Middle School in East Oakland, where gang activity and poverty were regular aspects of life, and Claremont Middle School in Rockridge, where folks were very much privileged and had access to resources. The East Oakland school was in high need, where I chose to stay. I worked there as a restorative justice (RJ) coordinator until 2018. The principal was one of the best that I ever worked with and really believed in me and the work that we were doing. It's important to note that this work was part of a larger effort in Oakland, because of a NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) lawsuit that required schools to reverse the numbers of African American boys being sent through the school-to-prison pipeline due to suspensions and expulsions.

I really gained a lot of insight through this work. I worked to create a group of youth peer mediators which was a huge transformation where conflict was an ongoing problem between students and teachers and staff. I noticed that adults don't usually listen to young people and that there is usually a power dynamic especially in inner cities. Especially teaching programs that send young teachers from other states to cities like Oakland, when they have never been around Black or Brown children before. This is a culture shock and most of them do not know how to engage with young people in a positive way.

When you are working with a school, what tools and/or strategies do you recommend to get started on implementing restorative practices? Where's the starting place?

It's important to have a well-trained facilitator and consider building circles just with staff alone for at least one year to really get them to understand the power of restorative practices and to embrace the experience. This way they can begin to communicate and really to discover if this process is for you and your school. This is not everybody. Not everyone is willing to go deep. It's going to expose you, your trauma, your beliefs, your ideals, your approach to discipline, and how you see the world. You have to

be really in it to understand and hold circles. The administration has to be onboard and has to engage as well. Restorative practices really have to be a part of the school culture. I think there is a misconception in this work that there is no accountability but there is so much. In order to repair harm, you may have to do community service, you might have to apologize to the entire classroom, it means that you have to fix something or put something back. You really have to put that work in for a year to really understand what it is and then implement. It's a cultural thing.

If you are a principal that doesn't believe in the power of restorative practices, or you are afraid or have a power dynamic that you are holding onto, then it will be difficult to implement. I had a chance to work with an academic counselor who was Irish, did not understand Ebonics, but honestly wanted to know how to better relate and build relationships with Black students as she was not from that culture. It was a humble and good display of trying to get that cultural competency. Building this cultural competency is important because ninety percent of schools are run by white women and sometimes, they can come in with their own cultural beliefs. This is where the work of anti-racism must be central to our work implementing restorative practices.

Considering recent changes in society and how we are seeing systems collapse, change, and transition: what opportunities do you see for deeper restorative practices in our schools and communities?

I am hopeful people will understand why this work is important. So much trauma has been experienced by so many. If we don't have spaces to address their trauma and build a human approach to education, then we are failing. Standardized tests and bullshit curriculum is not a benefit to our kids. The real work is being decent human beings. Building empathy for others. Learning how to deal with conflict. Doing this work among your community, this is what is going to allow us to live long. The need for this work is vital.

In many campuses that I've been to, it's so important for students to have safe spaces. When schools have these healing spaces then you can get to the academic rigor. The most important thing for our youth, and adults too, is to have a healthy holistic environment to learn, and that should be a part of their learning. This is particularly true for our teachers too. Every kid no matter where they are deserves a healing space and some place where they will be listened to. And not everyone has a loving, caring parent at home.

Let's make sure that we organize what our priorities should be and kids get what they need. Every kid does not have technology and there is real trauma at home. Be prepared to support students that are less fortunate. Grades are not important as kids getting their basic needs met and restorative practices are the foundation in which this can happen.

Guiding Questions

- Where is home for you? What makes a place home? Do you know what is considered "home" for your students and families in your community?
- Reuben suggests that schools in restorative practices engage "staff only" for an entire year before adopting such an approach. Reflecting on where you and your community are in the process, how much time do you spend as a staff and/or as adults engaging in honest, open, and transparent conversations with one another?
- What do restorative practices look like exclusively for the adults in the building and/or community? How can you find the time to prioritize such spaces for healing and community building?

"I want my classroom to feel like a place where I can dress the way I feel and not worry that I don't fit the 'norm'"

Expression

Ingri Mendoza Matias

Little Abolitionist

Lisa Bohórquez, Teacher, San Francisco, California

The standards that we're holding kids to are based in white supremacy thinking. Our standards should not simply be to get an A on a spelling test or to know what *Webster*'s defines valedictorian as. *I want my kids to just be able to communicate to other people.*

There has been so much talk about "learning loss" since the beginning of the pandemic, but the way I see it my students haven't lost anything of value. They might not be meeting the state's "standards," but they are thriving as much as a person can during a global pandemic, with so much loss and fear around us *all the time*. They are living beings in this time right now. That's all they need to be.

I'm also teaching them to be little abolitionists. I decided the one rule for our class is, "We keep us safe," and I had them talk to me about what that means to them. What does it mean for us to keep each other safe? They were like, "Well, we don't hurt each other when we get mad. We share the materials." And I ask them things like, "Okay, if there's only one green marker and we both want the green marker, and I say to you, 'Hey, I need the green marker because I'm drawing a tree, but you're also drawing a tree.' What do you say?" So, I'm also teaching them not to believe in scarcity. There are more green markers.

One of the ways I use restorative practices to create a sense of safety and community involves an intro exercise at the beginning of the year. We talk about who the students are as individuals, and then I invite them to share other insights about their identities. We start with who are you as a person and then ask: who are you as a mathematician, writer, historian, scientist, or artist? Who are you as a friend? And then, once they kind of get their voice a little bit, we start talking about who you are as a member of your family, and what's meaningful to your family.

For example, I will ask: "What's important to your family? What matters to your family and who are you as a family?" By framing the questions this way, I try to avoid topics like vacations or where your family "comes from," because some people's immigration story is harsh and not something that it's easy for them to deal with or even understand. And I'm not in a therapeutic position, so I can't really help them enough with that kind of thing. I think as students get older and more empowered, they feel more comfortable, and with a stronger sense of agency we can heal from larger wounds.

As another example, I asked my students to share songs that are super important to their grownups, to describe the values of their family, and to identify their grownups. The students had to go interview one of their grownups and ask their grownup what school was like for them. They all got some cool answers. I think it's a lot easier for a kid to say, "Oh, I have a hard time with writing," or, "I have a hard time with reading and so did my dad, or so did my mom," or, "When my mom had a hard time with reading, this is what happened to her. When I have a hard time with reading, my mom helps me."

Those things are empowering. All the issues around the horrors of the colonial world come out through a lot of those things. But they come out in a way that I think a third grader can handle a little better. That gauge is essential in building trust in our classroom community.

Another activity we love begins with me starting a story for them. And then without writing, the students take turns saying the next sentence. So, in the past, my kids have just loved this, because you get to say whatever and you kind of can mess up the next guy. He can be like, "And then I blew up." And then, "Oh no, what's the next guy supposed to say, because now you're in smithereens? You're tiny little pieces all over."

I also try to build trust. For example, when we get closer to November and we start talking about Thanksgiving, I talk about colonialism in the states and what was going on around that time and some of the messed-up values that made all that happen. Last year, we learned about the people who lived there before Plymouth Rock was named Plymouth Rock and the first Thanksgiving and some of the truths about the first Thanksgiving. And, there's a thing called the Plymouth Rock Foundation co-led by Native people and settlers in that area. They have an awesome online program where students are investigators looking at clues to figure out what happened in that area at that time. They learn that the settlers harmed the Indigenous people and stole from them but they find it out gradually through clues.

Putting them in that position of being the investigator gives them power. So, when you're dealing with something horrible, you can still feel okay. I learned about a study about people with PTSD. And they found that when people experienced horribly traumatic events, if they felt like they could do something, they didn't have long-lasting negative effects psychologically. I thought, "If I can give kids a position of power to look at these things, then they can look at it as though, 'I can do something about this.'"

And even if it's just, "I can do something about this myself, I can ask myself, what do I think about when I see people of different races or from different cultures and what can I do to make sure that I'm not perpetuating oppression." Even if we look at it that way, it still gives them power and it's less likely to traumatize them.

My job as an educator is to help them see the truth, but not be traumatized by it. I want them to know that I've got them. And their grownups got them. I want to reaffirm that they are not alone — they just have to trust me first. But building that kind of trust requires intentionality. I can't do it when I first meet them. I must build them up first and create that container where we keep us safe.

What do I want for them? I want them all to come out of it with the skills and tools that they need to realize that what's important to them is important, no matter what anyone else says. And that the way that they learn is a good way to learn, no matter what anybody else says. And that the things that are the most important to learn are not things that you only learn so you can put them on your resume. They are not commodities.

Something meaningful is always better than something performative. So, we're not here for show, but we're here for real.

And there is always an opportunity for reflection and improvement. This year is my first one back in a classroom for seven years. With all of the COVID protocols, and smoke from the wildfires again, and all that we've been through this last year and some, we are all exhausted. Even the young teachers are calling out with injuries and complete exhaustion. The children are afraid of getting sick and are having an extremely hard time relaxing and just loving their lives. It's gotten to me and I let things slip.

The children were so happy to be in person again and they were all amazing the first two weeks. We were rolling with very little explicit infrastructure. Normally by the second week we have class jobs, we've

made and adjusted co-created agreements, we've got solid and practiced routines that ensure equity of voice, opportunity, and affinity. Not so this year. I was so tired and there were so many COVID protocols that I let it slip. We played and learned and it was great but I did not set the boundaries they needed. Anyone who teaches knows what follows that. Chaos.

It got to where I was saying "STOP" so many times that I started to dislike myself. I went back to square one and began to build those routines and boundaries carefully and with great respect for each of them, who they are, how they learn, and what they need. But it is hard to go backwards. So I decided to teach them MC Hammer's "Can't Touch This" dance. Now, when I say, "STOP!" they call back, "HammerTime!" and they do their dance. They have not quite synchronized yet but it's a joyous and beautiful thing. It makes them so happy and we all feel the freedom of that moment. They get to move and shout and smile.

I had decided joy was my theme this year but I let the system, the grind, the soul crushing weight of colonized schooling take it away from us. But that's over and we are moving forward with joy. It's my job to keep them safe. We keep ourselves safe.

Guiding Questions

- Lisa shares that there has been lots of discussion around "learning loss" and that they haven't lost anything of value and "they are thriving as much as a person can during a global pandemic." What have been your conversations, reflections, and intentions around the concept of "learning loss?" How do you find balance between meeting learning goals and the social and emotional needs of your students and community?

- Lisa states the importance of safety in her classroom and approach to restorative practices with the phrase "We keep us safe." What are the ways in which you and others focus on emotional and physical safety in your classroom or learning community? What does safety currently look and feel like and what are the deliberate and intentional ways safety shows up in your practices and policies?

- "My job as an educator is to help them see the truth, but not be traumatized by it." What are some ways that you help students step into their own truth and power? How do you encourage and create an environment for courageous conversations around challenging topics and information?

Grow Where You Are

Dr. Christopher Pinkney, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon

I had the opportunity to work with a school where the special education teacher played a key role in the implementation of Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions (PBIS). She was open and aware of the need for change. While not one teacher or school leader should lead the work, we needed a starting place where there was enthusiasm and general support for this essential work moving forward. It helped that she placed a high priority on developing meaningful relationships with her students, too.

To start, we identified opportunities to start where they were currently, which meant recognizing teachers and connecting current practices to the supports and interventions we would like to have our students experience. She identified staff who really valued the importance of being appreciated and we helped cultivate that value of appreciation into our work. This made the work of creating a caring and loving culture and learning environment both tangible and practical for the staff.

It was notable that the school staff had a high level of data sharing, which served as an encouraging sign of their culture. Teachers met regularly and shared information about their students, and each set of teachers appeared to sincerely care and develop an understanding of the challenges that each faced in their own classrooms. This made the use of data sharing between teachers easily accessible and created a culture that encouraged each person to work together for the greater good.

Like many of our efforts in implementation, some things that they actually started doing missed the mark, even though many people enjoyed it. They started a school store where kids were able to purchase items for good behavior throughout the week. Although the results did not align with their goals, the enthusiasm translated to a number of kids anyway.

The school's implementation efforts began with the most visible components of PBIS implementation, namely creating signage and acquiring rewards for students. While I typically recommend that schools begin by first examining the school's vision, mission, and values, this school's focus on easy-to-identify milestones actually served to get faculty, staff, and students on board with PBIS.

With greater acceptance by the school community, the PBIS implementation team felt they had time, and really permission to adjust and revise what PBIS looked and felt like in the school as the team gained greater understanding of both the PBIS framework and the evolving needs of the students.

With greater acceptance came greater participation. As more teachers came on board to help support the initiative, the team realized that it would be important to keep track of the data and; the key question that they presented to themselves was: "How do we make data review feasible and understandable for folks?" We continue to work to implement PBIS with this goal in mind.

Guiding Questions

- Dr. Chris shares that "some things the school started, really missed the mark even though they enjoyed it." Reflecting back on the past year, what are some things that you have tried to implement that are well-meaning but might have "missed the mark"? What were the efforts and what happened as a result? What have you learned and how can that advance your efforts moving forward?

- Dr. Chris states that the school he was working with "started with the most visible components" by creating signage and acquiring rewards for students. Where are you currently in how you are creating a positive school culture and climate for your students? Where have you started and where do you hope to be by next month? Three months? Six months? By the end of the year?

- The teachers asked, "How do we make data review feasible and understandable?" What would be the response to this question in your classroom and/or school community? What data do you use, particularly given our current context? What does it mean to your team to make your data review "feasible and understandable"?

Real Food

Kimberly Higareda

"I feel best at school when I can have a tasty meal
and feel full and ready for the day at school."

Bring In the Messiness

Dr. Kai Mathews, University of California-Los Angeles Center for Transformation, Los Angeles, California

When I think about collaboration and how we can sustain work that centers the lives and experiences of our students, I would have to harken back to my time at High Tech High, and the idea of a teaching partner. In that model, you're automatically paired with a teaching partner. And I think the nature of having someone who not only has the same students that you have, but also has the same intention and aim for your students, is imperative.

It's not just the fact that I have a teaching partner. It's the fact that we share an office. It's the fact that we share the same students. It's the fact that we have dedicated time to interact, discuss, problem-solve, and innovate together. So, the structure almost forces us to collaborate, whether we want to or not. A lot of schools do have grade-level teams, or subject-matter teams, but they don't set up the right structures or systems for those teams to be implemented at their full capacity.

Schools are built on collaboration.

This is why we share the same office. This is why we have the same students. This is why we have dedicated time where you're just meeting with your teaching partner. And my teaching partner, yes, he teaches the same grade, but he teaches a completely different subject, but that's how much emphasis they wanted to put on collaboration. It's not enough that you are with your subject matter teams. It's that you and this person become like parents to your kids. We see the exact same kids day in and day out, in the same grouping. So that impacts our discussion. We talk about our students all the time, during break, at lunch, quick notes before we exchange classes. When we would meet in the morning, we would talk about our kids as if they were our children. "Did you see what happened with Paul yesterday?" Or "Just a heads up: Nicole is not having a good day, you might want to check in with her." Together we can ensure there is overlapping support and care that our students are receiving.

Normally, I would never meet with a math and science teacher. I teach English and social science. Why would I need to meet with a math teacher? But it makes sense when you're talking about the entire scope of how we live in an integrated world and that we want our students to be thinking and learning in an integrated way.

My mom used to be a principal, and she would, at the beginning of the year, partner two teachers, completely different grade levels, and completely different subject matter. And every quarter they would visit their partner's classroom and sit in their class during their prep period. But they're not evaluating each other—they're just observing. Watching how their partner teaches, watching their interaction with students. My mom got so much pushback at the beginning of the year when she would do this. People did not want to be partnered with somebody or they didn't understand the purpose. And they didn't want to be giving up their prep period.

But by the end of the year, those partnerships ended up being the best thing. The teachers really appreciated it because they got to step outside their silo or their classroom and just open up and start to ask, "How can I pull some of this into my own classroom?"

And even though she didn't require them, those conversations morphed into, "How can we better our practices and how can we help each other get there?" This is what sustainable improvement looks like. It ended up being one of those strategies that helped bring people together, helped build a culture of we're here for each other, we're supportive of one another and increased collaboration and communication across departments, across grade levels. And so as a school, it really did a lot for the culture and climate.

If we're going to teach in a culturally responsive way that acts or allows education to be active liberation, then we need to bring in the messiness of the world and then lay it out on the table and be like, "This is what we got." And we can have different opinions about it. We can have different values about it, but how we manage and how we respond and how we create something out of this mess is what students carry with them ten years from now. They will never remember your worksheets. They will never remember the slide deck or the tests. But they will remember creating something or building something or solidifying some ideology, understanding different values. Those things have an impact.

After George Floyd's murder, five of my former eighth grade students emailed me and said, "Dr. Kai, all those conversations that we had around that book (The Hate U Give) are coming up again. I've already had this conversation because we were able to have it in class, in a safe environment. And I was ready for what this was causing in my friend group, in my house, in my society." They were prepared for it. And that is the gift of education. If we do our jobs correctly, we can prepare our students for the world and reality they are going to encounter as adults. It won't be new to them; they will have seen these challenges before and will be better equipped to address, navigate, or negotiate them.

And I think about Bettina Love's book and her message around thriving skills. Much of the tension that we feel in schools is because we don't teach with relevancy. Society is moving quicker than our teaching… It's outpacing us. We need to realize that we are teaching students that can become millionaires as an influencer or by investing in Bitcoin. What are thriving skills for these students? What kinds of skills and knowledge do we need every human to know? And how do we teach that?

Is our job as teachers to evaluate and assess or is it to support and nurture? I think if our primary goal as teachers was to support and nurture students, we would be doing things differently. Right? Sometimes I feel like we aren't asking the right questions or pursuing the right purpose in education. Like school discipline: Am I disciplining to punish the kid, or am I disciplining to change behavior? Those are two different things. And a lot of times they require two different types of actions or responses. If I'm doing punishment, yeah, expel them, suspend them, send them to the back of the classroom, send them out of the class, yell at them, berate them, punish them, make them feel embarrassed, make them feel how you felt when they talked back to you in front of class because that's really what it is: an ego trip. You were hurt. So now you're going to hurt the student. So that's punishment.

But if we're trying to change behavior, what does that look like? That looks like a conversation. That looks like multiple supports. That looks like understanding. That looks like empathy. And so sometimes I feel like we need to just shift our questioning just a little bit. Are we managing or are we supporting? Are we punishing or are we changing behavior? These types of things, I think, matter.

Bloom's taxonomy already says: create is at the top of the pyramid. And we know it, but a lot of times we're like, okay, we need to go through this process of remembering and analyzing, but if you have students create something, they're doing all those things. If you're tying it to not only what you're learning in class, but also tying it to what's in the outside world, they remember what they learned in class. Having students find their own solutions builds more of the social emotional skills through relying on their own

gut, instincts, and intellect; and bringing their own cultural experiences, knowledge, ways of being, beliefs, and values to the table.

And you can do that for math and science. Right now, we have real life math and science problems in the world. Take, for example, the eroding coastline. That's a real science problem. People's houses are falling into the ocean. Solve it. And this could be grade appropriate at any level. Why does soil break up? What makes something solid dissolve and crumble? I think that we're just not being creative enough sometimes.

At High Tech High, we would have the eighth grade shuffle. We'd walk in and every single seventh-grader has a name tag on the table. And all the seventh-grade teachers talk about strengths, behaviors, attitudes, issues, and challenges that they've seen with the students. But it's not in a negative way, or for the purposes of academic placement. It's more like Michael is being raised by a single mom and gravitates and responds well to male role models. It would be great if he can have a positive male influence in the classroom. Well, there is only one team in the eighth grade that has a male teacher. So, let's put him on this team. Or it could be something like these two kids cannot be in the same class. They can be on the same team, but when they're in the same class and they're next to each other, they're disruptive and combative with each other, there's a history there. Let's separate them. Or Rachel really works well with Pia, they push each other in positive ways — let's try to make sure they have class together. This is critical anecdotal data. I know my kids. I'm seeing what the best fit for them is. What environment works best and is most supportive for them.

So having this holistic response to how I support kids using this data is imperative. Thinking about all the possible issues that could be at play for a student is important for crafting a holistic response. We need to ask more appropriate questions. We need to pause and reflect more when problem-solving, so we don't automatically jump to low hanging fruit. Blaming the child is easy. Finding fault in the system and the structure of schools requires interrogation of policies, habits, programs, funding, objectives. It's objectively harder and messier, but you must wade through it.

Guiding Questions

- Dr. Kai shares that oftentimes schools do not set up "the right structures or systems" for teams to collaborate. What does collaboration mean to you? What does it look and feel like? What promotes and/or harms collaboration from your experiences?

- Dr. Kai shares the story about how teachers would partner up in her mother's school to "visit their partner's classroom, sit in their class during the prep period" – just observing and watching how their partner "teaches, watching interactions with students." She shared that by the end of the year the "partnerships ended up being the best thing." In your restorative and/or teaching practices, what opportunities are there for such partnerships? What attempts have been made in the past and how could you improve such partnerships moving forward? Who might like to participate and how?

- Dr. Kai shares that students "will never remember your worksheets" and that students will remember "creating something or building something or solidifying some ideology." What are you creating and/or building in your classroom? Is it of value and/or of importance? How do you know? What does that look like in your daily classroom practices?

- Dr. Kai shares that we have "real life math and science problems in the world" that need solving such as eroding coastlines and "housing falling into the oceans." What opportunities are available for students in math, science, and all core subjects to explore topics that are important and relevant to our pressing needs in our communities and on the planet?

Focused On Me

Kimberly Higareda

"I feel best at school
when I have one on
ones and I am focused
and paid attention
to by my teachers
whenever possible."

Chapter 3: How do we team and collaborate together?

Collective Impact

Dr. Rhonda Beasley, Director, Los Gatos Unified School District, Los Gatos, California

I think collective impact is really the way to go when we think about how schools can engage in systemic change and continuous improvement. Collective impact is an intentional way of working together towards solving a problem that is so complex, one single entity does not hold the answer. The impact is collective. And what's really interesting is that schools are already doing some form of collective impact but they don't call it that.

Collective impact also includes this idea of uniting around a common agenda of student wellness and student achievement. And with that common agenda, department and team members come to the table with what they do best (for example, academics, student services, special education, wellness and nutrition). And they make data-informed decisions by looking at impact and fidelity data to ensure they know why they are getting these outcomes. Their actions are data-driven and aimed toward the common agenda. And of course they regularly communicate with each other and with their stakeholders. That's all part of the collective impact framework. But what may happen in our schools today is they may not have all of those parts moving together. So our task is to help them formalize their processes so those five conditions are in place.

A challenge that I have found with collective impact is the motivation to engage. When you think about working together towards a common agenda, people begin to think, "Will my value be diminished? Is someone else going to be able to do what I do?" And the answer is, "No." There is still a need for student services. There is still a need for academics. Everyone's role is still important but what we are doing by working together is streamlining processes and creating a better experience. By working together, the impact we have is collective rather than isolated.

I also reflect on the implementation of collective impact. It's easier to sit above the fray and write about what needs to happen, but it's the nuances of how the teams are structured and how they work together that makes the difference. How do you build trust among people who are working together? How do you get them to communicate with each other? How do you get them to share ideas? Those are all the things that can move the collective impact. And a significant part of this work is the structures that must be in place for how people work together. That's where Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) comes in.

The MTSS framework creates structures for how colleagues meet to talk about data and ask questions about data. We want to shift away from simply throwing kids into interventions without any rhyme or reason or having a plan for how a student can be removed from an intervention. It is important to have processes in place for how students are identified for support, how we monitor their progress toward the goal, and how they are exited from that support. We refer to these as decision rules and we want to make sure we have those in place. That's how we'll know that students are getting the help that they need.

At the end of the day, we want to shift from a student-deficit mindset. Not thinking about which student needs help—which is after the fact—but more focused on how I provide support to each student.

Guiding Questions

- Rhonda mentions that some schools are already participating in "some form of collective impact." Given the description she provides, what are some current ways in which you and/or your team or school site are participating in collective impact?

- Rhonda mentions that "some of the parts may not be moving together" to make a real impact on student achievement and performance. What parts of your system are "currently working together" to make a difference? Are there parts that are working together to make a difference? If so, what is making that work successful? If not, what could be improved for greater collaboration?

- "Team structures" are emphasized as an important unit of change to make an impact. How do different parts of your school system (i.e., PBIS Team, Equity Team, SEL Team, Administration, etc.) communicate with one another? Brainstorm three or four ideas that could strengthen the communication channels between each department and consider drafting goals that align with one another.

Planting the Seed

Angelica Otero, Rialto Unified School District, Rialto, California

In my current role as a licensed clinical social worker, I provide mental health services to students receiving special education services grades K-12. I quickly observed the internalization of oppressive educational experiences and environments amongst the students I have had the honor to work with in this role.

This internalization has manifested feelings of hopelessness, despair, and helplessness, resulting in students questioning their worth and capabilities. Restorative practices are essential tools during the therapeutic process in effort to awaken the students' spirit. By planting seeds that are nourished through the therapeutic process students can begin to flourish into their genuine selves enabling them to become hopeful and confident, having a sense of purpose and value, and open to establishing relationships.

Providing psychoeducation related to the origins of the special education system post-Brown v. Board of Education, its history of systemic racism, and the impacts it has on an individual's mental health often validates students' experiences enabling the process of healing to begin. It's difficult to observe as a clinician the impacts that internalized oppressive experiences can have on a student's sense of self, self-esteem, capabilities, and feelings of worth.

I have found that defining internalized oppression and exploring students' unique experiences in the beginning phase of the therapeutic process assists in the development of building rapport and validates their experiences — which enables them to begin building a new sense of self and retell their narrative from an empowering perspective. I believe this is key when attempting to motivate students who present stagnant because of internalized oppression — "stagnant" meaning showing no activity that is being expected of them to improve their academic, social-emotional, and/or behavioral functioning.

Take, for example, a secondary school student who has internalized oppression resulting in him believing he is not smart because he is failing all his classes after he refused to complete his assignments. He used the term "antiquated" to describe his class lessons as the reason he has refused to complete the assignments. He is also able to complete a 366-page book in 3 hours — yet he was failing all his classes.

As a clinician it is challenging finding interventions that motivate students with this level of insight when educational environments struggle with the implementation of trauma-informed Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) and Positive Behavioral and Intervention Systems (PBIS) frameworks as well as to fully embrace the implementation of equitable practices. This hinders the establishment of creating a safe environment for students and school staff.

However, healing can begin to occur in the therapeutic process by exploring these experiences and the impacts on students' functioning (academically, socially, emotionally, behaviorally) as well as validating systemic inequities that have negatively impacted their self-esteem and functioning. I strongly believe that creating a sense of understanding, community, mutual respect, and safety for both students and school staff prior to a potential crisis and/or conflict is an essential component required to implement effective restorative practices.

Guiding Questions

- Angelica speaks to this notion of "internalized oppression" and its impacts on youth. When reflecting on her experiences, how are students internalizing negative messaging in their own lives? How do you see this being played out over time?

- The section suggests that "it is challenging" to find interventions that motivate students that are trauma-informed. How trauma-informed are your interventions? How do you know and how effective are they in helping students achieve both academically and socially?

- Angelica suggests that "healing can occur" in the therapeutic sense by exploring internalized oppression. In what ways can you create safe and brave spaces for students to discuss and share their experiences, particularly in core subjects, where they might not have felt like they belong?

P ▷ N

Juana Mendoza Cruz

"I want my classroom to feel like a place where I can have friendships that nourish me with love. The water flows into my rough patches in life meaning the POSITIVITY and love are greater than the NEGATIVE past."

The Shift Room

Meggan Mertz, Behavior Interventionist and Coach, Port Huron School District, Port Huron, Michigan

On my first day as a behavior coach at the high school a teacher said to me: "Just so you know, PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems) is a waste of time, especially at the high school level." Some teachers had a negative concept of my position and perceived work responsibilities.

When the Behavior Interventionist and Coach position was first created, not all teachers saw it as a position designed to help both teachers and students. In fact, some viewed coaching as a negative rather than a positive. Also, during the initial introduction of PBIS at the high school, there wasn't a lot of buy-in around its basic tenets. Some educators viewed the primary purpose of someone in my role as the person who develops the behavioral matrix and acknowledgement system. It wasn't until our school saw significant changes in student behavior, supported by data, that our staff began to shift their thinking about how to handle misbehavior and see the value in being preventative rather than reactive. But, once most staff embraced the system and believed in its merit, nothing could stop them. It was then that I knew positive climate change was not only possible, but inevitable.

I worked hard to create buy-in and trust in my role. I shared experiences about my own stepson who had challenging behaviors and felt isolated in school. I wasn't afraid to be vulnerable — I wanted my colleagues to believe in me and to believe in the system that we were creating.

Open and honest conversations with my school principal also helped to shape my new role. I appreciated his openness and his response was simple: "How are we going to move this work forward?" I also worked closely with Glen Champion, a paraeducator in the building, to help change the culture and conversation around positive behavior rather than negative. After days of brainstorming and planning we developed the concept of the SHIFT room to help combat the continual disruptions happening in the classrooms so that teachers had time to teach.

We brainstormed tons of different names but kept returning to the concept of shifting. Switching How I Feel Today (or SHIFT) would hopefully help shift some of the negative thoughts surrounding behavior change. It's a shift in the teachers' beliefs in how to handle discipline in the whole school, and the administration; it's a shift in students' beliefs about themselves and their classroom communities; and it's a shift in the culture in the building. So, no matter what, it is just that — a SHIFT. And in our school, it has become a way of life.

To preserve the integrity of the SHIFT room, we spent many hours working with staff on how to use the SHIFT room properly, including what it was and what it wasn't. In the beginning, we saw kids that were sick or thought it was just a quiet place to work. That's not the purpose of the SHIFT Room. We worked with staff on why a student should be SHIFT-ed or why students should SHIFT themselves.

In the beginning days of the SHIFT Room, students were asked to fill out a graphic organizer that explained what happened. We really thought that it would just be that easy, that we could just say, "You have to fill this out, and then you can go over it with us." And especially at the high school, we found that

the last thing students who need a SHIFT want to do is write down what they're feeling at that moment.

Once we got the SHIFT program underway, students started to see that we wanted them back in class. Mr. Champion's big saying is, "Go to school." And that's what he says all the time. 11 minutes or less is the length of an average stay in SHIFT. But we've also changed a lot of things — there's so much that we have adapted as time has progressed.

For example, we strive for no technology, but sometimes, if that's what's going to calm a student down (for example, listening to music for five minutes or playing a game) to have a conversation, then to us it's like, "Why not?" Sometimes that is where the difficult part is, because we don't want to undermine anyone or their rules, but we want students to feel like they can have that spot to vent and self-regulate. If we approach an angry student with, "Put your phone away!" then the conversation won't take place.

The kids always say that they like the fact that they are heard. So, I believe the SHIFT room is just that, it's just a place to listen and process what is going on around them. I feel like having that person just to listen to what they have to say truly makes a difference; it often changes the whole dynamic because it's not often that students feel validated. A lot of times, the kid wants their way, but sometimes just hearing what they want is enough for them. Students appreciate having the freedom to say I need space; the freedom to make a bad choice and learn from it; or the freedom to process what they are going through without judgment.

Honesty is most important between Mr. Champion, myself, and the students. They know the importance of telling us the truth. We know that it might get stretched, but usually we get the point. We say, "It's a two-way street. You have to be honest with us, because that's how this works." And I think just getting to know us and the humor we use helps, because then they start to trust us, but we also both know a lot about what kids like, so we're able to drag them in.

I firmly believe that by learning about the world our students live in, we get a front row seat into their perspectives. I once stopped a student in the middle of an argument with an administrator by saying, "There's a new Trippie Redd concert, their album is dropping on Friday." He looked at me and said, "How do you know who Trippie Redd is?" I think that's almost key. Mr. Champion and I view making a connection as the single most important thing an adult can do in order to identify with this generation. In addition, admitting that we make mistakes is huge, because then a student will feel safe to make one themselves.

The SHIFT room is about a shift in attitude or saving face when they are wrong. I think the SHIFT room is unique because students are allowed to get emotional and go back to class without penalty or embarrassment. Teachers and administrators have been vital in the success of our SHIFT program. Everyone in our building has played a role in making the room what it is, because they've supported it even when it felt like it wasn't working. Once students learn to self-regulate, many don't use the SHIFT room anymore, because they have the skills they need to self-regulate and monitor when they're upset, before they blow up.

We have over 70 staff members in our building. So you think, if one kid comes from every classroom, we're going to be pretty busy. The teachers at Port Huron High School know the importance of trying to talk with their students first. They would talk to students and they would try things in their room, rather than just sending a student or just automatically letting them go. Sometimes they'll say, "I know you're upset, but could it wait until after I finish my instruction?" And that kid might then even forget about it, or come

later. So they've learned strategies to handle problems in the room to avoid taking advantage of the room.

Mr. Champion and I do a newsletter every week where we put out our data and share strategies. Because of my role as an interventionist and coach, part of my job is to coach teachers and offer coaching services to those that have a high number of SHIFTS in a month as support. For example, I might go into a room that has over 40 SHIFTS in a month and say, "I've noticed you've had a lot of shifts. Can I help, so that we can figure out together a way to solve the problem?" I also make sure they know that I don't know every answer. I get many of my strategies from what I call my "teacher toolbox," which is simply just a collection of strategies, interventions, and resources I have learned thus far in this role.

I believe that when teachers react to persistent misbehavior in the classroom as number one, then they are saying that those things are more important than learning. That sends a really big message to kids. If a teacher is constantly dealing with a kid on their phone, then that behavior becomes more important than what they're supposed to learn.

We have learned that not all behaviors can or should be addressed through the SHIFT room, because there's some things that are more restorative in nature or that may take longer than a typical SHIFT session. But we are committed to continuing the SHIFT room as part of our restorative work, alongside other restorative practices that help students, teachers, and administrators address behavior affecting others and/or the learning community.

Guiding Questions

- "Just so you know, PBIS is a waste of time," was one of the first comments Megan received while trying to introduce a new approach to student behavior. What is your approach to change? How do you and/or others in your spaces respond to change?

- How difficult or challenging is it for you to gain support for restorative practices in your school? How challenging is it for you to gain support for PBIS in your school and/or classroom? What are specific challenges you and/or your community face?

- The SHIFT room is described as a "place to listen and process what is going on" for students. Where are the safe and healing spaces in your classroom practices and/or school? What can you let go of to make a difference in how your students show up? What do you need to pick up?

Depression

Kimberly Higareda

"I feel best at school when I as a student am able to express the problems Im going through."

It's Not Magic

Dr. Felicia Singleton, San Diego County Office of Education, San Diego, California

I taught kindergarten for about seven years and after I became pretty bored with that routine, decided to go back and became a school counselor. After serving in that role for ten years, I went into administration.

I didn't learn about the term restorative justice (RJ), but I feel like it found me because it named how I am and how I move in the world. I believe that restorative principles and philosophies are who you are. You can learn them, but some people are just wired that way. So what was important for me, especially teaching kindergarten, was that students—even at that young age—felt seen, validated, and heard.

The thought of parents sending us their children is a big deal that I don't think we really reflect on enough as educators. But when you talk about handing your children over to other adults, this organization, this community—the thought of a child being unsafe, fearful, targeted, or harmed in any way is unacceptable. Far too many kids are in school just counting down the seconds until school ends.

I don't want that for anybody's children. And when I became a parent, I especially didn't want that for my children. So I try to operate in a way that always allows for young people to be able to communicate and tell me what's going on, tell me what they're feeling.

I've always looked for this way to disrupt those practices and belief systems. I already knew that the most marginalized populations are disproportionately suspended from school or expelled from school—those who are Black, brown, Latinx, Native American, and those with disabilities.

I recall applying for a job where I would be responsible for reviewing all of the district's recommendations for expulsions and suspension appeals. I went into the interview with current data on exclusionary practices and who has been impacted most—Black children. But to the panel, it was cause for concern as their takeaway was that as a Black woman I would inappropriately use my position of power to help Black students. The hiring manager literally said, "You're by far the top candidate. We want you, but there was a concern by the panel that you're only going to help Black kids." I was blown away. Even more so that this came from a fellow Black educator.

I told him I'm going to help those students that need somebody to stand in the gap for them. And if the data is telling us it's children that look like me, so be it, and I'm not going to apologize for it. So I hung up the phone and went about my business. Shortly thereafter I was called, and offered the position. From the moment I stepped into that office, I saw what I would read about. I saw that data come to life. I saw Black children coming in for a zero-tolerance offense.

And it wasn't until I ran a hearing in front of one -too -many attorneys that I realized that our zero-tolerance policy didn't mean anything. I didn't even know this as a principal. The policy was a smoke screen because the California Education Code gave five reasons why you could be expelled. Everything else, you have to have an alternative.

You must correct that behavior with something that's meaningful. And that connects to the action. So, I went to my chief and he was like, "There's this thing called restorative justice," and they had just done

training with the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) and a couple of other restorative trainers. So he brought in a practitioner and said, "National Conflict Resolution Center is going to hire this person part-time, you're here at the district, y'all meet each other, figure out how to make this work in the expulsions' office."

Her name was Justine. In every single opportunity that came up, Justine was like, "Let's go." I went to our restorative justice mediation program and was trained. I met people up and down the state. I went to IIRP and became certified and then got in contact with others. In 2016, I was included in a group invited to Washington D.C. to talk about restorative justice practices.

I just took everything I could and learned about it, but it took a good year before I realized the continuum. I didn't understand it. So once I realized that this is what it is, then I had to figure out how to insert it. With the expulsions, I decided that if it wasn't one of the "big five"—those mandatory reasons—we would consider utilizing restorative practices as an alternative. We had a group of high school principals that said, "We're willing to take this journey, we want to learn more about this." Those principals were selected as our pilot schools, where in any case that comes from that pilot school, I would contact the principal and offer a restorative option to the family.

When listening to students' stories behind their expulsions, we always heard from kids that things were happening in their personal lives that impacted their decision making. When we could offer that restorative option, I would just see this deescalation of tension.

The students would visibly relax, drop their shoulders, when they would see a Black girl walking in, like "Hi, I'm Felicia, I'm the Program Manager." And when I could tell them, "This is not going to be on your record, we're going to go through the restorative process," people jumped at the opportunity.

Educators initially didn't believe in it. They were like, "No parents are going to want this." But the feedback was powerful. It was powerful for the adults, the vice principals, principals, teachers involved, both families. Every single time we did a case at that level, it was very impactful, very powerful.

I've always been into that social-emotional domain of education where we focus on how to educate the whole child. How do we help children bloom and blossom into all of their potential and their purpose?

I was very naive because I thought we wanted to dismantle the zero-tolerance policy. I was so excited at that board meeting and was not prepared for the pushback that came from the union, site leaders, and various stakeholders. Many still followed the false myth that they were "safer" with a zero-tolerance policy. Many felt like this was going to be one more thing dumped on their plates and that their power was going to be taken away.

My response was to just have those conversations and really demystify what restorative justice is. It was sold as the alternative — you can't suspend, you can't expel. Many staff members felt like they had no tools in their toolkit. The system isn't set up to have those conversations.

So being able to tell board members and leaders that this is an opportunity for us to unpack what caused the harm and to get to the root of the issues and then hopefully give some tools and strategies and support to shift that behavior long term. Ultimately our students are going to graduate and become our community members, our neighbors, and what kind of adults do we want?

Another strategy that I have used is when I speak to adults, I relate restorative justice or restorative practices to their work. For example, I might ask, "How do you want your principal to approach you?" Do

you want an administrator to just say you're not cut out to be a teacher, you're gone — or do you want somebody to have a conversation and coach you?

The reality is that restorative practices are slow. It's not magic. I heard a very well-known researcher and scholar say, "These circles ain't magic." It takes an investment in human capital and resources, and building trust and building community.

If I could talk to educators, leaders, and decision-makers, my advice would be to not start at the top, most intensive tier; instead, start with community building and try to shift your entire culture, because it's kind of hard to repair a relationship if nothing has been established.

This work is not magic — it must be a part of the culture of everything we do.

Guiding Questions

- Dr. Felicia shares that "parents sending their children is a big deal" that we often do not really reflect upon enough as educators. If you are a parent, family member, and/or caregiver, what resonates with you in this statement? If you are an educator, what does it mean to you to have families send us their children to our classroom and schools? How do we honor such a gift and trust that is bestowed upon us? Can we communicate that expression to others?

- Dr. Felicia shares her story on how she met a restorative justice trainer and how that ignited her work in the district's mediation program. Who is igniting your passion for restorative work? Is there a group and/or organization that you are involved in to spur your growth personally and professionally? What else do you need in your practice to feel fulfilled and complete to be inspired and engaged?

- Dr. Felicia shares that restorative practices are "slow" and that "it's not magic." Her suggestion is one that invests in "human capital and resources" and "building trust." As you consider your ways of connecting school-based teams and teachers and community, what's the "slow" process of building trust?

The Long View

Mikki Cichocki, Program Specialist, Youth Court, San Bernardino City Unified School

I work for the school district and with counselors, interventionists, and psychologists to best support our young people. But when those systems are not operating, students fall to our department and we are oftentimes their last chance trying to catch them up in our spaces. Recognizing that our work is about changing behavior, our department has changed from "youth services" to "positive youth development." Because much of our office is focused on attendance and discipline, Tier 1 restorative practices are critically important for our systems and outcomes for our kids.

One of the things that was the most difficult for our staff is the reality that our students are what would be referred to as students who are facing intense challenges and have experienced severe trauma, kids we would consider Tier 3 kids. These are the kids that have been in trouble or are in trouble, and there's no magic bullet. It's not like suddenly they walked in our door and they're going to be—poof—changed. What it comes from is that we work with them on behavior like other people work on academics. Because a classroom teacher doesn't have that kind of time. Especially at high school, you've got 50 minutes to do all the academics. It's hard to take that time to teach behavior as well.

A big example I always share is with profanity.

I had one young lady that it took me seven months to break her from cussing all the time at Youth Court. Her potty mouth was off the chart. And then suddenly, I realized I hadn't heard her say anything, but she made up words like "for shizzle," she would say. And somebody started to say something and I'm like, "Okay. Stop for a second. Tell me the last time you heard her actually use a cuss word." And they had to stop because they hadn't realized that she'd stopped cussing because their picture of her was still of her in the past. I said, "She may cuss at school, she may cuss at home, she may cuss in the streets, but she's not cussing here." She understood the code and the expectation. What we learned was you must teach students the art of code switching.

Another example: We had a phone on the wall by our check-in desk, and a student was on the phone. I'm standing at the front of the desk talking to folks that are working there and some other kids that are standing there, and the kids on the phone. And suddenly, he just kind of lets loose with some expletives and I look at him and I'm like, "Hey, Hey. I'm right here." And he's like, "Oh my gosh. Sorry, Miss C. I'm talking to my mom. I didn't see you standing there." So, I realized, that's the language of his home. Our staff doesn't have that language at home. They've been raised to believe that excessive cussing is not acceptable. But he knew, the minute he saw me there, and was very contrite because he knew that wasn't acceptable to me. And he would not have talked that way in front of me, but he was talking to his mother.

To implement restorative practices, you have to have flexibility. You can't be rigid. You have to be willing to work with the partners that want to work with you, even if they are not your traditional partners. And be willing to look and reach out and figure out how to make connections. If I had to offer any advice, I would say: Be creative. Be willing to adapt and change. Think about succession planning as folks retire and leave. Hire people that actually fit the need that you want. Make sure they have the heart and the

understanding of what it takes to do this kind of work because it isn't easy. You have to have flexibility. You can't be rigid. You have to be willing to work with the partners that want to work with you, even if they are not your traditional partners. And be willing to look and reach out and figure out how to make connections.
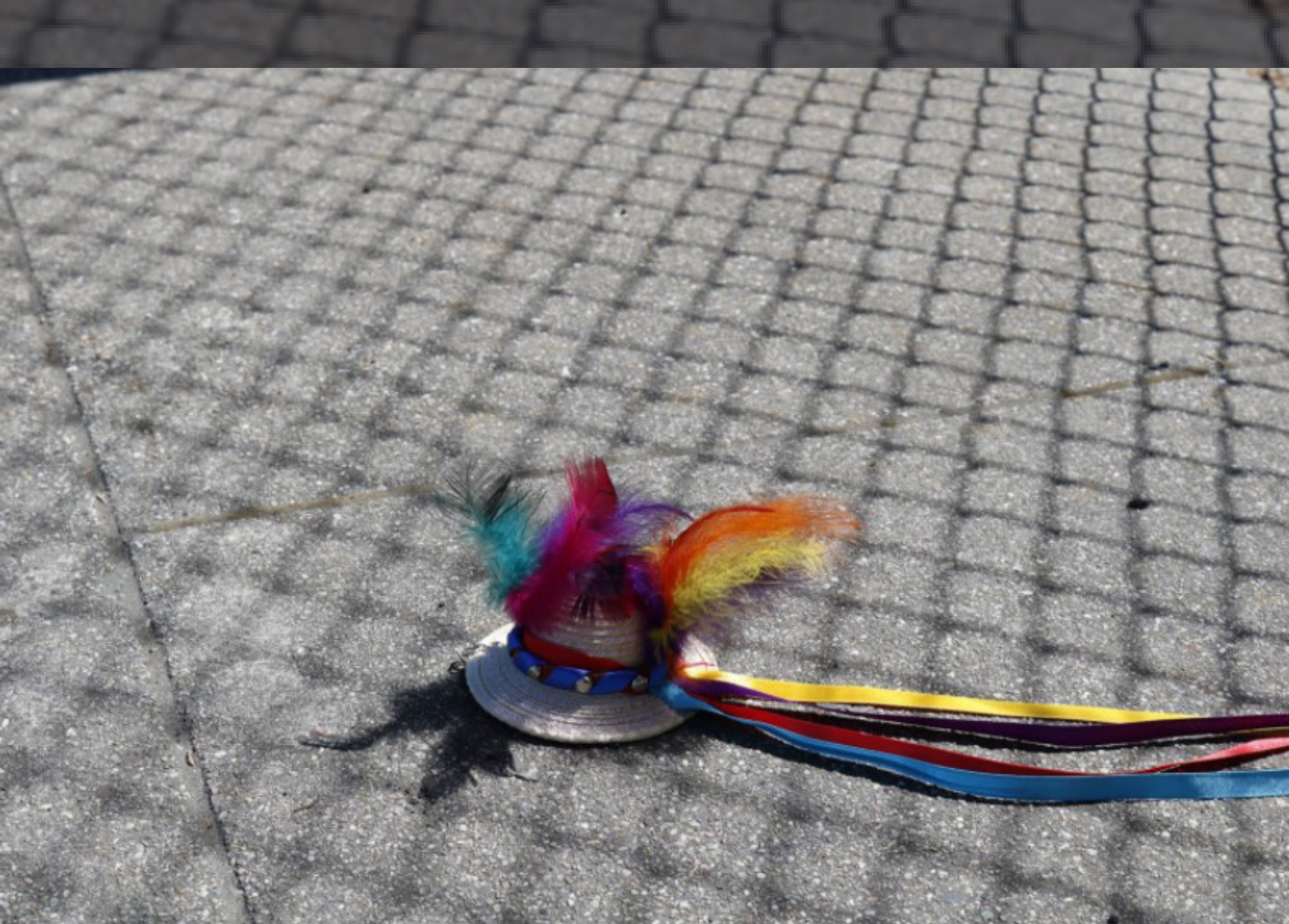
For example, for several years we have hosted an adventure camp with the San Bernardino City Police as part of the Department's community policing initiative. We have found that letting the students see that police are people too is a meaningful experience. The students learn that officers have kids and families and lives, and they laugh, and they play games, and they swim, and they fall, and they stub a toe and hurt themselves just like everybody else.

As you reflect on how to implement restorative practices, jump in with both feet and remember what the mission is, which is trying to engage kids in their school in a larger community, helping them change behavior, helping them become the adults that we want them to be. And you must give both yourself and the students grace, because if you're really trying to do those things, there must be a teaching and learning experience. People often make assumptions that law enforcement officials, like police officers or district attorneys, don't have the heart for the work. And I think that's a mistake that gets made too often. Sometimes folks are constrained by a job, but it doesn't mean that there aren't people who don't want to do the restorative work.

When we look at the work, we tend to look at people who think like us — but that doesn't change the dynamic, that doesn't change the conversation. That's not how change happens. Change happens by finding those partners that aren't always thinking like us but may have the heart for the work and showing them how the work can be done in cooperation or collaboration. That's where change gets made.

Guiding Questions

- Mikki states that the department she works in changed its name from "youth services" to "positive youth development." What are your thoughts about this name change? Are there phrases or ideas that create either positive or negative associations? What are they and does anything need to change on how we describe who we are?

- Mikki shares a brief story about helping students to "learn how to code-switch." What are your thoughts around code-switching and helping students to act and be in certain spaces?

- "In order to implement restorative practices," Mikki states in her section, "you have to have flexibility. You can't be rigid" and encourages us to "work with partners." What does it mean to you to not be 'rigid' in our implementation of restorative practices? What parts of restorative practices are essential and what parts are flexible for you and your community?

CulturX
Juana Mendoza Cruz

"I feel best at school when we all acknowledge our roots because we freely express them through the other side of the gate with lit colors and tastes."

Chapter 4: How do we sustain and grow this work over time?

The Village Takes Us

Dena Oneal, Educator, Nashville, Tennessee

I taught English, history, math, and social skills at the high school level and really started embedding social-emotional work in trying to teach my kids. They had ways to get what they wanted, but it was inappropriate. I was trying to teach them more appropriate ways to express their needs and be heard, because that's a lot of it.

Kids felt like they weren't being heard. They felt like things were unfair. They felt like somebody wasn't listening, or that somebody was punishing them for being the way they were. When I looked at a lot of my caseload, a lot of my students were also very diverse.

There weren't a lot of Caucasian students who were getting certifications on their Individual Education Plans (IEP), running into trouble with the security team at school, ending up in the principal's office, or being part of the many chats I had with the school resource officer or the parole officer assigned to my school. It tended to be students who were Hispanic, African American, and/or male, and although there were females, they also tended to be Hispanic or African American. Why were these students being picked on? There were other students who were Caucasian engaging in similar behavior.

Our school response to intervention behavior team started looking more closely at our Tier 1 restorative practices on how we approach students with behavior and assessing what adjustments we could make. Now, did it help that we were also the school of the arts for the entire district, so we had many drama students at the school? No, that did not help. There was a lot of "drama" going on but teaching teachers to tell the difference between a crisis with a student and drama with a student was key.

I ended up working for my local county school system as an Response to Intervention (RTI) specialist working with pre-K through fifth grade. The high schools were doing restorative justice, which is how I first learned about restorative and circle practices. The schools were doing all types of things and we worked with them to first set up their tier one space in school. Really teaching not only the school, but the community that the behavior and social-emotional rules didn't exist just within the school walls. For example, I really got into Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in terms of working with Vanderbilt University and buses became a big project. Kids were saying, "Well, I'm not at school." We were trying to teach them, "You are at school. This is traveling school property." We really started to educate the community around the children and people who touched base with the children. We let them know what we were doing within the school walls and that we had those expectations outside the school walls too.

Parent buy-in was also important, because if we didn't have that, that's a hard thing to overcome. Kids know when the teacher requires one thing, but if Mom doesn't reinforce those values at home, they're probably not going to do it then. A key component of our outreach included working with parents to help them understand we were all on the same team.

We ultimately saw a reduction in discipline referrals because we were educating adults in addition to the

children and making it clear that we were all learning about this, and we were all together on this. The adults were just putting it on the children in the old model. I think getting that mindset to change was important, and once it finally clicked, it was amazing to watch.

We developed a system where we paired small groups from different grade levels to work with each other. We paired kindergarten with fifth grade, first grade with fourth grade, and second grade with third grade. We also incorporated adult staff into the groups. For example, the janitor might have a group of those kindergarten and fifth graders, and the cafeteria ladies might have another group of those children. That really helped kids and adults see a bigger picture of things and form relationships that normally they never would have formed. Then we saw that play out in the cafeteria and on the playground or in the bus line. That was amazing to watch. It really was.

By the time we got to the point where we could have those cross-groups with different adults in the building, we'd already done five years of work in setting up and getting up to Tier 3 work with students by conducting student surveys. We had our PBIS in place. At that point, we were able to take that next step and do small social emotional groups.

The school guidance counselors worked together with the administration team to make the groups and assign adults. Once every nine weeks, we had a time in the master calendar where the principal just shut everything down. It was typically in the morning and set aside 45 minutes once every nine weeks. It was probably on a half day.

Teachers had their assigned list. I trained my older kids to go pick up the younger kids and meet me at my room. Then we had a topic from the guidance counselors each time that worked on a social-emotional goal. We always would try to wrap it back around in literacy, math, history, science, or some type of classroom standards. We taught a lot about empathy, thinking outside the box with kindness, and so much more that first year, and that little group gained so much confidence that I could just see them changing. That was just wonderful to see.

It is important to stay in the moment with your students especially if you tend to want to stick to a particular plan — the ability to change constantly is key. In many ways this idea of changing plans and perspective was inherent in the work that I was doing as an RTI specialist as we are always moving kids in and out and being flexible.

We found in our elementary school setting that students who were male and African American were getting the bulk of the disciplinary reports and we needed to take a really hard look at why that was happening. The next step was to address the data by coming up with a plan of change that looked at where the students were in their skills and how we could help move them to where they needed to be. I'm proud to say we were able to open our eyes to what we were looking at and reflect and change, and see the numbers really settle out more into what was being seen nationwide. You never say behavior will be zero because there's always going to be some (mis)behavior.

Finally, you must really know your kids. I'll never forget the lesson Mr. Mills taught me about this.

I met Mr. Mills during my very first school job. He always sat in his office with a coffee cup. He was an older gentleman, didn't get around real fast, and had been a principal for a long time. He was principal of a rural school. He knew I needed to see and know the kids' homes to understand the children and where they're coming from.

One day he said, "You're going to cancel your classes and y'all are going to do home visits. Go see as many as you can." The resource teacher, who was from the area, was assigned as my partner. We drove around and we talked to those who were willing to talk. Some were not. I found out which roads not to drive down because I might get persuaded to leave because they were that unfriendly. I found out which of my kids were living without running water. I found out which of my kids didn't have electricity, so they were using lanterns. I had kids come in with lantern burns or oil burns where the lantern had spilled on them. They were washing in the creek. I had to really be in the homes and see the kids in their own environment to understand the kids and where they were coming from.

That was a gift Mr. Mills gave me to start me off the right way to be the adult the kids needed me to be. Ever since then, I have always tried to learn about a kid's home life, if the family was willing to allow it. Sometimes they weren't willing to talk, and that's okay. I had to not be offended by it. There were instances where kids or their families were ashamed, or embarrassed. As they got to know me—and luckily since I've worked with multiple grades, or I had kids for multiple years—that really helped my relationship building. I really think that relationship building is just incredibly key. You're just not going to affect change unless you build a relationship with students. My first week of teaching every fall and every spring was never about academics. It was all about building those relationships.

You've got to build them and maintain them with your students and with your coworkers, because the way through this is to work together. "No man is an island," I think is the quote. No teacher's an island either. Holding onto each other, finding ways to do that, to help lift each other up and support each other. That's what's going to work. Then triage your students. Take a good look at the data. It's scary, but once you do, it's amazing because you really can move mountains that way. You must have a group of teachers brave enough to do it, and they're out there. So many teachers are so brave in what they do in trying to help students. It's just harnessing that power. The more you can harness that power together, I think the more that you can do as a cohesive group.

Guiding Questions

- What efforts have you made involving families, classified staff, and other community members in building the climate and culture of your schools? What would be the first steps in doing so?
- How might opportunities to work with students across grades help with your implementation of restorative practices or social-emotional learning?
- Take an opportunity to lift up and support a colleague or coworker whose efforts may have been under-recognized.

A Heart for Our Kids

Melissa Rubio, Upland School District, Upland, California

We are feeling the collateral damage of a war zone.

I've always had a heart for kids who traveled to their own beat. The largest portion of my tenure in education has been in alternative education and independent study; so, the actors, the singers, the kids who are working full time already, or the kids who just didn't fit into high school life. I love these kids, but they often shared how they were made to feel less than. I always believed that if schools were open more and had more support, it would be a better place for students to get everything they needed as human beings—from good food to counseling to people to advocate for them.

I didn't stick to the typical curriculum, and I didn't have to follow the exact letter of the script. I didn't like that kind of teaching, because to me, that wasn't creative. So, when a kid comes, you already know about life's experiences and can then read a book of his choice from an author he enjoyed or poetry he enjoyed. It was so much more fun for me as a teacher to support that kind of learning.

I had one kid who joined the Marine Corps, and his recruiter was going to pick him up at 4:00 a.m. the next morning. I was with him and other students' kids at night school finishing his last four credits that day so he could bring the certificate of completion to his recruiter to get picked up for bootcamp at four in the morning. I'd have other kids email me and say, "Thank you so much for staying with me and helping me get to my next chapter in life." I love that kind of stuff.

Then I was pushed into becoming an administrator.

I would find ways to avoid suspending kids because I knew it didn't serve them, but sometimes I was punitive without knowing it. I had to deal with the culture of the school and teachers who preferred to suspend students first. I had to reflect on my own stuff too, because a lot of times I recruit the help of diverse voices. I had this one coworker, an African American teacher and good friend from Oakland. And I remember he used to raise the mirror and hold the mirror up to me, he's like, "Mel, don't suspend that kid. Why are you suspending that kid?" And I said, "Well, he's fighting with this girl," and he goes, "No, bring those kids in. Let's sit down and talk because you don't need to suspend him."

On the other hand, sometimes I was restorative without knowing it because although I hadn't been schooled in restorative practices yet, I was always trying to find a different way to help a kid out of trouble. I remember one kid whose father was on the local police department's radar for drug trafficking and this kid—a smart kid, good attendance, "A" student—stole computer parts out of one of the classrooms.

So we had to call the police. When they went to go get the computer parts back, it turns out this kid, of course, at his father's urging, was stealing to fence the items and stuff. So I advocated with the police department to not press charges with this kid to let them just transfer to another school because he was a good student, but he just happened to live in a situation where dad was a drug dealer. But that's not

the fault of the kid. The kid was just doing what his dad told him to do, right? I would go to expulsion hearings and say, "Don't expel this kid—even though we had to put them up by law—please don't expel because he's a good kid and kicking him out of school will not help him." So that's what led me to restorative justice.

I think that restorative practices really solidified for me that everything is relational. I used to get folks that would say, "What is this stuff? This is just woo woo. Basically, it's saying that you don't punish people. There's no consequences," and that whole thing. And then I would have to adjust and find a way to build a relationship with the worst doubters and be very punitive in their practice. Instead of a "consider the deed, not the doer," approach, I worked to demonstrate that everyone should have the opportunity for redemption. Most adults are given redemptive opportunities when we make mistakes. Everybody makes mistakes and so do children.

Just because we have our credentials doesn't mean we've arrived. We're always evolving. We're always learning new practices because our schools don't stay stagnant. The students we have today are different from the students that we had ten years ago and they are a product of the culture and the greater society they are born into. How are we addressing their needs? And how are we serving their needs?

Because isn't that what we do? That's what we do, that's what I assume teachers come into the profession for. So then we just start looking at what type of student excels and does well and how do they do that? And then evaluating what type of students typically have problems and how we are helping them to resolve those problems, so we can put them in a place where we can successfully help them to graduate.

What's our goal as educators? At the end of the day, it's to get them to walk across the stage, change the tassel, earn their credits, and go on to a successful life beyond our hallways. That's what I tap into, and then I tap into how we best prepare them to be that person. I always hold up people in history that have the trappings of American success that weren't always your "A" student who wasn't the great scholar but has done very well in American society. Let's look at how we play into the system that indoctrinates kids into American culture, American life, and American success.

In a recent talk with about 60 adult educators I said, "Let's just think of great cataclysmic events in the last hundred years. How American many lives did we lose from the Vietnam War? How many American lives did we lose from World War II? How many American lives did we lose?" We are leaving or still in a war zone. When you look at the sheer numbers of Americans who've lost their lives during this war, with this virus, we're not done yet. We have collective trauma. And so, how are we addressing that as we are asking people who are still in the middle of a war to come back to school? They're afraid, they're traumatized, they're having high rates of anxiety and depression.

We are hardwired to be connected socially, and yet we haven't been able to connect socially. I can't see you in person or read your face because when we're in person and we're three or six feet apart, you've got to have a mask on. So, I can't read the little inflections and the little muscles that I'm supposed to read in your face. The non-verbal cues that I can't get on a Zoom, or in an email.

There's all this collective trauma and post-traumatic stress that we're having to face before we are even asking someone to go into a classroom and be relaxed enough to reach the cognitive portions of the brain to learn. We've got to address their sense of safety and love and caring and connection first before we can get to the learning part.

Remember that we're walking among the wounded and get out into your hallways. Get out of your office.

Get out from behind your desk. Get out into the hallways and just observe. Observe to see who's got a furrowed brow, who looks lost, who looks disconnected and connected. Even if it's just saying, "I'm checking in on you. I'm here if you need me. Seek me out if you need anything or you know anyone who needs something," and create that space of connection. Just use your intuitive instinct to check in with people and let your heart guide you to those people.

Guiding Questions

- Do you have someone in your life who "holds up the mirror" for you and allows you to reflect on what you are doing and the reasons why you may be doing it?

- How do you create those spaces to give and receive feedback?

- Reflect on a time when you experienced or observed an opportunity for redemption. How did that affect you?

- Check in with the next person you encounter and let them know you are available if they need you. Seek out someone you trust and check in for yourself. Share how you are feeling and think about what you need as well.

Free Spirited

Kimberly Higareda

"I want my classrooms to feel like a place where I can be a person with a brain not just a sheep and be free, throw my ideas and have attention on me."

This is a Movement, Not a Program

David Yusem, Restorative Justice Coordinator, Oakland Unified School District, Oakland, California

It's important to know that restorative justice (RJ) didn't come to Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) as an initiative or a top-down thing. Instead, we made an intentional push over time to really ask people to embrace a philosophy in a way of being in a set of practices rather than implementing a "program" or a "curriculum."

One of the reasons we haven't been a "flavor of the month" that's come and gone like so many others is because we focused on that philosophical shift, that culture shift, that way of being rather than, "Here follow these steps, do this one, two, three curricula, and then do this the next day, and then debrief that." It's much more a way of being with each other and embracing that. And so, when it came in, it came from the community. And I would say Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY) was responsible for partnering with the district in the early days of bringing it in.

And if you look at the history of RJOY at the time, Fania Davis (former Black Panther) was the executive director. Coming from the community into the schools, it really is the legacy of that social justice work, that community-based work that the Black Panthers were doing in Oakland. Because restorative practices came from the community into the district rather than into the district like most things—which would be from a staff person or a community partner or consultant that was hired to implement something—it came in a lot more organically. And after early success early at Cole Middle School, the district started to take notice.

Initially, people from the County would meet with people from the district, RJOY, and SEEDS Community Resolution Center (where I was working at the time). I was starting to learn about restorative justice (RJ) at that time and so I was coming into these meetings, and it was just a bunch of people acting as thought partners about how we can implement this in partnership with the community. And as a result, early on there were a lot of two-day trainings that were happening, and they were as part of the partnership between OUSD and RJOY primarily and Alameda County. And that started to seed RJ throughout the district and that's where some early adopters and leaders started to emerge.

This work really resonated with schools. But much of the work was still philosophical and centered around circle practices. And so, it didn't necessarily translate to whole school restorative justice. There wasn't really a whole school model yet, it was just trying to get people to do circles, trying to get people to be relational. The staff trained in RJ were essentially seen as firefighters — the professional person that you go to when there's misbehavior.

We also started getting resources based on the 2011 Urban Strategies Council report, which detailed the racial disparities of African American students at OUSD. As a result, we intentionally made RJ one of several strategies to eliminate our racial disparities, along with establishing an Office of African American

Male Achievement, positive behavior supports, trauma-informed practices, and social-emotional learning. We also obtained resources to create site-based positions, which we call RJ facilitators.

And so we began to have an organizational structure where we could train people and then coach them at the school sites through a process we call Model-Mentor-Transfer. When we train them, we model for them in the classroom and mentor them as they learn it. The knowledge and experience is then transferred through doing circles in their classrooms. And so we began to scaffold our training to implement whole-school restorative justice, focusing primarily on the proactive community building, but also responsive circles for dealing with harm and conflict and also providing individual support for students along the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework.

When we began to scaffold, our professionals better understood where they fit into the framework. Rather than feeling overwhelmed by the philosophy, teachers would understand, "Oh, Tier 1, that's my place. I can focus on that. Someone else will do the Tier 2 if stuff gets to that level. And if I do the Tier 1, it will make it so that it's less likely that all that other Tier 2 will happen." Although we can't prevent all harm, engaging in this scaffolded approach may make harmful incidents less likely because there are more opportunities for connection and the classroom is more engaging. I think it's important to try to convey this in our trainings — that you don't necessarily need to define restorative justice by a tiered approach; an easier way to talk about it with educators is to scaffold it so that people can understand it and connect it to something they already know, which is the MTSS.

But it would be a mistake to define RJ through tiers because then you're really breaking something that's this holistic philosophy and breaking it into parts, which was sort of contrary to the philosophy in a way. It's really a very Western thing to do that, to break things into parts and compartmentalize things. But at the same time, we saw a lot more people implementing restorative practices once they learned it in that way. And so, we scaffold our practices, but we make sure people understand that's not how it's defined. So now we've kind of crossed that river of resistance or the indifference or the ambivalence where at first, some people loved it, other people were like, "I'll wait and see. I've seen all kinds of things come and go in this district and I'll see if it sticks."

Teachers and principals have come to Oakland knowing that they can come to a district where there's RJ. And so, when I've done interviews with potential principals, every single one of them mentioned restorative justice as one of the things that drew them here. And so now it's really about capacity building. How can we train all the people that need to be trained? How do we continue to sustain this work with so much turnover?

Given the prevalence of staff turnover, you might only work with a principal for a short amount of time and then must start over with a new administrator and what they know and think about RJ. This is another reason why it's important to work with kids and teach kids how to participate and even lead restorative practices because the students are the ones that are here for 12 years—a lot longer than most adults.

Finally, we must do RJ with an anti-racist lens. For our district, that means using an anti-racist lens specifically because that's really where the racism lies. Our data shows that Black students are really experiencing racism at the highest levels, because they're being excluded from education beyond their percentage of the population. Because of our history coupled with the history of RJ in our district, it's always been an attempt to eliminate our racial disparities and to eliminate racism in our schools.

One thing that's changed over time through the lessons we've learned, is that we used to think that

practicing RJ automatically eliminates racism just because it's values-based, equitable, trauma-informed, and potentially allows every student who's in the room to feel like they're a part of that space and that their values are present. We used to think that if you just do RJ with fidelity in the classroom, that will itself eliminate racial disparities, along with other strategies like African American Male Achievement and targeted universalism.

But we realized when the numbers weren't changing; when the racial disparities persisted, even after we were doing this for many years, we realized, "Okay, that's not, so what will?" And we realized that we must be more intentional. We can't just do RJ and say that that is a practice that will eliminate racial disparities because although the use of restorative practices brought overall suspensions down — but of the suspensions there's still the disproportionality.

So now the focus is really on working with the adults and the student leaders around our own biases and our own racism and how that impacts the community positively and negatively, our own behaviors. We work with our Office of Equity and other departments to try and work collaboratively to do that. And so just within the RJ unit we have a restorative racial justice and restorative justice working group, where we have a smaller group of RJ staff that are working together to try and constantly weave together "the two RJs," as we call them: racial justice and restorative justice.

We participate in affinity spaces and support circles on racial justice and more specifically racism at the school sites and promote talking about it. We've also had about five or six book groups on the Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice by Fania Davis, where we gather people from all over the district and meet about five times over the course of six weeks to discuss the book and the connection between racial justice and restorative justice.

And so, for us, the only antidote to the root issue is to implement RJ with an intentional commitment to anti-racism. We are inspired by the concept of "absent but implicit," where the topic of race might be absent from the conversation because it's not directly being discussed, but it's present in a conversation between people working within that system simply by nature of being in that system.

Guiding Questions

- Oakland Unified School District's restorative justice practices are steeped in the community's history of social justice and anti-racism. What's your community's history with social justice and racism and how does it influence how you will approach your implementation of RJ?
- What are the current efforts in your school/district/community around diversity, equity, and inclusion, and specifically anti-racism, and how do they connect to the RJ in your setting?
- How might you make those connections more explicit?
- David describes how the tiers associated with MTSS don't align to the holistic practices of RJ, but that using some of the terminology helped to bridge the "river of resistance" that they encountered in the district. If MTSS frameworks are currently practiced in your schools, how do you understand how RJ will work with those practices?

All Are Welcomed Here

Antoinette Bailey, Emotional Health Therapist, Rialto Unified School District

As educators, we must recognize all the things that our students have gone through in terms of their own loss due to the pandemic. The loss of loved ones, friendships, and the ability to go out and play or be a part of a team. Some have lost housing, the community that they're used to, or have been displaced because of having to move around to make ends meet. Others have lost freedom—being able to eat or go out and enjoy entertainment as a family, either because of lockdowns or because of lost income. And perhaps more than anything else, there is also just that fear and wanting to be safe from the pandemic, the loss of normalcy and movement.

But we realize that all of us have had those similar experiences together, so it's kind of a collective trauma, or a major shift in how we live life. And so, if the teachers, administrators, and staff aren't aware of how they have been impacted by these changes, then I think that blindsides them to what our kids have experienced. And if you don't take care of your own needs first and fill your own cup, it's difficult to be able to give and be empathetic for the students who you're going to serve.

Sometimes the best way to help a student is to help empower and equip the people who are going to be serving the students. To that end, our focus when working with teachers is student engagement, relationship building, and getting to know your students. Because you really can't meet their needs if you don't know who they are, and you won't know what their needs are unless you get to know them, and that includes their family.

And so the plan for this year was to be prepared to have our social-emotional curriculum in place, and have our teachers trained on that. For example, we are training teachers to take five to ten minutes at the beginning of class to start with a check-in, a social-emotional activity that builds a relationship that helps us to get to know each other better. Just talking about different things and sharing the experiences that we've all had. An activity like this gives teachers permission to be able to first focus on the relationships and rebuilding what was lost during the pandemic. Our goal is helping teachers have a model to do that and feel better-equipped and empowered to do that on their own.

If we spend a little bit more time upfront investing in our students and building their relationships and a trusting environment, then that's going to give them more time for instruction and decreased distractions and interruptions. But if you don't make this upfront investment, then you're going to be continually stopping and starting, stopping, and starting, which is going to take more of your time.

Over the past year and a half, we developed equity supports, including multi-disciplinary or even multi-ethnic staff coming together to talk about equity issues openly. We used that time to talk about our biases and prejudices, and how those biases and prejudices influence how we see things, and how we view students. They can also impact student outcomes. For example, if I'm viewing a student and I see their behavior as violent or assaultive, and those are the words that I use to describe the student, then I may already be criminalizing that student.

And perhaps I'm using those words because of my own previous experiences, my own biases — implicit and explicit. But we need to talk about those things so that I can become aware so that we can make changes. Because if I diagnose a problem, that's the problem I'm going to treat. And the way I diagnose something is going to be the way I view it. If we are not able to have those open conversations, then I think that minimizes the work that we can do in moving forward to be equitable in our treatment of students and the services that we provide. And so we had to confront some of that, and some people were brave to talk about their experiences and how they may have been a part of the problem that we see that is happening systematically within our culture.

Why is it that we can look at data that will show African American boys being targeted and given harsher punishments for the same things that their white counterparts have done, but many educators still found this information disheartening and difficult to accept? That's why the conversations were eye-opening— they helped us realize that we can't continue down the same road, because now we're doing a disservice to students and families.

Or we're over-identifying certain students. Usually, our African American male students are overly identified as being emotionally disturbed or as needing special education and services. The rhetorical question can be, "Can we just remove them? Can they be in a different location so that we don't have to see them, deal with them so they don't disrupt our 'utopia'?"

It's important to challenge administrators and teachers to teach with a cultural lens. It's not about I don't see color, because then that's not being true either. Because obviously we all see color immediately, but it's about embracing that and understanding that, and then to be able to celebrate that in the classroom.

When students can't trust the adults in the classroom to advocate on their behalf, they don't want to be there. And then they're not going to be open or willing to learn. And then we're kicking them out and then we're just doing this self-fulfilling prophecy over and over of kicking kids out — and when they miss out on an instruction, the gaps get bigger. And then now as you're criminalizing their behavior, guess what? Now they're out in the community, not skilled, not being formally educated, not feeling like they have a sense of belonging or have much to offer — now we're just feeding into that pipeline to prison.

Let's focus on creating a culture of welcome for the students. And welcome, add an extra L, well-come so that when we're welcoming students we're also focusing on their wellbeing and we're promoting wellness. And when I think about creating a culture of welcome I'm thinking of hospitality. When someone's coming to your home and you make a date for them to come, prepare for that, get your house ready, make a meal, create an ambience and an environment that's inviting, that's warmly receiving people. And I would like for the teachers and administrators to adopt that same idea for their campus, for their school site, for their classroom, so that children can feel like they belong here. So, we're creating a sense of welcome, a sense of community, and being able to meet their needs so that we're engaging them when they come.

When your company comes in you don't just holler at the door, "Come on in," and turn your back; you greet them. On this day maybe it won't be a hug; it might be a fist bump or elbow bump, but it's eye contact, it's calling them by name, it's getting to know those names. And just creating that environment of showing love, showing a welcoming environment to them. That I want you here, and I'm happy that you're here, and I'm excited to see you. And I just think that just kind of sets the tone or sets the table if you want to get to know them. And then I think that will help go a long way in creating that safe environment so they can build trust, so that they are ready to learn, and then you're able to meet their needs as you're getting to know them.

And getting to know them also means getting to know their families; getting to know their backgrounds; and getting to know what they are coming to you with. And so, we want to engage their community as well, and that starts with their parents. And so that we can see the whole child, and embrace their whole family, and work together right off the bat, not waiting until a negative incident occurs to call home. But no, calling in to introduce yourself to say, I'm the teacher this year for your student, and I'm excited to have your student with me. Can you tell me something unique or special so I can get to know your student, and better serve your student, and better serve you, and we can work together in partnership to have a great academic school.

Guiding Questions

- Antoinette speaks to the idea of implicit biases when diagnosing problems. When you think about how your restorative practices work, what problem(s) are you trying to solve? Whose problems are they and how do you know?

- Antoinette speaks to the importance of "really getting to know your students" because you can't really serve kids unless you know who they are. Who are the students in your classroom? What intentional steps are you making to know who they are and who their families and communities are?

- The mention of bringing people of diverse backgrounds and experiences together to discuss difficult topics is noted. What preparations or groundwork might you create prior to such conversations in your own classroom and/or community? What resources are available to ensure a space is both brave and safe for all involved?

- What are some specific things that help to "fill your cup"? Share one or two ideas with those who you work closely with and ask them, "What fills your cup?"

- Over the next few days, listen for adults using language that may characterize student behavior as criminal or pathological. Without attempting to blame or shame the individuals using that language, share your observations in a meeting and discuss how to replace deficit-based language. Get support from others to engage in this conversation if you need it.

- Antoinette points out that how we diagnose leads to how we treat problems. In your current setting, what work have you done to diagnose the root causes of student behavior and how have you moved beyond blaming students, their families, and the community?

- Describe some ways that you have seen teachers create "well-come" in their classrooms and schools. What are some other ways we can create a sense of care for everyone's well-being while making them feel they are wanted and belong?

Horizon

Juana Mendoza Cruz

"I feel supported and connected in school when the adults in my life help me go to my horizon and help me plan a clear way towards my passion."

Where We Go Next

Dr. April Clay, Clay Solutions, Rialto, California

We've grown from doing community building, to social justice work through the Restorative Circles and Restorative Conferences in schools and healing circles in the community. About three years ago, there was a school shooting and a series of shootings in San Bernardino city that upset the community. In response to increased violence in the community, a local assembly member had one of their people reach out to me and asked if I would be willing to facilitate a healing activity. I agreed.

As a result, I facilitated a well-attended restorative circle with the community, which was more of a healing discussion than it was a true circle. In addition to the shootings, we were experiencing a lot of racial conflict in our community: Riverside, San Bernardino, and neighboring cities.

In my work, my team and I are often invited to facilitate healing activities with youth, parents, community organizations, and school personnel. In addition to the restorative work we've done over the years, the niche is centered on racial justice and equity. Usually we host reentry circles or conferences, community building circles, or custom restorative activities to repair the community after harm has occurred.

I loved restorative justice from my first introduction. My team engages in this work in school districts because it was first introduced to me as a parent. I attended training with a community of parents, teachers, police, and law enforcement. We had campus security as well as campus PD (police department), and the district chief of police was there. It was really meaningful to hear that they (police and the district) wanted another approach to school discipline. The fact that they were interested in another approach gave me hope, because we knew at that point, there was disproportionality in discipline practices with Black students.

To that end, you could walk in a lot of different schools at any given time, and see a little Black child in the office because they were in trouble. It was just common and it's still prevalent in San Bernardino and Riverside counties for African American/Black students to receive discipline for behaviors other students get warnings for. That is why having a restorative model rolled out, including campus police department, was refreshing. It gave me hope.

Restorative practices influenced me from the very beginning because I didn't have another model of how we would integrate an approach to healing and prevention that integrated the community including law enforcement. There was never a time that it didn't include law enforcement, campus police, or the Dean of students who had discipline. It was always in my thoughts that this is something that folks who were dealing with correction should be doing, so that we can stay focused and stay positive and keep it healthy.

Preparing folks is a big part of effective restorative practices. And I usually set ground rules at the very beginning for the audience. If you're not an active participant, we want your questions to be able to be included as well. So, I personally prefer having the audience be able to write their questions. Because otherwise, they'll get the mic and have a five-minute monologue before they ask the question. So yeah. So,

I typically will have things set up... props set up to be able to allow the audience to engage the process as well.

Kids are just amazing. The things that they think and say bring you to tears. So, Martin Luther King Jr. High School in Riverside, the largest high school in the county, over 3,000 students, has had a history of racial conflict. As it rolled out, as the pandemic was really first starting, we were in the site doing restorative circles with the kids and we did one day of healing and it was a three-hour event. And there was a young person in there who was in female attire, but used the pronoun he/him.

And so this student, you would probably describe as being trans female. So transitioning to female from male. And the remark that that young person made about people judging and mistreating, not just him, but his peers and adults looking the other way. It has been subtly allowed by adults because they allow the kids to interact with each other in these spaces so that they don't feel safe on campus. And the remarks that that young person made in that moment just kind of took our breath away.

So profound, so impactful. And I just can't wait to see how the world is changed as these young people become adults and get to be able to be the ones that influence policy and practice because they've been exposed to some raw racial or sexual tension on their campus. And I mean, when I say racial, racial violence includes physically attacking a Muslim student because she was wearing a hijab. And I'm thinking, "Well, that's okay. You don't have to punish him. Let's have a restorative conversation."

So we know that it's not just one school, it's all of our schools that have adults that aren't ready to deal with... Because they themselves, in that community, they themselves are the culture keepers. They're the ones who believe the things that our last administration was saying. They believe those things to be real. If they believe that these people are less than human or somehow not deserving of humane treatment in their private life, we know that when they roll in as professionals, it's very difficult to transition. They're not transitioning, and they're not achieving that thought process. It permeates the culture. And so what I see and hear... what I saw and heard that day, was hope from a student's perspective, but very transparent dialogue around how adults have maintained that racial culture.

I mean, even in the situation I described above, there was the fact that the principal brought us in. The fact that the principal wanted to create safe spaces for students on campus. That all does... It absolutely speaks to this idea that the campus is trying to do something better for their students.

We did a re-entry circle in their district, for young people. Kids had a big brawl, 20 or so students were suspended and it was as they were leading to a break. So, the fight happened on the Thursday before the holiday. So, when we came back from the holiday break, we had a chance to do the restorative circle with the young people who were involved in the conflict.

There had been some ongoing communication over social media. So, the tension was still kind of brewing in the community. So it was important for us to bring those young people back together. And so we did a four-day activity with them. Two separate circles then brought them all together for one big circle. When we brought them all together for the one large circle at the end, the district member was there and the district representative was there, over at student services.

I don't allow adults to impose and give their stuff just yet. Of course, they're part of the circle, they can engage, but really this is for the young people to be able to work through their concerns and adults who are impacted to be able to help participate in a positive, helpful way. So, she was there and wanted to be able to be a support for them.

And she asked the kids, "How can I be a better support for you all? I know that this day is going to end and some of you are graduating and leaving, but I want to make sure that we, as a district, wrap our arms around you in advance so that this doesn't happen." And that was really meaningful. And the kids gave her honest, transparent feedback.

So I would say, as we reimagine, I would say for our RJ advocates who are doing the work because they believe in the work, we definitely need to make sure we stay connected. Because you cannot continue to give without having your energy, your hope, your breath of life rejuvenated. You've got to be able to come back to the well, if you will, and refill, refuel.

And so being able to stay connected to Pivot, right? RJOY and some of these organizations that are there to be a resource and the support for those providers of RJ work, that's important. And staying in bubbles doesn't help us. So, if they're inside a school district, they need to reach out to the neighboring schools and learn best practices from them and share their best practices.

It's important that we do this work in collaboration and partnership. And then for RJ programs that are being launched, I think it's important that we bring the right people. Everybody shouldn't be doing this work because everybody doesn't have the same belief in the system, the process, and kids. I think that's important. We need to probably just do more screening before we allow folks to enter into this space.

Guiding Questions

- Clay speaks to how her program has "grown" from doing community to restorative circles and conferences in schools. What has been your restorative journey up to this point? What work are you most proud of? What are your growth areas? What do you need to start, stop, and continue?

- Clay speaks to the need of "preparing folks" for the work of restorative practices. How are you preparing for the work ahead of you? What preparations do you need to make so that you can chart a path forward?

- "Kids are just amazing" – what are some ways that kids have positively "amazed" you this year?

- How have you intentionally involved campus security or campus police in your efforts to build restorative justice practices? How would you begin to do so?

- What is an example of an issue in the community or the country that affects your students and how have you allowed for students to share the impact that has had on them and how they come to school?

- How do you stay connected to others engaged in healing and restorative work that helps you refuel and recharge?

My Agency

Ingri Mendoza Matias

"I feel best as school when I make my own decisions on what I want my future to look like."

Guiding Questions

Chapter 1

Honoring the Roots of Restorative Practices read

- What are the traditional lands in which you read this section? In what ways are you currently practicing this idea of reciprocity?
- What came up for you as you read this piece? What do you notice about the roots of restorative practices? How does this connect to what you already know and value?
- Do you have relationships with local tribes? How can you continue and/or start to foster those relationships?
- In what specific ways have we acknowledged and honored the Indigenous roots of restorative practices? How might we make Indigenous roots a more central part of our practices?
- What have we done to welcome and affirm voices from across our community to participate in our restorative practices and be honored as members of our community?
- What is an example of a humble attitude or a sign of humility that we have witnessed that we want to share with our community? How did that example of humility impact how we have shown up in spaces? What might foster greater humility in our approach to restorative practices?

On Being Vulnerable read

- Reflect upon the last time you had a student and/or staff member demonstrate vulnerability. What did that look and feel like for you? For the person sharing? For the community?
- What are the ways that we hold each other when being vulnerable?
- What does "being vulnerable" mean to you? When was the last time you felt vulnerable? What feeling resulted in your body?
- What's the role of being vulnerable in facilitating healing- and justice-centered spaces? How do you find the right balance between vulnerability and being brave?
- Reflect on a time when you may have deflected attention from a difficult feeling or experience. What did that behavior allow you to do and what did it prevent you from doing?
- What are some specific conditions, actions, or words in your practices that promote greater vulnerability and what conditions, actions, or words might prevent vulnerability? What change might you initiate as a result of this reflection?
- Christopher's story highlights that "to be patient with each other's readiness" was a gift that generated more gifts. Think of a person who might need that patience and what support you might need to offer that.

Justice Denied

- What resonated with you most in Jerry's story? Why?
- Are there students in your classroom, school, and/or community whose experiences echo the story you read? How do you know?
- At what point in Jerry's story could there have been a positive interaction with his situation or circumstances?
- Jerry states that "the world has always represented a threatening and hostile environment that required nothing short of an equally hostile response." What resonates with you about this phrase?
- Jerry's entry shows an acute awareness of oppression and inequality in his community and schools. What opportunities have you seen or experienced to confront and discuss these conditions in classrooms and the community?

On Belonging

- Can you think of a time when you tried to "fit in"? What did that look like? What did that feel like? How are your students trying to fit in with what is currently happening in your community?
- How effective are you at articulating your faults and failures with those around you? What spaces in your community are safe to do so?
- What kind of container are you creating for yourself and for others as it relates to belongingness? What does that look and feel like to you and for others who traditionally have been left out of such conversations and opportunities?

Living Outside the Circle

- Lizeth talks about using the circle to "confront a system that is patriarchal and systemically racist." What comes up for you as you consider this idea?
- What are the ways that you and your school and/or community intentionally establish relationships given that the pandemic has disrupted ways of sharing space in person? What have been your experiences that have resulted in growth? What are ways in which you could co-develop new ideas for areas that are challenging?
- Do you and/or others have spaces to discuss the current struggles in the teaching profession? The author discusses how she considered leaving the teaching profession and the shifts she made to stay. What are your experiences and how are they shaping your reality and relationships?

Chapter 2

Are You Ready to Talk?   read

- In this section, the author speaks to some of the "negative" connotations that PBIS has solicited. What is your opinion of PBIS in general, and its role in your classroom and school?
- The student Martin exhibited behavior that was disruptive to the learning process. What was your initial reaction to the behavior?
- The author mentions a "sense of dread" coming over her body as she witnessed Martin rolling around on the floor; she went on to say that she "took a few deep breaths" and began to make some logical choices. What are some of your self-regulation techniques and strategies that you use in your classroom and/or practice to center yourself?
- What are your indicators that students are "ready" to come back to the classroom? Hannah mentions that she was "able to ensure that his mindset" was ready, but how do you know when students are ready to return after struggling in class?

Is PBIS Inherently Racist?   read

- The author argues that "any system can reproduce oppression, the culture of white supremacy, and implicit bias." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?
- In this section Dr. Jessica speaks to the idea that PBIS could be utilized to "reproduce oppression" offers to center equity and disrupt such oppression. What are your initial thoughts on this topic? How can you and your team educate and activate your work to make sure you are centering equity in your PBIS model and implementation?
- Dr. Jessica suggests "co-creating agreements with students and families" to help with school-wide expectations. What might be some challenges that you might experience when crafting such expectations?
- Dr. Swain-Bradway suggests that "family voices are prominent" in creating agreements and school-wide expectations. What has been your experience in creating school-wide agreements with parents and families and students? What has worked well? What have you learned? What could be modified and/or adjusted?

Where I'm From   read

- Where is home for you? What makes a place home? Do you know what is considered "home" for your students and families in your community?
- Reuben suggests that schools in restorative practices engage "staff only" for an entire year before adopting such an approach. Reflecting on where you and your community are in the process, how much time do you spend as a staff and/or as adults engaging in honest, open, and transparent conversations with one another?
- What do restorative practices look like exclusively for the adults in the building and/or community? How can you find the time to prioritize such spaces for healing and community building?

Little Abolitionists

- Lisa shares that there has been lots of discussion around "learning loss" and that they haven't lost anything of value and "they are thriving as much as a person can during a global pandemic." What have been your conversations, reflections, and intentions around the concept of "learning loss?" How do you find balance between meeting learning goals and the social and emotional needs of your students and community?
- Lisa states the importance of safety in her classroom and approach to restorative practices with the phrase "We keep us safe." What are the ways in which you and others focus on emotional and physical safety in your classroom or learning community? What does safety currently look and feel like and what are the deliberate and intentional ways safety shows up in your practices and policies?
- "My job as an educator is to help them see the truth, but not be traumatized by it." What are some ways that you help students step into their own truth and power? How do you encourage and create an environment for courageous conversations around challenging topics and information?

Grow Where You Are

- Chris shares that "some things the school started, really missed the mark even though they enjoyed it." Reflecting back on the past year, what are some things that you have tried to implement that are well-meaning but might have "missed the mark"? What were the efforts and what happened as a result? What have you learned and how can that advance your efforts moving forward?
- Chris states that the school he was working with "started with the most visible components" by creating signage and acquiring rewards for students. Where are you currently in how you are creating a positive school culture and climate for your students? Where have you started and where do you hope to be by next month? Three months? Six months? By the end of the year?
- The teachers asked, "How do we make data review feasible and understandable?" What would be the response to this question in your classroom and/or school community? What data do you use, particularly given our current context? What does it mean to your team to make your data review "feasible and understandable"?

Bring in the Messiness

- Dr. Kai shares that oftentimes schools do not set up "the right structures or systems" for teams to collaborate. What does collaboration mean to you? What does it look and feel like? What promotes and/or harms collaboration from your experiences?
- Dr. Kai shares the story about how teachers would partner up in her mother's school to "visit their partner's classroom, sit in their class during the prep period" – just observing and watching how their partner "teaches, watching interactions with students." She shared that by the end of the year the "partnerships ended up being the best thing." In your restorative and/or teaching practices, what opportunities are there for such partnerships? What attempts have been made in the past and how could you improve such partnerships moving forward? Who might like to participate and how?
- Dr. Kai shares that students "will never remember your worksheets" and that students will remember "creating something or building something or solidifying some ideology." What are you creating and/or building in your classroom? Is it of value and/or of importance? How do you know? What does that look like in your daily classroom practices?
- Dr. Kai shares that we have "real life math and science problems in the world" that need solving such as eroding coastlines and "housing falling into the oceans." What opportunities are available for students in math, science, and all core subjects to explore topics that are important and relevant to our pressing needs in our communities and on the planet?

Chapter 3

Collective Impact

- Rhonda mentions that some schools are already participating in "some form of collective impact." Given the description she provides, what are some current ways in which you and/or your team or school site are participating in collective impact?
- Rhonda mentions that "some of the parts may not be moving together" to make a real impact on student achievement and performance. What parts of your system are "currently working together" to make a difference? Are there parts that are working together to make a difference? If so, what is making that work successful? If not, what could be improved for greater collaboration?
- "Team structures" are emphasized as an important unit of change to make an impact. How do different parts of your school system (i.e., PBIS Team, Equity Team, SEL Team, Administration, etc.) communicate with one another? Brainstorm three or four ideas that could strengthen the communication channels between each department and consider drafting goals that align with one another.

Planting the Seed

- Angelica speaks to this notion of "internalized oppression" and its impacts on youth. When reflecting on her experiences, how are students internalizing negative messaging in their own lives? How do you see this being played out over time?
- The section suggests that "it is challenging" to find interventions that motivate students that are trauma-informed. How trauma-informed are your interventions? How do you know and how effective are they in helping students achieve both academically and socially?
- Angelica suggests that "healing can occur" in the therapeutic sense by exploring internalized oppression. In what ways can you create safe and brave spaces for students to discuss and share their experiences, particularly in core subjects, where they might not have felt like they belong?

The Shift Room

- "Just so you know, PBIS is a waste of time," was one of the first comments Megan received while trying to introduce a new approach to student behavior. What is your approach to change? How do you and/or others in your spaces respond to change?
- How difficult or challenging is it for you to gain support for restorative practices in your school? How challenging is it for you to gain support for PBIS in your school and/or classroom? What are specific challenges you and/or your community face?
- The SHIFT room is described as a "place to listen and process what is going on" for students. Where are the safe and healing spaces in your classroom practices and/or school? What can you let go of to make a difference in how your students show up? What do you need to pick up?

It's Not Magic

- Dr. Felicia shares that "parents sending their children is a big deal" that we often do not really reflect upon enough as educators. If you are a parent, family member, and/or caregiver, what resonates with you in this statement? If you are an educator, what does it mean to you to have families send us their children to our classroom and schools? How do we honor such a gift and trust that is bestowed upon us? Can we communicate that expression to others?

- Dr. Felicia shares her story on how she met a restorative justice trainer and how that ignited her work in the district's mediation program. Who is igniting your passion for restorative work? Is there a group and/or organization that you are involved in to spur your growth personally and professionally? What else do you need in your practice to feel fulfilled and complete to be inspired and engaged?

- Dr. Felicia shares that restorative practices are "slow" and that "it's not magic." Her suggestion is one that invests in "human capital and resources" and "building trust." As you consider your ways of connecting school-based teams and teachers and community, what's the "slow" process of building trust?

The Long View

- Mikki states that the department she works in changed its name from "youth services" to "positive youth development." What are your thoughts about this name change? Are there phrases or ideas that create either positive or negative associations? What are they and does anything need to change on how we describe who we are?

- Mikki shares a brief story about helping students to "learn how to code-switch." What are your thoughts around code-switching and helping students to act and be in certain spaces?

- "In order to implement restorative practices," Mikki states in her section, "you have to have flexibility. You can't be rigid" and encourages us to "work with partners." What does it mean to you to not be 'rigid' in our implementation of restorative practices? What parts of restorative practices are essential and what parts are flexible for you and your community?

Chapter 4

The Village Takes Us

- What efforts have you made involving families, classified staff, and other community members in building the climate and culture of your schools? What would be the first steps in doing so?
- How might opportunities to work with students across grades help with your implementation of restorative practices or social-emotional learning?
- Take an opportunity to lift up and support a colleague or coworker whose efforts may have been under-recognized.

Heart for our Kids

- Do you have someone in your life who "holds up the mirror" for you and allows you to reflect on what you are doing and the reasons why you may be doing it?
- How do you create those spaces to give and receive feedback?
- Reflect on a time when you experienced or observed an opportunity for redemption. How did that affect you?
- Check in with the next person you encounter and let them know you are available if they need you. Seek out someone you trust and check in for yourself. Share how you are feeling and think about what you need as well.

This is a Movement Not a Program

- Oakland Unified School District's restorative justice practices are steeped in the community's history of social justice and anti-racism. What's your community's history with social justice and racism and how does it influence how you will approach your implementation of RJ?
- What are the current efforts in your school/district/community around diversity, equity, and inclusion, and specifically anti-racism, and how do they connect to the RJ in your setting?
- How might you make those connections more explicit?
- David describes how the tiers associated with MTSS don't align to the holistic practices of RJ, but that using some of the terminology helped to bridge the "river of resistance" that they encountered in the district. If MTSS frameworks are currently practiced in your schools, how do you understand how RJ will work with those practices?

All Are Welcomed Here

- Antoinette speaks to the idea of implicit biases when diagnosing problems. When you think about how your restorative practices work, what problem(s) are you trying to solve? Whose problems are they and how do you know?

- Antoinette speaks to the importance of "really getting to know your students" because you can't really serve kids unless you know who they are. Who are the students in your classroom? What intentional steps are you making to know who they are and who their families and communities are?

- The mention of bringing people of diverse backgrounds and experiences together to discuss difficult topics is noted. What preparations or groundwork might you create prior to such conversations in your own classroom and/or community? What resources are available to ensure a space is both brave and safe for all involved?

- What are some specific things that help to "fill your cup"? Share one or two ideas with those who you work closely with and ask them, "What fills your cup?"

- Over the next few days, listen for adults using language that may characterize student behavior as criminal or pathological. Without attempting to blame or shame the individuals using that language, share your observations in a meeting and discuss how to replace deficit-based language. Get support from others to engage in this conversation if you need it.

- Antoinette points out that how we diagnose leads to how we treat problems. In your current setting, what work have you done to diagnose the root causes of student behavior and how have you moved beyond blaming students, their families, and the community?

- Describe some ways that you have seen teachers create "well-come" in their classrooms and schools. What are some other ways we can create a sense of care for everyone's well-being while making them feel they are wanted and belong?

Where Do We Go Next

- Clay speaks to how her program has "grown" from doing community to restorative circles and conferences in schools. What has been your restorative journey up to this point? What work are you most proud of? What are your growth areas? What do you need to start, stop, and continue?

- Clay speaks to the need of "preparing folks" for the work of restorative practices. How are you preparing for the work ahead of you? What preparations do you need to make so that you can chart a path forward?

- "Kids are just amazing" – what are some ways that kids have positively "amazed" you this year?

- How have you intentionally involved campus security or campus police in your efforts to build restorative justice practices? How would you begin to do so?

- What is an example of an issue in the community or the country that affects your students and how have you allowed for students to share the impact that has had on them and how they come to school?

- How do you stay connected to others engaged in healing and restorative work that helps you refuel and recharge?

Resources

- [Alignment of the PBIS Framework and Restorative Practices](#) | Pennsylvania Community of Practice

- [Beyond Circles](#) | Restorative Justice Partnership

- [Centering Adaptive and Relational Elements of Restorative Practices for Implementation Success](#) | Lauren Trout, WestEd

- [Creating a Better World Means Asking Better Questions](#) | Creating the Future

- [Embedding Restorative Practices within a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support for Student Success](#) | SERC

- [Midwest Embedding RP in PBIS Readiness Assessment](#) | SERC

- [Family Engagement Initiative](#) | Kelly Teshima-McCormick

- [Guide for Racial Justice & Abolitionist Social and Emotional Learning](#) | the Abolitionist Teaching Network

- [Let's Talk: Discussing Race, Racism, and Difficult Topics with Students](#) | Teaching Tolerance

- [Multi-Tiered System of Supports Fidelity of Implementation](#) | Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports

- [Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports and Restorative Justice at School Sites](#) | Oakland Public Schools

- [Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports: Tier 1 Interventions](#) | PBIS World

- [Restarting School with Equity at the Center](#) | Reimagine California Schools

- [Restore Our Schools](#)

- [Restorative Practices Evaluation Plan](#) | Jefferson County Public Schools

- [Restorative Justice Implementation Guide: A Whole School Approach](#) | Oakland Unified School District

- [Rights-Based Restorative Practice: Evaluation Toolkit](#) | the Human Rights Center, University of Minnesota

- [The Promise and Limits of Restorative Justice for Youth](#) | Julie Reynolds, California Health Report

- [San Diego County Office of Education Student Listening Sessions](#)

- [School-Wide Restorative Practices: Step by Step](#)

- [Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education](#) | Maria Elena Garcia, Kay Frunzi, and Ceri Dean, McREL International; Nieves Flores, Guam Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service; Kirsten B. Miller, McREL International

- [Whatchu Know About Restorative Justice](#) (Podcast) | California Conference for Equality and Justice

- [Why Restorative Justice is About More Than Reducing Suspensions](#) | Daisy Yuhas, The Hechinger Report

pivot LEARNING

The Guidebook for the People is a project of the Prevention and Intervention program at Pivot Learning.

Pivot Learning's mission is to ensure a rigorous, relevant, and inclusive public education for all students by developing instructional coherence and improving teaching and learning. Learn more at pivotlearning.org.