

Seeding Restorative Measures in Minnesota: Challenging Opportunities

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Minnesota was the first state in the United States of America whose state education agency actively promoted the use of restorative principles in schools as a response to student discipline problems and as primary prevention of violence. In 1997, the Minnesota Department of Education published *Restorative Measures: Respecting Everyone's Ability to Resolve Problems* (Anderson, 1997), followed by the 1998 Commissioner of Education's Recommendations for use of restorative practices. The Minnesota Legislature provided funding for a demonstration grant from 1998-2001. These three events developed interest, encouraged experimentation and provided training programs for implementation in a variety of classrooms, schools and school districts throughout the state.

For over a decade, the Minnesota Departments of Education, Public Safety and Corrections provided support to educators, community organizations and criminal justice workers on restorative practices in funding, networking, training and technical assistance. This support has been consistent, albeit varied in intensity, depending upon social and political elements.

Restorative measures as a set of practices, and more importantly, as a way of operation in schools, are both resilient and adaptive. Restorative approaches have several key elements that make them compelling for practitioners: relationships, moral clarity and the ability to augment other prevention programs. Continuing challenges to implementation include the lack of resources and a persistent attitude that punishment is an effective solution to control student behavior. A review of the current versions of these challenges and the strides made in Minnesota may provide insight to others intent on a whole-school uptake of restorative measures.

Context

Minnesota, home to the headwaters of the Mississippi, has a population of 5.2 million. Its 900,000 students Kindergarten-grade 12 attend school in 345 school districts and 154 public charter schools. The student populations consists of 75% European American, 10% African American, 7% Hispanic, 6% Asian American, and 2% American Indian. Within each of these categories, there are long-term residents, migrants and immigrants. The largest recent immigrant groups to settle in Minnesota include the Hmong (the hill people of Laos and Cambodia), the Somali, Mexicans and other Spanish speakers, and people from the former Soviet Union. The last two years has seen an influx of the Karen, Chin and Karenni from Myanmar (Burma), the Iraqi and the Bhutan from South Asia. The original keepers of the land still in Minnesota are the Lakota and Ojibwe people.

This mix of cultures enriches the state and adds to its creativity. Minnesota has a history of innovation in social services and in education. Social service agencies for chemical dependency, sexual violence and domestic abuse have developed prevention education programs, provided trainers to present in schools and created curriculum that teachers

could use themselves. Minnesota is home to one of the first child sexual abuse prevention education programs using, for the first time, theater as a methodology. Educational innovation, through education, community organizations and higher education collaboration, resulted in alternative learning centers, charter schools and state-wide violence prevention mass media campaigns. The Minnesota Department of Corrections hired the first restorative justice planner in the nation in 1994. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) was the first state education agency to promote the use of and evaluate restorative measures in schools.

Minnesota's Restorative Journey

'Restorative justice' is a term used in criminal justice and law enforcement to describe programs and practices that depict "Crime," as Howard Zehr writes, "as a violation of people and of interpersonal relationships. These violations create obligations. The central obligation is to put right the wrongs" (Zehr, 2002).

In the Minnesota educational community, 'restorative measures' is a term used to encompass the application of those principles to prevention education and to discipline processes. Cordelia Anderson described restorative measures as "a philosophy and a process that acknowledges that when a person does harm, it effects the person they hurt, the community and themselves...By applying restorative measures in schools, school personnel have another tool to use with children and youth to repair harm and teach problems solving skills"(Anderson, 1997). By teaching problem solving skills and social emotional learning, schools can provide what Stutzman Amstutz and Mullet described as "both areas of restorative discipline—the preventive and the restorative" and use conflict when it happens as part of the learning process (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2005).

In everyday conversation, 'restorative measures,' 'restorative approaches' and 'restorative practices' are used interchangeably with 'restorative justice' and 'rj' or simply 'the restorative.' I will use the terms as the people and programs I describe use them.

The impetus to use the principles and practices of restorative justice came from a public policy shift in the 1990's to alternate ways for the criminal justice system to respond to crime and for schools to manage discipline problems. State funds supported pilot sites that set up model practices in court services, community organizations and schools, trained key leaders and produced measurable outcomes. Relationships between state agencies, the Minnesota Departments of Education, Public Safety and Corrections, resulted in grant programs for restorative justice, conferencing curricula, workplace restorative programs and circle trainings, and technical assistance. Community organizations, advocates and entrepreneurs helped develop an infrastructure of knowledge, practice and training in Minnesota that continues to serve people interested in implementing restorative programming.

From 1998-2001, MDE conducted a three-year evaluation of implementation and use of restorative measures—circle to repair harm and to provide social emotional learning and community building in the classroom. The findings were promising and indicated that:

- Consistent application of restorative principles and practices— behavior management approaches and circles to repair harm— resulted in significant yearly reduction of behavior referrals and suspensions in one elementary school.

- A problem-solving resource room for at-risk students resulted in increased academic achievement in a high school.
- Teacher in-services on behavior management resulted in higher professional satisfaction.
- Teacher training resulted in high levels of teacher application in the classroom—in five elementary buildings, 50-70% of teachers use circles, behavior management skills and classroom management techniques. (In School Behavior Intervention Grants Final Report, MDE, 2001).

The In School Behavior Intervention (ISBI) grants were followed by the Restorative Schools Grants 2001-2003, designed to provide statewide training and evaluation on restorative measures. The ISBI evaluation made two things apparent: 1) restorative measures showed promise in reducing behavior referrals to the school office and in reducing suspensions, and 2) after the grant money runs out, a program can end. In response the next round of funding trained as many people as possible and hoping their knowledge would take root wherever they went. “Given the uncertainty of grant awards and general funding for education, as well as the natural mobility of teaching staff, it seemed to be more cost effective to teach a lot of people “how to fish,” rather than have them depend on a guide with a good boat for a limited amount of time (Restorative School Grant Executive Summary, MDE, 2003).

The evaluation of the second round of grants also showed reductions in behavior referrals. Two schools trained staff to use classroom circles daily. Both schools had strong administrative support and staff leadership, and used restorative circle to repair harm as a discipline intervention. The outcomes regarding suspensions are striking:

	<u>01-02</u>	<u>02-03</u>	<u>% change</u>
Nellie Stone Johnson	800	292	63% reduction
Ramsey Fine Arts	272	149	45% reduction

In 2007-2008, MDE conducted a retrospective student discipline study, and attempted to compare restorative interventions to suspensions, regarding test scores, graduation, recidivism and adult criminal records. Because the study was retrospective, going back 4, 5 and in some instances 7 years, it was difficult to obtain information on students who had participated in a restorative process in school. The study was inconclusive regarding the sample’s adult criminal record, attendance and graduation, and data systems’ challenges prohibited us from accessing test scores. However, we were able to match the test group to students who were suspended and to students who were never suspended and compare discipline records.

The analysis of the discipline data indicated that students who went through a restorative process re-offended less. For the restorative group, the re-offense rate was 40.32%. For the suspended group, the rate was 57.26%. The restorative students who did re-offend had longer delay between offenses. By year, the average time between first and next incident for the suspended group was about 1.2 years. For the restorative group the lag time between incidents was over 2 years, and as high as 2.5 years (MDE Unpublished Report, 2010).

MDE's evaluation of restorative measures with the work of others the world over, provided evidence to justify allocating resources to provide districts with technical assistance and training. For over a decade, an annual a weeklong seminar has been offered for 5-7 new school teams. Throughout the school year, MDE offers workshops and training sessions. In addition, a network of experienced community and school trainers provides staff development to anyone willing to explore alternatives to suspension, bullying prevention and intervention or youth development principles as embodied in restorative measures.

As a result, restorative measures have grown in use in Minnesota schools. From the initial 4 sites in 1998, to today, about one-third of Minnesota school districts report the use of restorative measures at the elementary, middle or secondary level (MDE Report, Title IV: Summary 2005-2006, 2007).

Restorative Approaches: Key Strengths

Student support staff, teachers and administrators consider using restorative approaches for a variety of practical reasons: grant funds make it viable to try, cultural practices resonate with restorative philosophy, or because other approaches have not worked. From my vantage working with practitioners, I see three strengths that also support the use of restorative practices: relationships, moral clarity and the ability to augment other prevention programs.

Relationships Relationships are the center of the restorative philosophy and are essential in education as children and adults are hardwired to seek good relationships. Restorative processes offer ways of teaching, practice and a sense of community and safety. Safety is essential for learning to occur. An article from *Edutopia* summarizes the connection between emotional safety and learning: "...There is a good amount of neurological evidence to promote the idea that if students do not feel comfortable in a classroom setting, they will not learn; physiologically speaking, stressed brains are not able to form the necessary neural connections" (Bernare, 2010).

There is simplicity to restorative practices in schools, based as it is in relationships. We ask children to get to know each other by sharing favorite flavors of ice cream or what subject they like to study. We ask them to listen and we invite their voice, so they can, for a moment, be heard. Best practices in youth development emphasize the importance of youth voice in all aspects of their lives to "participate as citizens, as members of a household, as workers, as responsible members of society" (Konopka, 1973).

Relationships have helped restorative measures to grow in the state. Supervisors from the Minnesota Departments of Public Safety (DPS) and Education worked together with the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) to support restorative programming across public and private sectors. Kay Pranis, the first Restorative Justice [RJ] Planner to work for a corrections agency, worked with a DOC staff, community members and other state staff providing trainings, while all three agencies provided grants for implementation of restorative programs. Jeri Boisvert from DPS and Carol Thomas from MDE noted that relationship in state government is as important as accountability and transparency. "Restorative justice is about partnerships and community based work," said Boisvert. "We see our job in government to partner with our community, our grantees." "Minnesota is still a kind of small town," observed Thomas. "If you stay around long enough, you have a base

of support, people who will collaborate with you.” Collaboration inside agencies, with other state agencies and with community organizations is done because it is a good practice.

Moral clarity Restorative measures provide a moral clarity to complex issues, a way to untangle the mess of harm. Stephanie Haider, a trainer and director of Lakes Area Restorative Justice Project located in Central Minnesota, explained what drew her to Restorative Justice work. She was a probation officer, working with adolescent girls.

“These girls were in trouble—run-aways, assault, etc.,-- because of abuse, sexual abuse. It was predictable. And in the 70’s, there was no training for how to work with these very mixed up families—I’d either be punitive or too lenient in dealing with these girls. This caused me a lot of stress. In the 80’s I learned about victim-offender’s mediation and the idea of restitution. So we developed the Dakota County restitution program. We wrote in the manual, ‘If you have wronged someone, it is your responsibility to make it right with that person and your community as a whole and it is your responsibility to improve yourself with personal achievements and goals.’ This is what it’s about—it is not about being punitive or lenient, but being accountable. Not by me, but by the victim and the community—they could do my job for me. It was a revelation. It was a relief.”

Restorative measures provide the way to hold two contradictory ideas in our heads at the same time—a person can be both a victim and an offender, and we need not ignore either fact. Given the multiple experiences some children have with victimization, this notion is enormously useful when a child hurts someone else. We, as community, can acknowledge both truths, and in doing so provide real support and true accountability. We can in the process also hold ourselves accountable.

Augment other prevention programs Restorative processes are congruent with other programs’ values and can augment both academic activity and social emotional programs, such as Committee’s for Children social emotional learning/bullying prevention curricula or the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. It can be a strategy as part of the School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports framework. We teach students problem solving skills and the elements of social emotional intelligence. But when a student makes a mistake, we often ignore the very set of skills we have taught. For expedience, we do “to” them—suspend, detain, expel—rather than working “with” them, approaching the question with a balance of power and engaging in problem solving (Wachtell & McCold, 2001). It is as if we were to teach students to read on their own, but when it came time for a reading test, we would act as if they could not read, and read all the questions to them. What would be the point of the instruction?

One restorative practice, Circle, is also being used to teach. In Minnesota, the Circle is a communication process that uses a talking piece to order the flow of communication. The Circle process, when based in Indigenous, youth development and restorative philosophies, is a tool to ensure that all students participate and all students help to create a safe academic environment. The teacher is able to see each student as the talking piece is sent around making obvious care and interest in each student, each class time. In Minnesota schools, the Circle process is used to deliver social emotional learning, and to teach everything from Spanish to creative writing to math.

Policy and Funding Challenges

Every innovation encounters challenges on the way to its demise or institutionalization. The main challenges identified in 1997 MDE publication, *Restorative Measures*, are still its challenges today: time, money, training, belief in punishment and an ingrained desire for retribution, reluctance on the part of people to participate in conferences or circles, and failed conferences or circles. The first three—time, money and training— challenge schools looking to implement any new initiative, from a reading program to restorative measures. The other challenges are manifestations of ingrained social beliefs pervasive to majority American culture.

In the United States, these six challenges can be found in three issues that shaped the last decade's educational landscape: inconsistent funding, education policy dependent upon testing as the sole measure and the too frequent use of zero tolerance policies in discipline. The impact of these issues illustrates the need for restorative measures as part of a school's design.

Funding Public education requires substantial public resources and is, therefore, significantly affected by the ebb and flow of the national and state economies. In Minnesota, 40% of the state budget is designated for education including early childhood through grade 12 and higher education and provides 80% of school funds. School districts may levy additional taxes. The federal government contributes less than 5% of funding needed by schools.

In 2000, state finances shifted from years of plenty to meager resources, affecting education and social services programming. In response to a budget shortfall in 2001, the Governor un-allotted school violence prevention education and after school programming. Last year, to close a budget shortfall, the state borrowed from the educational funds. The state is currently facing a \$6 billion deficit. On a federal level, education funds for prevention have recently shifted from money allotted to all districts in the country based upon enrollment, to national competitive grants that fund a few districts.

Funding affects the consistency of school programming because in part it effects staffing. Besides the usual reasons faculty and administrative staff move—marriage, pregnancy, wanderlust and a better offer—budget cuts cause personnel changes. During the three years of the ISBI grants in one district alone, the superintendent changed twice in 3 years, two principals left, and because of budget cuts, the number of restorative planners went from three to two to zero as the grant ended. The school district was not able to sustain the program, in spite of strong outcomes—a significant reduction in behavior referrals to the office and out-of-school suspensions.

Academics Only The year 2000 marked a change in United States education policy. Congress passed and the President signed the education funding bill entitled The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB sought to raise educational standards by measuring student outcomes and putting in place school consequences for not making “annual yearly progress,” determined by student test scores. Hence, schools focused almost all of their attention on reading and math academics. Cordelia Anderson, author of *Restorative Measures*, cites the early years of NCLB as the time that set back implementation of

restorative practices in schools more than any other factor. “All of a sudden, the schools had to spend so much time on tests and teaching to the test. Coupled with the decreased finances, schools literally did not have people to work with kids.”

Zero Tolerance The policy of zero tolerance for guns on school property affected dissemination of restorative measures in schools. Set first in federal law in 1994, some states and school districts expanded the policy. Zero tolerance policies result in suspension, expulsion or police arrest of students K-12 for alcohol or drug possession to possession of firecrackers or, that euphemism for talking back to a teacher, insubordination. Even as NCLB attempted to raise standards, merged with zero tolerance policies, the act had the unintended outcome of creating, essentially, a school-to-prison pipeline for many marginal, special education and minority students. (Losen & Skiba, 2010; The Advancement Project, 2010).

Echoing national suspension and expulsion data are Minnesota’s data found in the review of the Minnesota discipline and graduation data, *Disproportionate Minority Representation in Suspension and Expulsion*.

“In examining the disproportionate minority representation of Black, Hispanic and American Indian students in comparison to White students, Black, Hispanic and American Indian students are overrepresented in suspensions and expulsions. African American students are 5.6 times more likely to be involved in a Disciplinary Incident Reporting System (DIRS) incident, 5.9 times more likely to be suspended, and 3.8 times more likely to be expelled than White students.

“Hispanic students are 2.2 times more likely to be involved in a DIRS incident, 2.5 Times more likely to be suspended and 2.5 times more likely to be expelled than White students. American Indian students are 3.9 times more likely to be involved in a DIRS incident, 4.1 times more likely to be suspended and 6.2 times more likely to be expelled than White students” (Anfinson, et. al., 2010).

Social and Emotional Challenges

The United States educational discourse often appears to have a simplistic analysis—all public schools need improvement—and there is a desire for the simple answer: if we test or if we encourage innovation with a lot of money or if we have the best college graduates teach for two years in high poverty schools or if we just push out those failing students. But the world of children is much more complex.

Obvious to people who work in schools, but helpful to review, are the social pressures faced by the children and the adults who work in school. Besides testing pressures in every school district in the nation and state, Minnesota school districts, at varying levels, have had to address these difficulties:

- The economic downturn, causing some districts to go to a 4-day week in order to save transportation and heating costs;
- Unemployment reaching 10%;
- A 40% rise in the number of reported homeless students over 4 years due to increasing poverty and home foreclosures;

- An increase in the identification of students with autism;
- Immigration raids at local food processing plants that results in students not being picked up by their parents at the end of the school day;
- A bus accident that killed 4 children and had a regional impact;
- Two school shootings within 18 months of each other affecting schools statewide;
- Multiple deployments of National Guard members to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan, leaving children and adolescents to live with one parent or extended family and with daily emotional uncertainty (The National Guard is call the 'citizen's army'. These are not career soldiers, but people with jobs and families in communities throughout the state, volunteering for regular training and periodic duty to provide support in national disasters, need for security, and recently, 10 year wars. Minnesota has no military base to support the multiple needs of soldiers' families, which are scattered in communities statewide.);
- Refugee and immigrant students, some traumatized by war and poverty, and all traumatized by relocation, enter school districts in rural, urban and suburban areas;
- School districts responding to a spate of student and staff deaths - accidental and suicidal - clustered in one school year;
- Massive flooding in three portions of the state.

Likewise, children do not always come to school ready to learn, willing and able, present and participating. Besides the above list of life challenges, a recent study funded by the U. S. Department of Justice highlights that children are more likely to experience violence than adults. Among the findings:

- Sixty percent of American children were exposed to violence, crime or abuse in their homes, schools and communities.
- Almost 40% of American children were direct victims of 2 or more violent acts, and 1 in 10 were victims of violence 5 or more times.
- Almost 1 in 10 American children saw one family member assault another family member, and more than 25% had been exposed to family violence during their life.
- Children exposed to violence are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol; suffer from depression, anxiety and post-traumatic disorders; fail or have difficulty in school; and become delinquent and engage in criminal behavior (Finkelhor, et. al, 2009).

Life events, natural and human made, can disrupt the learning environment of the school or the individual student. To be effective with all students, both teaching and discipline approaches need to take these realities into account.

Bullying, Punishment and Poly-victimization

An example of the complexity of school discipline issues can be seen in the problem of bullying and how schools address it. Zero tolerance is suggested by some as a response for bullying, just as zero tolerance was applied for gun possession. A review of Minnesota Student Survey data provides a bigger picture regarding both gun possession and bullying experiences.

In 1994 when the zero tolerance for guns in schools policy was enacted, the simple solution to the complex problem was 'expel the student.' Expulsion alone does not

address several issues related to guns in school such as addressing the fear and harm the actions cause for other students; nor does it address underlying or related needs of the perpetrator; nor does it address the other types of behaviors that may cause fear among students such as a school wide climate of bullying.

Punishment alone also begs a number of questions that are suggested by the Minnesota Student Survey bullying analysis. Of the almost 120,000 students (6th, 9th and 12th graders) who took the survey in 2007, only 1.7% reported bringing a gun to school. But almost 90% of the students who report carrying guns on school property in the last 30 days, report that they are involved in a bullying experience as a victim, an offender or a bully victim (86.8%). Approximately one-quarter of those students are a bully-victim (25.8%, n=599).

Students who are regularly involved in bullying experiences whether as victims, offenders or bully-victims, share associated experiences, most of them negative. They are more likely than their peers who never experience bullying to report harassment, physical assault in school, intra-familial and extra familial sexual abuse, family drug use and dating violence. (*Minnesota Student Survey on Bullying: An Analysis*, in press, 2011) While students carrying a gun need to be held accountable, the response should be more comprehensive than expulsion, as the act of carrying a gun may provide insight into the needs of the student and the climate of the school that might not otherwise be apparent.

As with guns, there is a similar punishment rhetoric regarding bullying and cyber bullying. Phrases, such as ‘zero tolerance for bullying’ and “swift and immediate action,” are used by talk show hosts as well as school districts. One teacher said, “Just get rid of them.” Such remarks lack nuance. We are talking about children and children learn from adult viewpoints and behaviors. If children are hurting other children, it is important to reflect on adult behavior—as important as seeking redress for a child’s behavior.

Complicating a school administrator’s response to bullying are the state and federal data privacy laws that rightfully protect information regarding a student who is disciplined. However, those laws have the unintended consequence of leaving many critical questions, usually for the victim, unanswered: *Why did you target me? Will you do this again? Do you have the capacity to carry out this threat?* Punishment, no matter how much people call for it, does not answer these questions. US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, in a letter to chief state school officers, December 16, 2010, stated, “When responding to bullying incidents, schools and districts should remember that maintenance of a safe and equitable learning environment for all students, including both victims and perpetrators of bullying, often requires a more comprehensive approach.”

A “more comprehensive approach” is needed when the harm spills into and out of the school. Here is one example of a bullying situation from calls I receive at the Department of Education:

-- A group of girls from the volleyball team post on Facebook a sexually explicit photo-shopped picture of a teammate, Liah. Liah starts receiving sexually explicit emails from as far away as Australia. A fight happens in school between Liah and one of the girls. Both girls are suspended for 3 days. Liah is excluded on the volleyball team (no one will set her up for a spike; no one will talk to her). Liah’s mom wants to sue the

volleyball coach because the coach has not addressed this situation. The girls who posted the picture have egged Liah's house and TP'ed the trees in her front yard. The volleyball booster club has met with the superintendent to complain about Liah and her mom making the other girls upset.

Bullying does not affect just a student or two; it can engage an entire community. I talk with parents of children who are bullied and find that they are completely frustrated by two things: the school cannot tell them what they did to the person who bullied their child, and more importantly, the situation for their child has not improved.

A more useful intervention is a restorative process, carefully conducted, given the seriousness of the harm. Bullying and cyber bullying need a face-to-face intervention. Bullying interventions need to be transparent and supportive of all people affected. As Brenda Morrison emphatically noted in her book, *Restoring Safe School Communities*, "It is the behaviour, *and not the person*, that should not be condoned within the community; hence, it is the behaviour *and not the person*, that needs to be confronted by the community...both the victim and offender need to be involved and supported" (Morrison, 2007).

The supports needed for change are elemental for both the student who bullied and the target: family who love their child, adults who care about the child, and peers who can stand with the child in a good way. Making a process where these supports are engaged takes time to set up; fidelity to practice is absolutely essential to protect all participants. In these instances of bullying, we are offered a chance to truly work for the good of all.

Summary

The challenges identified 14 years ago regarding implementation of restorative measures continue to be the challenges of today: time, money, training, belief in punishment and ingrained desire for retribution, reluctance of people to participate and failed conferences. However, like the Chinese character for conflict, each challenge offers opportunity.

Money Inconsistent funding and the mobility of staff have resulted in three interesting outcomes.

1) Schools look outside their walls for community restorative program with which to partner. Lakes Area Restorative Justice, a volunteer conferencing program in central Minnesota, provides restorative conferencing to several school districts and county court services. Minneapolis Public Schools have a vetting process for their community restorative programs, so a principal may easily contact a community facilitator to help address harm that happens in school.

2) Districts train currently employed staff rather than hiring someone paid by time limited grant money. In that way, more people learn restorative approaches.

3) Educators trained in restorative measures move, seeding restorative approaches as they go to a new school. For instance, one language arts teacher influenced 2 recovery alternative schools and one junior high school (and by extension, the entire district) by continually asking the question, "Is there a better way to hold kids accountable?"

Training is connected to funding, certainly, but training continues to be available and affordable and sometimes free. Community organizations, individual trainers and the

Minnesota Departments of Corrections and Education provide training and seminars. There are a growing number of books and blogs, YouTube postings and web sites on school restorative practices. Individuals can apprentice to a facilitator or keeper. Key to the successful use of training is coaching and the common principals of effective practice. Coaching increases the likelihood that a person will actually use the skill they have been taught in the classroom by 95% (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

The belief in punishment is best countered by participation in a conference or circle, so that one can see and feel how the process works. Real accountability is not just a written agreement, but it is the process of empathy, that can be seen and felt more than reported. The belief in punishment has resulted in disproportionate minority representation (DMR) in suspensions and expulsions and the school to prison pipeline. DMR is so blatantly unfair that it has gathered nationally a large number of opponents who are now demanding alternatives, including school climate initiatives such as School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports and restorative justice programs (Advancement Project, 2010).

The reluctance to participate may slowly ebb as the term ‘restorative’ and opportunities to participate in restorative measures become more common. An example of the acceptance of restorative measures in schools can be seen in a bill introduced in United States Congress this January. The Restorative Justice in Schools Act would allow local education agencies to use Elementary and Secondary Education Act funding for key school personnel such as teachers and counselors to receive training in restorative justice and conflict resolution.

Failed conferences Suspension and expulsion research indicates that school exclusion has a deleterious effect on youth including: high levels of repeat offending—suspension are not effective in changing behavior (Costenbader & Markson, 1998, Skiba & Knesting, 2001), early suspension appears to predict a rise in misbehavior (Tobin et al 1996); and suspension is correlated with school dropout (Ekstrom 1986), decrease in academic achievement, (Townsend, 2000, Arcia, 2007), and the School to Prison Pipeline (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivet, 2004, Advancement Project, 2005). I feel a little rueful when, because one part of a restorative process does not meet the needs of a participant, restorative measures are challenged as not effective. I want to ask, “And how is that suspension working for you?” All discipline processes need to be evaluated and adjusted as needed for the good of the child, the school and the community. Fidelity to practices is essential.

Time is the final challenge and an enormous gift. The challenge: teachers omit morning circle because they feel they need to spend more time on content, only to find that they spend more time on discipline. Administrators admire the outcomes of Minneapolis Legal Right Center’s restorative conference with one of their students, but complain about the time it takes (2 hours). When I share the positive outcomes (regular school attendance, homework completion, low levels of recidivism and graduation) of a juvenile community circle process run by a county court, people are delighted. When I say the youth meet every other week with their community circle for from 5 months to 2 years, they sigh: ‘Really? That long?’

If anyone wonders why a restorative process might take time, review the list of trauma that 60% of children experience. In some instances we are not restoring, we are building for the child a structure of care that did not exist for them. That does take time.

We are educators. We touch the future. Youth who participate in St. Louis Park High School's Boys2Men, a weekly school circle of support and accountability, have said: *I want to learn to do this when I get out of college. You have inspired me to study restorative justice. I think it would be good if we had a circle like this at my dorm.* When they graduate and go on to post secondary education, some take the time to come back. They volunteer each week as co-keepers of circles. I meet young professionals who I first met as high school students at an RJ training or seminar and they have returned as young adults. They have gone off and studied restorative justice theory and practice. They have come back and are working restoratively for community organizations, state agencies, and the criminal justice system. They are teaching in schools. They are hosting restorative justice conferences and lobbying the legislature. They are contributors.

Conclusion

I am neither an academic nor a practitioner. I work for a state agency to ensure public funds are used appropriately and provide technical assistance and training. I liken my job to that of a bird flying over the state—I see the work of others and I share the seeds of their insight, successes and failures. For more than a decade, I have been part of a cadre of public servants who have worked with schools and community, criminal justice and social services to implement restorative measures in the lives of children, youth and their communities. In spite of the challenges of time, money and training, schools districts and individuals find the time and the money to get the training. As long as we adults are willing to speak up and say 'Let us try another way' and as long as we allow youth to have their voice, we will continue to find ways to address the challenges of implementing restorative measures, however they manifest themselves.

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