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## II. VIOLENCE AT SCHOOL, THE VIOLENCE OF SCHOOLING: RESTORATIVE ALTERNATIVES

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### Introduction

A young man, one of several youth convicted in the 1997 beating death of their peer Reena Virk in Victoria, British Columbia, nine years after the incident hugged his victim's parents after a National Parole Board granted him unescorted temporary passes. His parole hearing included an Aboriginal healing circle. Reena's mother, held an eagle feather while she spoke: "I am thankful and grateful you have taken responsibility for your actions" (Canadian Press, 2006, par 4). Although this case initially raised public outrage around teen violence in Canada, the willingness of the courts and the Virk family to engage in a restorative action indicates a promise for reclaiming others like this young man in the future.

This chapter begins by examining the kinds of violence that occurs at schools, and common school responses to such violence. It then turns to the ways in which our traditions of schooling perpetrate violence against students and reproduce patterns of systemic violence in our society. Hence incidents of violence at schools can be seen as reflections of out-of-school violence. The chapter advocates emerging practices of restorative justice – highly applicable to school contexts, which offer hope for a more restorative society.

Without wanting to diminish the horror of very overt forms of systemic violence that still exists in schools around the world including corporal punishment, prejudice based on race, ethnicity, gender and the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, the fear of sexual abuse and abduction (Human Rights Watch, 2005), this chapter focuses on school violence in the North American context.

### Violence at School

Since the school shootings at Columbine High School in 1999, the popular media and scholarly literature have been rife with panic over the phenomenon of school violence. This section begins by outlining

definitions of violence. The phenomenon of school violence is explored and the nature and prevalence of violence in schools identified. The category of student perpetrated violence is introduced.

### ***Definitions of Violence***

Commonly “violence” is defined as “the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on, or cause damage to, persons or property . . . [and as any] treatment or usage tending to cause bodily injury or forcibly interfering with personal freedom” (dictionary.oed.com). Describing violence as multi-dimensional and pervasive, Scherz (2006) includes “any emotional, psychological, or physical harm to person, community, or property” (p. 3). The World Health Organization defines violence as “the intentional use of physical and psychological force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (1996: 2-3). For the Council of Europe, with the aim of implementing consistent policies to combat violence in everyday life, violence is succinctly defined as “that which acts against convivencia – the Spanish word for ‘living together in harmony’” (Gittins, 2006: 14).

Philosopher’s Bourdieu & Passeron (1990) see violence as a way of getting and keeping a hold over someone. They distinguish between overt violence (physical or economic) and symbolic violence (alternately referred to as structural violence or systemic violence) – often euphemized, unrecognized or misrecognized because it is so deeply embedded as to be naturalized or taken-for-granted in our everyday understandings, practices and in the structures of our institutions and governing systems. Its very invisibility, according to Bourdieu, gives symbolic violence its power. Furthermore, Bourdieu’s (1998) “law of conservation of violence,” which claims that all violence is ultimately paid for, explains how symbolic or structural violence in society erupts in everyday acts of interpersonal violence. This understanding ties violence at school to the violence of schooling and to structures and systems of out-of-school violence.

Grosz (2000) explains that philosopher Jacques Derrida shows, “everyday violence, the violence we strive to condemn in its racist, sexist, classist and individualist terms, is itself the violent consequence of an entire order whose very foundation is inscriptive, differential and thus

violent” and concludes, “it is thus no longer clear how something like a moral condemnation of violence is possible, or at least how it remains possible without considerable self-irony” (p. 194). She draws on Derrida’s identification of the law as a form of compensatory violence which conceals itself by claiming a position above violence in order to judge it, and insists that a distinction between “good” violence and “bad” violence is ambiguous at best. Punitive practices such as the death penalty and rapidly increasing imprisonment rates (Ahmed et al, 2001) – particularly incarceration rates for members of racial minority groups, exemplify the ways that institutional violence is legitimized in our society. Grosz cautions against straightforward or outright condemnation of any individual acts of violence.

Based on their study of schools across Canada, Portelli et al (2007) conclude that “violence of various sorts is an issue within communities marginalized by poverty and despair, and that violence will erupt into community schools” (p. 52). Findings from studies into the experiences of students at school support the notion of “the conservation of violence.” Students admitted that the frustrations encountered via the processes of schooling are often expressed through fighting on the playground and aggression towards classmates (Herr & Anderson, 2003; Portelli et al, 2007).

Forensic psychologist Gillian (2001) agrees that violence has its roots in socio-economic conditions. Based on thirty years of extensive work with criminals he concludes “structural violence is not only the main form of violence... it is also the main cause of violent behaviour” (p. 101-102). Restorative justice advocate Sharpe (1998) concurs, “when imbalance and disharmony are a regular feature of community life, it should be no surprise that crime is too” (p. 11). Sharpe cites Canadian researchers in the areas of Aboriginal law and justice who see crime as a symptom of an unjust society. Likewise, Price Lofton (2004) sees violence and crime as manifestations of a flawed society.

### *The Phenomenon of School Violence*

Based on sensationalized media coverage of incidents of school violence in the last decade one may assume school violence is on the rise. Joong & Ridler (2006) believe that it is precisely because of the increased media attention that school violence has become such a major source of concern in the public consciousness. High profile cases of school

shootings around the world have certainly made the public more aware of the potentially horrific consequences of conflict in the school environment. Such events, stir up concern for educators and parents over whether schools are safe places for students and staff (Joong & Ridler, 2006).

Data collected from various studies confirm that school violence is of increasing concern. In surveys in Toronto schools, students reported frequent experiences of bullying (Pal & Day, 1991). Canadian teens surveyed said violence had increased in their schools over the past five years (EWRC, 2005). In a study in Nova Scotia, Ontario and British Columbia schools, the opinion of most students interviewed was that “the danger of physical, verbal, and emotional violence was ever-present in their daily life in schools – in the schoolyard, hallways, at the local park, and at home” (Portelli et al, 2007: 48). Surveys of teachers revealed that teachers felt a greater sense of fear for the safety of their students than for their own safety (British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, 1994).

Rates of violence were found to be highest in schools where gangs were present. Junior high and high schools were more likely to report violence than elementary schools, urban schools reported more violence than schools in suburban or rural areas, and large schools were more likely than smaller schools to report crimes (NYVPRC, 2002).

Other studies reported that “the vast majorities of schools in the United States are safe places and in recent years have become safer. Overall rates of violence in schools have fallen and students feel safer today than they have for several years” (NYVPRC, 2002: 1). In fact, schools today have more protections against violence than most other settings in our troubled world. In any case, “one thing on which we can agree is that there is an increasing concern for violence among children and youth” (EWRC, 2005: 6).

The complex social ecology of school systems has only recently begun to be explored. School violence from an ecological perspective “maintains that human behaviour is best understood in terms of the interaction between a person and his or her environment. Institutions are systems that are embedded with larger systems. As a result, what happens in an institution will impact, as well as be impacted by, the larger system within which it is nested” (DeFour, 2005: 87). Schools represent the political, cultural, and economic fabric of a community; what goes on inside the school doors is tied to the larger community (Flores, 2005).

Violence is socially constructed, and the ways individuals construct meaning about violence are affected by race, class, gender, age, geographic location, ability, and religion (Williams, 2005). The violence that takes place at school begins with the environmental conditions of the community or larger societal factors (DeFour, 2005).

It is suggested that school climate may contribute more to levels of school violence than the school's socio-economic status and crime rates in the neighbourhood. "High levels of violence are found in schools where students feel alienated . . . in the form of a lack of connectedness to or lack of significant knowledge of other students, teachers, and the school's structure and environment in general" (Scherz, 2006: 15).

School violence may be one response to what Blake (2004) terms "a culture of refusal" – youths' sub-cultural response to a society that marginalizes poor and minority adolescence. In a school culture without a strong sense of belonging and where students feel alone in their struggle to fit in, the basic impulse to act aggressively may be stronger than the threat of consequences. Bullying, delinquency and alienation are unlikely to exist where students and teachers have a strong sense of belonging (Paphazy, 2005).

In some sub-cultures violence is viewed as an acceptable form of problem-solving, where being "soft" can be an exploited weakness (Scherz, 2006). Moreover, changes in societal demographics can result in students needing to interact with others from different cultural groups. Misunderstandings take place due to unawareness of the social rules of others' cultures, such that a significant amount of school violence is the result of cultural ignorance and insensitivity (DeFour, 2005).

School violence, as explored in this chapter, can be divided into two categories: 1) student perpetrated violence, and 2) the violence inherent in the processes of schooling as we know it. It is the student perpetrated violence – peer-to-peer violence or violence by students towards teachers, that is commonly reported in the media and around which the public panic revolves. As well as such incidents of interpersonal violence at school, a much more insidious form of school violence exists, that is largely taken-for-granted. Various manifestations of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) exist within the very structures of schooling that, in a vicious cycle, are reproduced by and work to perpetuate violence in the larger society. Both these categories of school violence are examined in the discussion that follows.

***Student Perpetrated Violence at School***

Incidents of student perpetrated violence range from minor discipline problems such as disobedience and teasing to major problems such as obscene gestures, bullying, and assault with or without a weapon, vandalism, extortion, and gang-related activities. Such violence “affects not only the perpetrator and the victim, but the entire student body, the staff, and the community as a whole” (EWRC, 2005: 5).

While instances of school shootings represent the extreme of school violence, bullying is the most prevalent form of student-to-students abuse and is perceived as a significant problem (Paphazy, 2005). Bullying can be indirect aggression, when the targeted person is alienated, ostracized or defamed by the group; or relational aggression when the person is purposefully manipulated by others, damaging self-esteem and peer relationships (DeFour, 2005). Verbal abuse and spreading lies or gossip are common forms of bullying. Cyber-bullying is another growing concern (Keith & Martin, 2005). Bullying, it is posited, is one way children impress their peers, try to fit in and be “cool” (Pal & Day, 1991).

Whatever the reason, for victims of bullying, the abuse negatively shapes the entire school experience. Victims go to extremes to escape being bullied including staying away from school or learning to avoid undefined areas of the school such as hallways, gyms, locker rooms, playgrounds and cafeterias. (DeFour, 2005). Bullies are often victims of bullying themselves (EWRC, 2005). Both the bullies and their victims are at risk of low self-esteem, depression, and suicide. Most at risk are those who both perpetrate and are victimized.

Another form of student-to-student violence is sexual in nature. Youth encounter teasing, disrespectful remarks or unwanted touching from perpetrators who may be a classmate, another student in the school. Most incidents involve a male perpetrator and a female victim. Even though much of the harassment occurs publicly, it evokes little reaction from other students or staff (Krauss et al, 2005).

Gang activity in schools is another growing concern, with weapons, graffiti, vandalism, arson, stabbings, shootings, extortion of fellow students, intimidation of teachers and administrators noted as some of the common problems (Edmonton Police Service, 2006).

The adolescent peer group is a dynamic ingredient in the secondary school environment that constitutes a vital component of the institutional

culture of the school which sometimes leads to violence (Brady, 2004). These peer groups or cliques (jocks, nerds, etc.) are propagated in the student body and sustained by other students, administrators, and teachers. Peer groups consist of clearly delineated members who maintain a status system, with violence and abuse often perpetrated by higher status students upon lower status students. Students' perceptions of their status within that hierarchy impact significantly on their school experiences – their attitudes towards school and to the outcomes of their education. This peer group dynamic can also be seen as part of the symbolic violence inherent in the structures of schooling.

Gender differences in peer violence are noted (DeFour, 2005), with girls more likely to be verbally, physically and/or sexually assaulted. DeFour (2005) reports that girls are more likely to participate in social aggression, but are less likely to be involved in gangs. They characterize more areas of the school as unsafe and they report more violent events. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to be physically aggressive. They are more often both perpetrator and victim and more likely to be involved in gangs (DeFour, 2005).

With respect to violent incidents perpetrated by students against teachers, in surveys of teachers a significant number reported having been subject to some form of abuse, with verbal assaults occurring more frequently than physical assaults (Manitoba Teachers' Society, 1993).

### **Responses to Violence at School**

Responses to student perpetrated violence at school come in many forms. In the wake of Columbine and other high profile cases of school violence security measures and policies have been implemented, programs and curricula have been developed, and there is an increased desire to find a ways to identify students who are likely to engage in violent acts. In the section below reactive or punitive responses to school violence are examined alongside other more productive proactive measures.

### ***Reactive or Punitive Responses to School Violence***

In response to growing fears around school violence, administrators have implemented policies aimed at reducing the likelihood of such events occurring or reoccurring in their schools. There are rehearsals of school lockdowns, "zero tolerance" initiatives for weapons brought to

school, for threats made against students or staff, or for violating school drug policies, and “three strikes and you’re out” policies for even minor repeat offences. Teachers attend workshops to learn to recognize gang colours and signs (Herr & Anderson, 2003), to improve their knowledge and understanding of aggression in children and youth, to prevent and manage behavioural problems in the classroom (EWRC, 2005). Across the U.S. and in Canada the prudence has been considered of following the Texas example, where one school district has allowed teachers to carry concealed (NSSSS, 2008).

Post-Columbine, violence prevention efforts have been directed toward beefing up security through hardware and law enforcement presence (Lawrence, 2007). In some cities, millions of dollars have been spent on the installation of greater security apparatuses: metal detectors and video cameras, and the hiring of additional security guards for their schools (Krauss, 2005). Schools that regularly use paid law enforcement or security, it is assured, are less likely to experience a violent incident than those that do not regularly have officers in the schools.

It is suggested that violence-prevention programs need to be tailored to fit the specific school; that school audits should be conducted to answer the question, “How well-organized is this school to prevent, minimize and respond to issues of violence?” (Galvin, 2006: 23); and such data used to design interventions and evaluations. Examples of interventions might include locating hot spots for violence on school maps, creating focus groups to identify reasons why violence occurs in those areas, and identifying solutions for preventing and deterring perpetrators in those areas, along with increased adult supervision (Williams, 2005).

The U.S. Department of Education ([www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)) report *Safeguarding Our Children: An Action Guide* suggests that an effective school violence prevention plan should include: a school-wide foundation for all children, provisions to identify students at risk, supports that address risk factors and build protective factors for them, and intensive interventions for the few who experience significant problems.

Post-Columbine policy often seeks to assess the risk of violence within the student body. To this end school administrators and policy-makers have become fixated on the idea of identifying students or “profiling” those who are more likely to engage in these violent acts in order to avoid future tragedies (Krauss, 2005). However, such identification cannot



easily be done without inaccurately highlighting a large number of non-dangerous students (ibid., 2005).

Two major thrusts in response to violence at school are an abundance of anti-bullying programs and the practice of equipping schools with police officers euphemistically known as “school resource officers.” Great emphasis is placed on anti-bullying programs in schools without considering how school bullying reflects wider societal processes of domination as a form of influence. Most anti-bullying programs, identify, and thereby stigmatize, an individual or groups of individuals as bullies or perpetrators of harm – placing the blame and the responsibility for change squarely on the bullies. As Portelli et al conclude, “too often anti-bullying programs in schools are approached as though bullying is an individual problem, unrelated to issues of social difference and social justice, and too often such programs are articulated only to students, ignoring the ways in which *adults* in schools and school systems can contribute to a bullying culture” (2007: 49-50). Addressing bullying on a broader scale would require a profound shift in how schools view and engage in the practice of “discipline.”

Various forms of security staffing are in use in schools including School Resource Officers (SRO) programs (LaLonde, 1995), to combat youth violence. The role of the SRO is crime-prevention and education as well as law enforcement and patrol functions. But relations between police and school administration, staff and students can be strained: “After all, regardless of what you call a police officer . . . he or she still will view most situations through the criminal justice lens” (Finn et al, 2005: 69).

Anti-bullying and SRO programs may go some way in allaying public fears of school violence and in actually stopping violence, but much is sacrificed with these reactive approaches. Zero tolerance, profiling, surveillance and police presence create an atmosphere of suspicion and a lack of privacy for children in schools, revealing a hidden curriculum that no one can be trusted, that everyone is to be feared. This atmosphere of suspicion in schools supports what Giroux (2003b) describes as the demonization of youth by those looking for quick-fix solutions. Giroux contends, “in a society deeply troubled by their presence, youth prompt in the public imagination, a rhetoric of fear, control, and surveillance” (2003b: 554).

***Proactive Responses to School Violence***

In a search for more proactive solutions to school violence, the first step may be to use a concept opposite to violence, to switch from a negative focus to a positive one in order to build convivencia (Smith, 2006). While it may not be possible to completely eliminate violence in our society, students can learn how to deal with the challenges of life in a healthy school community (Scherz, 2006).

Scholars agree that reactive or punitive measures are not the answer: “Rather than increasing security around school or expelling students for bringing a weapon or drugs to school, it may be more useful to encourage greater communication among students and faculty” (Krauss, 2005: 269). “Zero tolerance policies should be replaced by extreme-tolerance policies in which we seek to understand inappropriate behaviour and how the dynamics of the school play a significant role in modelling acceptable problem-solving.” (Scherz, 2006: 106). Giroux agrees, “School safety policies should offer children a second chance, not simply dump them into the criminal justice system” (2003a: 96). Draconian penalties are unlikely to encourage open communication, rather, are likely to lead to greater levels of an “us” versus “them” mentality.

Students should be given the power to play a role in developing and governing violence reduction or school safety policies (Giroux, 2003a). When the rules are created by students, they feel empowered and take ownership and responsibility for the programming and solutions to violence in their schools (EWRC, 2005). Youth opinions and experiences need to be given credence and valued. “By listening to youth, society as a whole can come much closer to solving a complex problem that affects everyone, regardless of age. As a society, we need to create sustainable changes at the very heart of our communities to ensure a future that is marked less by violence and more by respect” (Ma, 2004: 7).

The focus for reducing aggression and violent incidents involving young people should be on proactive curriculum-based work that will develop pupils’ social, emotional and behavioural skills. “Schools should provide forms of critical education in which ethics and values are used to teach students to keep the spirit of justice alive in themselves, embrace the need to be compassionate, respect the rights of others, and be self-conscious about the consequences of their actions” (Giroux, 2003a: 94).

Peer support has been found to be an effective type of intervention

against violence in schools (Cowie, 2006). Peer support systems include cooperative group work, befriending, buddying and conflict resolution practices. Teaching of non-violence and conflict resolution skills to both students and teachers is essential for building a healthy school environment, as well as teaching positive behaviour through modelling, coaching and prompting (Williams, 2005).

As much of the violence at schools happens not during school hours but after school, "one of the targets of intervention should be providing youth with supervised after school activities that would allow them to channel their energy into appropriate activities" (Flores, 2005: 83). Schools could play a more proactive role by offering programs after school and in the evenings, and offering low-cost programming during holidays.

Seniors are another excellent yet untapped resource. "Older people," Stuckelberger (2005) contends, "are the key to violence prevention and to the promotion of a culture of peace" (p. 157). Elders have participated in and witnessed history at a personal level and in living this history, many have experienced the profound impact of war. Ageing individuals could become "conscientious role models . . . [who] represent key values of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace" (Ibid., p.158). Moreover, older people often have the time and patience that is needed in order to gain the understanding needed to communicate with disruptive children.

It is suggested that one barrier that needs to be addressed in effective responses to bullying and violence is the affective barrier associated with public shame (Ahmed, et al., 2001). Shame management is found to be an important mediating variable as shaming and the emotion of shame regulate social behaviour. Rather than belittle the person and the behaviour, which is stigmatised shaming with negative labels, the community can respect the person while not condoning the behaviour, which is reintegrative shaming that supports the person, but not the act (Ibid., 2001).

Research has shown a direct correlation between safe schools and positive learning experiences (Joong & Ridler, 2006). The entire school setting and the wider community should be the focus of violence prevention strategies. "Because school violence reflects the violence in our communities and neighbourhoods, schools are the most effective in confronting school violence when the community around them provides support" (NYVPRC, 2002: 2). Key sectors of the community that can

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serve as allies for schools include community organizations, social and mental health services and law enforcement agencies.

In fact, many excellent proactive programs for addressing violence at school are being implemented world-wide with much success (DeFour, 2005; Gittins, 2006; Smith, 2006). Many of these methods are consistent with the restorative approaches advocated later in this chapter.

#### **The Violence of Schooling**

As well as increasing incidents of interpersonal student perpetrated violence, rarely addressed in the media and popular literature is a much more insidious form of school violence inherent in the structures of schooling – structures that are very much taken-for-granted in our society. The following section looks at the violence inherent in the very function of the Western notion of schooling and some of the common school structures and practices that subtly perpetuate violence.

#### ***The Normalizing Function of Schooling***

In philosopher Michel Foucault's (1979) historical study of prisons, he draws an analogy between schools and prisons in that both were founded as disciplinary bodies (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998), revealing incarceration, and schooling, as apparatuses of power and punishment. His notion of *governmentality* (Foucault, 1991) offers an analysis of the mentality of governance focusing on the collective, taken-for-granted ways of thinking behind the institutionalized practices that attempt to normalize individuals' conduct – as in prisons and schools. In institutionalized settings, he suggests, the wielding of power is accompanied by an attitude toward those over whom power is exerted, constituting individuals as objects of power, to which they often respond with resistance. Herr & Anderson concur that "schools, like prisons, may actually generate violence... rather than contain it" (2003: 416). An unbalanced distribution of power engendering resistance, aggression and violence is antithetical to the process of education.

Ivan Illich (1970) in his classic text *Deschooling Society*, laments the extent to which public education, in the name of the Western notion of progress, has become institutionalized so as to no longer meet human needs. In this way social reality has been "schooled" into conformity and dependency. Illich identifies the processes of "schooling" at the root of poverty, social unrest and global degradation. He calls for a

“deschooling” of society, away from reliance on institutions, towards greater self and community empowerment.

For Herr & Anderson (2003) too, “problems of persistent social inequality and school violence are linked . . . [and] current policies attempting to address these issues are flawed, based on a limited theorization of violence” (p. 415). They suggest that, “violence may be partly a result of the social policies we have devised to contain it” (p. 416). To understand the violence of schooling Herr & Anderson apply notion of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) to explain how violent practices that are normalized and thereby rendered invisible become part of the hidden curriculum of schooling, and Bourdieu’s (1998) “law of conservation of violence,” to explain how the violent hidden curriculum of schooling and violence in society precipitate instances of student perpetrated violence at school. They insist that violence occurs in schools in the reproduction of privilege through everyday pedagogical practices by, “taking arbitrary cultural capital (e.g. white skin, a particular way of pronouncing words, manner of dress) which has no inherent superiority and succeeding in imposing it as a dominant social norm” (p. 417). Herr & Anderson further suggest that even the most caring attitudes of teachers can perpetuate symbolic violence by obscuring its insidious effects. They conclude, “the reaction of students who are victims of symbolic violence represent strategies that run the gamut from the relatively passive internalization of their lack of worth to ‘being bad,’ or engaging in forms of resistance” (p. 418). In this way symbolic violence in schools contributes to the reproduction of relations of hostility and aggression, between disparate groups and classes in our society.

#### **Violent School Structures and Practices**

Herr & Anderson (2003) studied critical incidents in a U.S. school to reveal the workings of symbolic violence. Their study showed disparity in the success of students from different social groups within the same school. Shockingly, the achievement of students from non-dominant cultural groups at this school was found to be significantly below similar populations at other local schools that were not demographically mixed. While no overt differences were noted in the ways students were treated, and no hard data were produced to link symbolic violence with student achievement, they suspected that seemingly innocuous school practices, (such as the piping of classical music into the halls) that

favoured the cultural capital of the dominant group while alienating members of marginalized groups of students, were to blame.

Portelli et al (2007) concur that, “the processes, policies, practices and structures on which schooling is based are pervasively white middle and professional class. Notions like school readiness, early and emergent literacies, meritocracy, background knowledge, and previous experience are all based in unexamined assumptions that universalize white middle class habitus” (p.38). In their study of schools across Canada, which inquired into equitable education for students at-risk, teachers and students identified common school practices detrimental to the education of students at-risk, which display symbolic violence inherent in the processes of schooling. Elements of violence (symbolic and more overt) that they identified included:

- a curriculum of interruptions characterized by: fragmentation, pull-out programs, rigid subject boundaries, short class periods, compressed school days required by bussing, lack of time for teachers to work together, on-going PA announcements;
- curriculum and pedagogical methods (e.g. copying notes from a text book) that are inappropriate;
- large class sizes, overcrowded classes;
- cuts to programs that valued students’ familiar ways of knowing and spoke to students’ lives such as shop, family studies, practical and fine arts, ESL, peer tutoring and human rights programs;
- standardized testing that defines curriculum in narrow and rigid terms, tests that focus on print texts and multiple choice questions for which there is one right answer – often going against what teachers and administrators know to be effective practices;
- school ranking based on high stakes testing, the accompanying loss of reputation and morale for low ranking schools, and the distribution of resources based on performance;
- the demand for blind obedience, school discipline policies such as zero tolerance, suspension and expulsion;
- reproduction of gender binaries in terms of the sorts of activities available for boys and girls;
- reproduction of racist relations through, for instance, lack of appropriate mechanism for communication across language and cultural barriers, and lack of diversity amongst teaching staff;

- overt aggression from teachers directed towards students ranging from demonstrations of lack of respect, to shouting, verbal harassment, negative teasing, humiliation and discrimination;
- poor school design, scarcity of resources;
- teachers without experience or training for the contexts in which they work, lack of professional development opportunities, shortage of support staff, high student teacher ratios, high staff turnover or burnout;
- system inflexibility, rigid staffing and resource formulae, bureaucratized and centralized school systems, system-wide policies that do not account for diversity;
- lack of acknowledgment for the contextual nature of schooling and the special circumstances for struggling disadvantaged schools;

These practices are violent in that they operate on a “deficit mentality” (Portelli et al, 2007) by de-valuing other ways of being in an attempt to shape individuals’ to fit the valued norm – the way of the dominant class. The authors lament that such detrimental curriculum and pedagogy embedded in the structures of schooling at all levels, undermine the work that caring educators are attempting.

The practice of identifying and labelling students based on ability – as having “special needs” (FASD, ADHD, etc.), or labelling them as “at-risk,” “bad kids” or “trouble-makers,” commonly practices in schools often with the best intentions, to identify concerns in order to address them, is however a destructive practice. Labelling creates a self-fulfilling prophesy, a culture of hopelessness, low expectations that foster negative attitudes and self-destructive behaviours such as self-blaming or aggressiveness, stigmatization and further marginalization (Portelli et al, 2007).

Epp (1996) too claims that systemic violence, which “impacts on individuals or groups by burdening them psychologically, mentally, culturally, spiritually, economically, or physically . . .” (p. 1) occurs in schools, “when the positive impact on some students is only possible through the negative effect it has on others” (p. 3). Other common practices identified as inherently violent include: curricula which reflect only the dominant cultural group; pre-determined, externally chosen subjects of study that neither take into consideration students’ interests nor their developmental readiness; the social hierarchy in classrooms where

students compete for a few positions at the top – for coveted spots on school teams or school drama productions; age-segregation; the use of fear, competition, and punishment to ensure compliance; evaluation that encourages a sense of superiority or inferiority.

Likewise, Gardner suggests that the practice of moving from class to class and subject to subject at regular intervals is actually counter-productive in that it “makes the achievement of an education for understanding virtually impossible by breaking the sense of flow necessary for true learning”(1993: 118).

Violent practices are deeply embedded in many of the common practices of schooling. Alfie Kohn (1993) argues that the use of incentives, grades and rewards is just another form of the violence of schooling. Not only do grading practices positively reinforce skilful students while having an adverse affect on those who are less skilful, but the effects of such extrinsic rewards have an even more insidious effect. Kohn believes that “while manipulating people with incentives seems to work in the short run, it is a strategy that ultimately fails and even does lasting harm” (Kohn, 1993, book cover). Grades, tests, punishments and rewards reduce the probability that students will get the help they need as formative growth is difficult in an environment where someone judges the performance of others. Rather than feeling encouraged with support to perform, students’ performance suffers from anxiety. Moreover, as Deci & Ryan conclude, “top-down evaluative pressure has prompted teachers to be more controlling in their classroom activities, in turn fostering a more outcome-focused orientation in students, a focus that has been found to promote impoverished learning, higher dropout rates, and greater alienation within schools” (2006: 1).

Rewards are commonly used in schools to motivate children and improve achievement. Yet, rewards are an agent of control and “a controlling paradigm does not help children to act responsibly” (Kohn, 1993: 174). Ryan & Stiller concur, “externally imposed evaluations, goals, rewards, and pressures seem to create a style of teaching and learning that is antithetical to quality learning outcomes in school, that is, learning characterized by durability, depth, and integration” (1991: 115). Extrinsic rewards do not help children, nor increase their achievement, but devalue intrinsic motivation. As Thorndike insisted decades ago, “the approved view to-day is that an intrinsic interest in the activity, regardless of ulterior consequences, is an enormously superior means of



learning” (1935: 108). Yet schools continue to use controls that have been long understood to have no known benefit. Rather, Kohn (1993) calls for a safe and caring atmosphere that allows children to admit when they do not know something and ask for help.

Williams (2005) claims that bullying is also, in fact, structurally supported by schools. Victims of bullying tend to blame themselves, and perpetrators often engage in victim-blaming that deflects attention from their abusive behaviour onto the victim’s inability to cope. Teachers and administrators blame individual students for the bullying and thus divert the focus from examining what structures are in place that allow or invite bullying. Some teachers reject children who seek support because the issue to them seems trivial.

Discipline policies that attempt to control aggressive behaviour and protect students at school actually cause more violence (Williams, 2005). Punishment, isolation, suspension, expulsion, and zero tolerance policies are seen by some as systemic bullying. Portelli et al found, “while suspension was an official component of the *Safe Schools Act...* [it] seemed to exacerbate rather than solve problems related to safety and violence experienced daily by students within and beyond the school walls” (p. 48).

Fine & Smith claim that “ideologically, [zero tolerance] is part of a larger political project of ‘accountability,’ in which youth . . . are held accountable for a nation that has placed them ‘at risk.’ Systematically denied equal developmental opportunities, they are pathologized, placed under surveillance, and increasingly criminalized (2001: 257). Moreover, such reactionary responses eliminate the possibility of determining the root cause of violent behaviour in children (Williams, 2005).

Those students who fail to thrive in educational settings often are unable to cope. Some express their alienation through aggression and violence; others drop out or are in effect pushed out of school when the education system is weighted against them due to multiple disadvantages, or if they actively reject the values and goals of the middle-class education system (Center on Evaluation, Development, Research, 1987). The school dropout is thus often a victim of structural violence.

The inequitable allocation of resources in schools is another major obstacle for addressing structural disparity. Those responsible for allocating funds for education, the elected government officials and school board trustees, take into account the views of their supporters rather

than the needs of children when allocating funds. The U.S. education policy *No Child Left Behind* ([www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)) is a case in point – where, in the name of “accountability,” resources are allocated based on student achievement, perpetuating a vicious cycle of failure. In many small schools where site-based decision-making is practiced, principals are unable to devote sufficient funds for the number of personnel required to adequately address the needs of struggling students. “Unequal allocation of resources . . . systemically withholds from some students the learning opportunities enjoyed by others” (Epp, 1996: 18).

For Meighan (1999) the entire enterprise of compulsory education is an abuse of human rights. “The problem with most discussions about education,” she says, “is that the essential coercive and indoctrinational cultures of mass schooling are overlooked. In blunt terms . . . the current model of the compulsory day-detention centre, is itself a bully institution” (p. 4).

### **Restorative Alternatives**

Restorative justice is a movement that has gained recognition around the world over the past two decades or so as an alternative to our Western notions of justice and a vision for healing and change. Restorative justice is most commonly applied in response to criminal behaviour, but has implications beyond just addressing crime. The following section examines the ways restorative justice is defined in theory and practice. From a restorative perspective, a critique of our Western system of justice offered, traditions upon which restorative justice is based are acknowledged, and common restorative approaches currently in practice reviewed.

### ***What is Restorative Justice?***

Restorative justice is both a philosophy and a practice. As a philosophy of relationship (Sullivan & Tift, 2004) and a life ethos, it “consists of a set of tenets that enable us to identify and reduce injustices, currently unrecognizable as such, in socio-economic arrangements, other institutional settings such as schools and workplaces, family life, and intimate relationships” (Johnstone, 2004: 13). Central to restorative justice “is a concern for the most effective way for people to interact with one another in order to live in social harmony” (Warner Roberts, 2004: 247). Collaborative problem-solving and co-operative engagement are

critical elements and the degree to which all stakeholders are involved in meaningful emotional exchange and decision-making is the degree to which any form of social interaction can be termed fully restorative (Wachtel & McCold, 2004).

While its potential application is widespread, reflecting values commonly espoused in our society, but less often acted upon (Sharpe, 1998), restorative justice has, up until now, been put into practice primarily as a response to crime with the aim of building community (Sharpe, 1998). A restorative approach, rather than endorsing punitive acts that inflict suffering and pain on the offender, calls for positive acts that benefit and meet the needs of both the victims – those harmed by the crime, as well as the offender (Johnstone, 2004; Zehr & Toews, 2004). With a focus on accountability rather than retribution and punishment, on “harms done rather than rules broken” (Sharpe, 1998: 5), “restorative justice lives in relationships and intentions not in systems or procedures” (p. 101). It sends a message that a criminal act is unacceptable while still supporting the individual and taking into account the realities that underlie crime (Sharpe, 1998).

In response to crime, restorative justice is based on the premise that, “whether we have victimised others or been victimised ourselves, we need social support in the journey to re-narrate our stories so that they are no longer just about shame and humiliation but ultimately about dignity and triumph” (Zehr, 2000: 10). “Restorative justice is about ‘re-biographing:’ restorative storytelling that redefines an ethical conception of the self” (Ahmed, et al, 2001: 10).

A restorative approach involves a transition in the way we think about and respond to crime “from a focus on problems past and present to a focus on possibilities in the future” (Batley, 2004: 369). Batley (2004) describes restorative justice as involving an “understanding-that-runs-deeper-than-cognition . . . [towards] individual and collective emotional transformation” (p. 369).

#### ***A Critique of Retributive or Punitive Justice***

In suggesting that restorative processes, may deter and rehabilitate more effectively than our present punitive system, restorative justice implies a critique of existing Western notions of “justice.”

Our society’s primary approach to justice leaves many people unsatisfied because it reduces crime to a violation of rules, and seeks

punishment rather than accountability. It holds the offender accountable only to the abstract law and a set of arbitrary consequences, rather than to the real people affected by the offense – the victims and their communities. In doing so, the court system neglects both the material and emotional needs of the victims of crime as there is neither means available for victims to experience emotional restoration, nor does it provide for material restoration. As well as denying victims a sense of justice, “it takes power from those who have caused harm and denies them the chance to make amends” (Sharpe, 1998: 3). Instead, the state is entirely responsible for punishing and correcting the offender (Lawrence, 2007).

Focusing primarily on responses to individual instances of wrongdoing, Johnstone (2004) claims, avoids looking more broadly at social problems or social disparities that may have contributed to the crime committed thus drawing attention away from “preventing and remedying the distress, poverty and inequality that frequently arises from ‘lawful’ social policies and practices” (Johnstone, 2004: 14). Price Lofton (2004) concurs that “until we have a healthy social system, we gain nothing from pointing fingers at each other, trying to stick the label ‘offender’ on particular persons for particular acts . . . [rather we should] recognize that crimes emerge from a community’s lack of wholeness, and it is that lack that should be addressed” (Price Lofton, 2004: 385).

Institutionalized justice does not allow for a questioning of the complex factors that contribute to crime including the inequitable social structures that underlie it and what the community could do to prevent it (Sharpe, 1998). Responses to wrongdoing should not be about “fixing” an individual wrongdoer, but about creating a better world in which all can find meaning and belonging. By thinking in terms of harms done rather than rules broken, community members can respond to a crime and focus on what makes it unique. By understanding the full effects of an incident and its aftermath, recognising what is needed by whom, assigning responsibility in right proportion, and holding people directly accountable for what they have done, a richer enactment of justice can occur (Sharpe, 1998).

Retributive or punitive justice, upon which the Western criminal justice system is based, holds the belief that if a wrong has been committed the wrongdoer must be made to “pay” in the form of hard treatment or suffering proportional to the suffering caused, and this “payment” is

exacted by the state. The intention of this form of justice is precisely to inflict pain. Alternatively, in restorative justice, which may also result in hurt and hardship, the intent, however, is not to inflict such hurt. On the contrary, Walgrave (2004) insists, an approach where restoration is the goal would see potential hurt as a reason to reduce an offender's obligation. The infliction of pain is not only counterproductive as it closes down rather than invites dialogue, but it is also considered socially destructive and unethical. "Relying on punishment for dealing with crime leads to more imprisonment, more human and financial costs, weaker ethics and less public safety" (Walgrave, 2004: 51). Retributive justice focuses on wrongdoing in the past while restorative justice focuses on restoration in the future.

Walgrave (2004) notes that it is sometimes argued that retribution, or the punishment of "evil," is a human need in order to acknowledge what is deemed "good." Our society considers it a moral imperative, then, to punish the transgression of norms. Whether or not there is some sense of "good" to which we strive, beyond resentment for personal hurt, threat, affront to one's dignity, physical integrity or one's social or material world, censuring for wrongdoing need not involve punishment. There is no rational reason for inflicting pain, when restitution is a more practical way of making things right. Censorship from a moral authority respected by the offender has greater potential to have an impact on moral thinking than punishment. Restorative justice offers a constructive form of censorship focusing on harms done to another person and to the quality of social life rather than appealing just to some abstract law. In the Western criminal justice approach, "balancing the harm done by the offender with further harm inflicted on the offender . . . only adds to the total amount of harm in the world" (Wright as cited in Walgrave, 2004: 56).

For Wachtel & McCold (2004) of the four different approaches to the regulation of behaviour – punitive, permissive, neglectful, and restorative, the restorative approach with high control and high support effectively confronts and disapproves of wrongdoing while still affirming the intrinsic worth of the offender.

"The fundamental, unifying hypothesis of restorative practices is disarmingly simple: that human beings are happier, more co-operative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behaviour when those in positions of authority do things *with* them, rather than *to*

them or *for* them. This hypothesis maintains that the punitive and authoritarian *to* mode and the permissive and paternalistic *for* mode are not as effective as the restorative, participatory, and engaging *with* mode” (Wachtel & McCold, 2004: 1-2).

### ***Honouring Restorative Traditions***

To fully appreciate restorative approaches, it is imperative to acknowledge and honour restorative traditions upon which current understandings and practices of restorative justice are based. Indigenous traditions around the world as well as some religious traditions (of the past and present) uphold beliefs and practices that underpin restorative justice philosophy. To avoid essentializing, romanticizing or co-opting indigenous traditions that restorative justice draws upon, and duly honouring those traditions, there is a need to problematize both the historical context that brought those traditions to the attention of Western culture, and the present realities of indigenous peoples worldwide (Cunneen, 2004).

Restorative justice as it is practiced in Western contexts today adapt justice processes similar to the traditions of indigenous groups worldwide including groups from New Zealand, Australia, North America, and also Africa and Asia. Two cultures with the strongest practices are the Maori in New Zealand and North American First Nations. In truth, it must be acknowledged that great variations exist between the beliefs and practices of various indigenous groups, so that generalizations about restorative justice and indigenous traditions should be avoided. Generalizations about indigenous cultures, Cunnee (2004) warns, trivialize the complexities that exist in indigenous understandings of justice and justice practices. In some cases, in fact, restorative justice practices today diverge significantly from indigenous traditions. For example, current restorative justice approaches often involve bringing together parties for dialogue and face-to-face encounters between offenders and victims, while in some indigenous traditions physical sanctions including, “temporary or permanent exile, withdrawal and separation within the community, and restitution by kin” (Cunneen, 2004: 350) all involve avoidance of confrontation between the offender and victims rather than dialogue. Moreover, colonization has impacted claims to “authenticity” of many cultural traditions. For Aboriginal people, the historical context in which restorative justice is being promoted and introduced

includes the experience of colonialism and cultural genocide (Cunneen, 2004).

In relation to religious traditions, Batley (2004) describes common beliefs that restorative justice approaches share with Christian traditions including: the connectedness of all people; that well-being and right relationships between people are desirable; that each person's dignity is valued; that conflict and crime disrupt such harmony; that some "supernatural" element is involved in understanding justice; that mediators are useful in justice seeking process; and the need for reparations or making things right rather than retribution.

As restorative justice approaches continue to be adapted for various Western cultural contexts it is essential that they remain true to its key tenets. The dangers of an influx of practices that are not carefully considered, is a diluting of the core values of restorative justice philosophy, thereby reducing its potential as a true approach for systemic change (Warner Roberts, 2004). In particular, state instituted programs run the risk of cooption of restorative values into the mainstream justice system – reserved, for example, only for certain types of offenses and certain types of offenders. The fact that restorative justice is currently used primarily only in the juvenile justice system, for non-violent or less-serious offenses, and with indigenous populations is of concern (Zehr & Toews, 2004). Such limited application reduces its likelihood of having any impact towards changing the system from its biased ways (Price Lofton, 2004).

### ***Restorative Justice Approaches to Crime***

In response to crime there exist various modes or models of practice in the restorative justice field today encompassing a variety of activities that can occur prior to, during, or after a criminal prosecution. From a restorative justice perspective (Achtenberg, 2000), crime is seen as a result of the alienation of some members of society, and the community is considered to be responsible for helping bring those members back into a harmonious relationship with self and society. At the core of these methods is restorative dialogue between victims and offenders. Bazemore & Walgrave (1999) describe restorative justice as "every action that is primarily oriented toward doing justice by repairing the harm that has been caused by a crime" (p. 48).

The purpose of a restorative process is to identify and address the

needs of the parties affected by the crime, and seek a resolution that affords healing, reparation and reintegration, and prevents future harm (McCold, 2001). Satisfying the victim in the process and helping the offender to understand and take responsibility for his crime are the main goals, the challenge being to ensure that the process truly sees to the needs of both the victim and the offender (Sharpe, 1998). Criteria for the selection of cases generally include: an identifiable victim, the victim's voluntary participation, and the offender's acceptance of responsibility for the criminal action. Restorative practices generally involve an opportunity for the victim and offender to meet face-to-face with a mediator who helps focus the discussion on what the victim experienced, how the offender experienced the incident, and how best to set things right (Sharpe, 1998). Along with the primary victim and the offender, stakeholders in the process may include secondary victims – the family and friends of the victim, and community members, as well as supporters of the offender. Van Ness (2004) “emphasizes repairing the harm caused or revealed by criminal behavior... best accomplished through inclusive and cooperative processes” (p. 137).

Restorative justice practices generally embody: flexibility of process, participation, dialogue and consensus, full and direct involvement and accountability, collaborative problem-solving, consensual decision making, respect among all, reparation of harm, healing, reunification, reintegration, empowerment of all and strengthening of community to prevent future harms (Sharpe, 1998; Warner Roberts, 2004).

Restorative practices may take the form of Victim Offender Mediation, Conferencing (New Zealand Maori), or Justice Circles (North American First Nations) each with its particular variations. Other practices also sometimes defined as restorative include: victim impact panels, community work service, community policing, and alternative measures programs (Warner Roberts, 2004). Offenders might offer an apology that is a sincere admission and expression of regret for their actions, make financial restitution through payments, replacement of property or working for the victim, or by performing community service.

Community conferencing uses the principles of “reintegrative shaming” (Braithwaite, 1989) – respectful and healing with the intent of preventing crime, not degrading and stigmatizing shame. Wachtel & McCold explain, “restorative practices provide an opportunity for us



to express our shame, along with other emotions, and in doing so, reduce their intensity” (2004: 6). It is also suggested that restorative justice might address the victim’s internalisation of shame – the idea that I was victimized because there is something wrong with me as a person (Ahmed, et al, 2001). The sentencing circle is an alternative to a formal court proceeding that endeavours to empower the community with the resolution of a criminal matter. The aim is to shift the process of sentencing from punishment to rehabilitation and responsibility.

Commenting on the various forms of restorative justice currently in practice Bazemore & Umbreit suggest “the future may lead to one hybrid model. Or, more practically, jurisdictions may wish to consider developing a ‘menu’ which includes a variety of conferencing alternatives to meet the diverse needs of each case” (1998: 27-28).

In Canada, youth justice committees exist in several provinces (Hillian et al, 2004) that address low-risk and minor offenses as alternative measures to the formal court system and incarceration. Medium or high-risk offenses may involve case management conferences that occur post-sentencing.

Community accountability programs such as the Wet-suwet-en Unlocking Aboriginal Justice Program in Northwest B.C. (Mirsky, 2003), offer alternatives to the court system. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (2006) Community Justice Forum refers criminal cases to a restorative process, which they claim includes the benefits of reduced time and costs, the gaining of a deeper understanding of the incident in question, restoration or creation of bonds between people, and closure and healing for both victim and offender.

Restorative justice is neither punitive nor lenient (Lawrence, 2007). It is not a “soft” option (as is sometimes criticized); because restorative processes are personal and direct, they are often highly emotional and have a powerful impact on those who participate. Restorative justice approaches have reported a high degree of satisfaction from both victims and offenders (Walgrave, 2004), and are deemed especially effective with young offenders who are more likely to be impacted by face-to-face encounters with victims of their crimes rather than by accountability to an abstract legal system (Johnstone, 2004). “Restorative justice circles or conferences have shown considerable promise in the criminal justice system as a more decent and effective way of dealing with youthful law-breaking than punishment” (Braithwaite, 2001: 239).

### **Restorative Justice at School**

As well as the criminal justice context, “restorative justice involves principles and practices that are equally important in many other contexts . . . responding to crime is only one application of the underlying philosophy” (Sharpe, 1998: i). An examination of the punishment practices in society and in schools that are the enforcers of cultural hegemony (Ferguson cited in Herr & Anderson, 2003), is an important starting point for enacting change. As such, the concept of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) is particularly useful in examining punishment practices, and restorative justice a significant alternative to retributive justice. A restorative justice approach “changes the distribution of power, and encourages people to work together to solve problems” (LaPrairie cited in Sharpe, 1998: 12).

A response is needed to school violence that shifts away from education conceived in terms of our current model of schooling – highly institutionalized, functioning to disciplining our bodies and normalize our ways of thinking and being, based in a deficit mentality, reproducing the violent social fabric that gives rise to violent interpersonal responses. In the school context, restorative justice has implications not only with regards to alternative ways of responding to infractions at school, but also for transforming the entire school environment including the hidden curriculum steeped in symbolic violence. Both these approaches are explored in the discussion that follows.

### ***Restorative Responses to Infractions at School***

The school setting creates a fertile opportunity to use restorative processes to reduce the incidence of violence in schools and there have been developments in its use. Schools commonly adapt terms used in restorative justice for the school context: “restorative justice” becomes “restorative response,” “victim” and “offender,” become “students who have been harmed,” and “students who have caused harm” (Mennonite Central Committee Canada, 2003).

The use of restorative justice in schools is based on the realization that control, criticism and guilt are not effective ways to change someone’s behaviour, but only foster negative self-esteem. Instead, the goal of any intervention to an infraction at school should be self-discipline. It is believed that teaching students to make restitution rather than applying consequences externally will achieve the change that is wanted in the

schools with restitution becoming the creative part of self-discipline (Gossen, 2001).

Classroom management is restructured as the constructive and humanistic approach of restitution through which a child or youth can learn to remedy his/her mistakes and make reparations. The focus is removed from the fault of the mistake to making things right (Gossen, 2001).

Circles and groups introduced into the everyday activities of the school day provide opportunities for students to share their feelings, build relationships, and solve problems. Then, when there is wrongdoing, circles and groups can play an active role in addressing the wrong. When problems do arise, teachers have found that the reactions of students are positive and co-operative (Wachtel & McCold, 2004).

#### ***Restorative Social Arrangements at School***

Beyond responding to infractions at school, the philosophy of restorative justice offers an alternative way of conceiving schooling to address not only individual wrongdoing, but also systemic injustices – violence at both the micro and macro levels (Zehr & Toews, 2004).

The Restorative Justice Consortium (2005) developed a set of twenty-four principles and an assessment tool for schools to use in the implementation of restorative processes in order to “define when schools, in theory and practice, are being restorative to members of the school community, and when they are not” (p. 329). They conclude that “the benefit for schools in the long term is that the staff and student population undergo fundamental behaviour and cultural change” (Ibid., p. 56). A restorative, whole-school approach to managing behaviour and relationships includes intensive and targeted interventions as well as universal interventions that ground the normative climate in schools (Morrison, 2007).

In order to bring restorative justice to school, arrangements are needed “that prevent both interpersonal and structural violence from occurring . . . [which] involves preventing violence that derives from needs denied, potential thwarted, and personhood dismissed . . . [and] must concern itself as well with creating social arrangements that foster human dignity, mutual respect, and equal well-being from the outset” (Sullivan & Tift, 2004: 391-392). This calls for transforming the learning environment “from one of comparing, differentiating, homogenizing,

and excluding students, to one that [is] fully inclusive and appreciative of each learner's gifts and needs" (Ibid., p. 398). Restorative justice must be incorporated into the design of all school practices by, for instance, creating a collaborative environment; involving students in decision making; focusing on "need-meeting" arrangements – selecting models of learning suitable to students' needs; allowing students to have a voice in what is to be explored; learning from one another; evaluation through portfolios for students to demonstrate their achievements; students taking responsibility for their own learning in a community of learners; and by telling stories to discover each others' feelings and needs.

From their study of symbolic violence in schools, Herr & Anderson (2003) concluded that what is needed is a more expressive atmosphere and curriculum that disrupts or sheds light on the symbolic violence in school and in society – that makes the systems of privilege and oppression explicit.

School District #35 in Langley, British Columbia wanted culture change in their schools. To this end, in 2000, a partnership was created between the district and Fraser Region Community Justice Initiatives (Bargen, 2003). As well as addressing misbehaviour, this initiative offers professional development and a restorative action curriculum for students, parents, and staff with comprehensive application throughout the entire school district.

In Alberta in response to the need for a positive approach to discipline in schools, the Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities provided a curriculum that utilises class meetings to facilitate change (Gauthier et al, 1999). The purpose or aim of class meetings is for the teacher and students to collaboratively assist each other to solve social and curricular problems in an atmosphere of mutual respect and dignity. The Society has since developed a series of curricula for Alberta schools that focus on: Living Respectfully, Developing Self-Esteem, Respecting Diversity and Preventing Prejudice, Managing Anger and Dealing with Bullying and Harassment and Working it Out Together.

Also complementary to a restorative approach, the *Circle of Courage* philosophy developed by Brendtro et al (1990) offers a framework for creating environments in schools based on traditional Native American child-rearing philosophies to "reclaim" youth who are discouraged and alienated. To foster a sense of self worth, with a focus on the four "spirits" of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity, the "Response

Ability Pathways” curriculum depends on the establishment of positive relationships with youth, an environment of respect and care, supportive school personnel who respond to students needs rather than react to problems, alternative learning experiences, positive youth involvement in meaningful decision making, identification of positive values and modeling of appropriate behaviour including restorative discipline, sharing and community responsibility.

In author Conrad’s applied theatre research with incarcerated youth (who, in Alberta, are mainly youth of Aboriginal descent), our work on a story-telling activity elicited some interesting insights into their understandings of discipline and punishment. We were devising an alternate ending to a traditional Cree story ([http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Legends/Ghost\\_Stallion-Yinnuwok.html](http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Legends/Ghost_Stallion-Yinnuwok.html)) involving a man who had been punished by supernatural powers (a ghost stallion) for his cruelty to animals. In the original story the man’s prized horses were taken away from him and he was fated to spend the rest of his life searching for them. Our alternate ending aimed to provide a scenario in which the man, in relation to animals, would have an opportunity to redeem himself. As the alternate ending unfolded two such opportunities arose, but both times the man failed to change his offensive behaviour. When questioned about this, the youth explained that the man ought to be given three opportunities to fail before he could be expected to make meaningful change in his life. This was a restorative reversal, of the popular “three strikes you’re out” policy, so common now in criminal justice and in school discipline procedures. The youths’ understandings of human nature and the challenges involved in making life changes, proved much more realistic, charitable and compassionate than the intolerant “three-strikes” policy. The nature of our storytelling activity and the way it was taken up by the youth, showed the sensibilities of restorative justice in action.

Restorative practices could ultimately include teaching students how to confront any kind of wrongdoing or conflict restoratively, teaching parents how to raise children restoratively, teaching teachers how to teach restoratively, bosses how to manage restoratively, presidents how to be restorative leaders. By promoting restorative justice in schools, we develop a more restorative society as a whole (Morrison, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

As the media so likes to sensationalize, there is a good deal of student perpetrated violence in schools today with higher levels of violence occurring in schools where students feel little sense of belonging. The literature also reveals evidence of systemic and structural violence in the very processes of schooling. Terms commonly used to label students do violence by harming their identities and disregarding their situatedness. Zero tolerance policies bully youth most “at-risk” and model violence as an acceptable form of problem solving.

Restorative justice offers a more ethical and socially constructive response to infractions in schools with implications for transforming the whole school environment. The use of restorative justice in schools is growing. Karp & Breslin (2001) offer a vision for the future of schools: Creating change in schools will require a paradigm shift from retributive justice to restorative justice. Rather than breaking school rules, a misdemeanour will be defined as adversely affecting others. Instead of establishing blame or guilt, problem solving will focus on the expression of feelings and needs and how they can be met in the future. Dialogue and negotiation will replace an adversarial process. Restitution will replace the imposition of pain or unpleasantness. Attention to rules and adherence to due process will give over to attention to right relationships. The entire school community will be involved in facilitating restoration.

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