

Toward Fundamentally Transforming School Culture with an Accent on Communication, Self-Reflection and Accountability:

Using Restorative Theory, Practices and Structures Throughout Your Building to Effect School Wide Cultural Change

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**September, 2015
Brooklyn, N.Y.**



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Foreword and Outline

This paper is written as a guide that can be used to help any school move away from a Zero Tolerance (ZT) approach regarding discipline toward a restorative approach to handling behavioral issues. It can also help a school transition away from a hierarchical structure of school governance toward a more collaborative model for the running of the school on a day to day basis.

Within the first section of the paper, we will lay out the 'Big Ideas' or assumptions which underpin our suggested changes in school structure and functioning. Secondly, we will enumerate/explain the work which needs to take place before any changes can be put in place. Finally, we will offer the tools, practices and structures which we believe will help facilitate your school's move toward becoming a self-reflective, fully bought in community of learners/teachers who value each other, communicate well and take responsibility for their actions.

In the second section, we will focus on the functioning of the Dean's or Restorative Justice Coordinator's (RJC) office. Given the central importance of the 'discipline people' (Deans, RJs, Principals, Counselors), in the transition of any school from some point on the 'behavioral response continuum' near the ZT pole toward a more RJ spot, we feel an urgency to provide our Deans and RJs with as many tools and protocols as possible to help them facilitate and lead in this process. Thus, a separate section all their own. [*This section under revision and available on request*]

Part One - A Focus on Whole School Change

I Introduction: Big Idea I

- Let's Be Clear- Restorative Justice Practices (RJP) applies to us all and gives us the power to transform the nature of all social relations and, therefore, the daily reality in our schools

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Toward Fundamentally Transforming School Culture with an Accent on Communication, Self-Reflection and Accountability:

Using Restorative Theory, Practices and Structures Throughout Your Building to Effect School-Wide Cultural Change

Part I – A Focus on Whole School Change

I Introduction: Big Idea #1– Restorative Justice Practices (RJP), when applied to our schools, are generally thought of as a set of approaches and techniques geared toward helping students in our schools 1) learn new skills so as to better handle conflict and avoid negative incidents and suspension, and 2) be able to take responsibility for any harm they have caused after an incident has occurred. Actually, RJP is/can be much more. When fully embraced by a school community, a restorative approach is embedded in the all the structures of the building and the daily life of all its community’s members. **If this is done, RJ has the potential to fundamentally transform the pattern of relationships between and amongst every individual who walks in to that building. Let me explain.**

Clearly, a restorative approach entails some staff (school leaders, the guidance department and the Deans, at least) reacting differently when students act out, be it by disrupting a class, getting into a fight or cutting a class. Rather than chastise the student and mete out punishments, these staff members have to 1) recognize that there is something going on with the students that led to the misbehavior and 2) engage in a dialogue which helps that young person center themselves. This, in turn, enables the teen to look at the incident/situation more calmly and be open to taking responsibility for his/her actions and working towards making amends. **So, RJP are not solely about changing student behavior alone; it’s clearly about changing adult behavior as well.** These staff members (and maybe the student’s advisor as well), have learned to approach the teens/preteens as mature adults and handle the problem in a serious, yet compassionate way. They have learned to not judge the students or be angry at them, rather address the actions taken and the harm they may have created. In doing this, they have served as role models for choosing another way to respond to negative situations.

But, what about how staff, other than those explicitly trained to use RJP, handle and respond to their conflicts with students and amongst the students in their classes? We all know that a great many classroom teachers, if not trained explicitly in RJP or in any other emotional intelligence system, will act reflexively to students’ misbehavior either to them or towards other young people in their classes. How can we prevent sending the wrong message/setting a bad example for our young people? How will teachers/staff be able to respond as role models to misbehavior

so as to not send a negative, different, conflicting message to our kids, if they haven't been trained/taught how to see student misbehavior in a different light?

And what about how staff members treat each other? What do those interactions teach our young people? We know that our students closely watch our behavior to see if we are consistent in our words and actions; to see if we act as well as we tell them to act. We also know that there are relationship problems amongst staff members that students observe. In a sense, a combination of how we treat our students and how they observe us relating to each other, will determine how seriously they believe the school's 'new approach' to discipline. So, what will they learn if/when they see 2 teachers fight over how to share a room? Or, when a teacher talks down to the 'non-professional' support staff? Or, when an administrator is critical of a teacher in public? How can we prevent sending the wrong/contradictory message to our youngsters?

Clearly, one piece of the answer is to train all staff in restorative approaches so that the adults in the building all respond similarly to students having a hard time dealing with their emotions and conflictual situations. Another, I would argue equally as important, is to apply the restorative practices approach to the whole school community – to hold every relationship to the same standard and to apply the cooperative, egalitarian ethic of the restorative approach to every activity that is done within the building. For we must realize that to make substantial, deeply ingrained and potentially transformative impacts on our schools and all the wonderful people working and attending therein, we must change much more than solely how we respond to students acting out. We must view every interaction and activity that takes place in the school through the same lens. We must apply a similar standard to evaluating all our classes, meetings, discussions, etc. and use a similar approach to resolving any problems/conflicts that develop between anyone in the building. We must change our schools into caring communities where everyone is treated with a full complement of respect and where every adult in the building can serve as a role model, in the social emotional sphere, for all of our children.

But, how can we do this/get there? How can we, step by step, make changes in how we structure and run our schools so as to transform how everyone in the building, within every context, relates to each other in a more respectful way? This paper will offer a number of structures and practices (certainly not an exhaustive list) to help schools make such deep changes in culture.

But first, we will need to make clear why we are comfortable putting so much time and energy into this non-academic sphere. How can we justify this? Secondly, we will need to lay out an underlying assumption which is basic to restorative approaches, but rarely explicitly stated in writings on RJ Practices.

II Big Ideas II and III– There are 2 additional pedagogical tenets which undergird all the RJ practices and structures that will follow. They are ‘the 51-49 understanding’ and the necessity to develop a ‘culture of self-reflection’ (CoSR) within each school.

The first belief is that the mission/reality of successful education in our middle and high schools in NYC, necessitates that we divide our time equally between academic and social growth. We must remember and take in to account that our students come to us at 10/11 years old in 6th grade and 13/14 years old in 9th grade; they are kids. And, they need to be guided in their social development as well as academic ability. This holds for youngsters across class and racial boundaries. Even if they have been brought up in conditions of relative privilege helping them to deal with their feelings and social situations needs to be addressed.

This reality is exacerbated in poor communities of color, where conditions of oppression and depravation are extreme and our students’ lives are negatively impacted by the ravages of poverty, class prejudice, racism, sexism and more. Many times our kids have been asked to shoulder adult responsibilities and/or have witnessed violence or crimes which have impacted them profoundly. Some have suffered abuse of a physical, sexual and/or emotional nature. These experiences have not only negatively affected their ability to focus on academics in school but have left many traumatized. Because of these factors, we must remember that many of our students don’t come to us 2, 3 and 4 years behind in just reading and math. They also come to us and act and respond as not as 14 year-olds (that would be challenging enough!), but as 9th graders with the emotional development of 10 or 11 year-olds! And, 6th graders may act with the maturity levels of 7/8 year-olds. Thus, our students very much need us to see who they are and help them deal, in a hands-on way, with both the trauma they’ve experienced and their maturation process. This is why we need to split our time with our kids equally between teaching social skills and academics. Yes, I’m saying that a true ‘education of the whole child’ necessitates our putting 50% of our time, energy and money into helping our youngsters mature – no matter where they live and especially in poor communities of color which have historically been neglected. (For those who can’t quite make the leap to considering social-emotional education as important as academic growth, I’ll compromise; let’s say that the breakdown is 51% academic and 49% social–emotional. Hence, ‘the 51-49 understanding’).

Remember that ALL teens and preteens need to learn how to navigate in the world and this necessitates our helping them develop ‘emotional intelligence’ as well as showing them how to read, write, compute and manage technology. Learning how to negotiate one’s feelings and deal positively with other people’s words and actions are life supporting skill sets that our teaching colleges and most middle and high schools woefully neglect to address. And, when we continue to not deal with this reality, our students, their families and society pay the price in the form of high suspension, dropout and, ultimately, juvenile incarceration rates.

But, let us be clear about what the research consistently reminds us of: that schools having a strong social-emotional program in place benefit academically with higher test scores and increased passing and graduation rates. As a school community is built through the teaching of communication skills, new ways to handle our emotions constructively and as it begins to reward taking responsibility for our actions, a nurturing school environment is built. A 'caring community', if you will, is developed. It is in this context that acting out is reduced, students are kept in school even when they make mistakes (in most instances) and academics can get more of our youngsters' undivided attention. **In a sense, a stable school climate is the necessary platform from which academic achievement can take off.**

The 3rd pillar/idea is that RJP will most readily take hold within a building that endeavors to establish a 'Culture of Self Reflection' (CofSR). For what is at the heart of the RJ practice/ethic? RJ's goals are to help people involved in a situation take responsibility for their words and actions and then participate in 'repairing the harm' that they have created.

Thus reflection is key to this process because people cannot take responsibility for themselves if they cannot introspect. Since introspection and the admission of errors to others can be very challenging/scary for many people (adults as well as young people), we need to create a safe environment within which this deep emotional work can take place. A nurturing space where others won't blame/vilify/castigate someone who has admitted doing some disrespectful and harmful things. A place where people will actually be supported and praised for taking responsibility, making amends and thereby restoring harmony to the individual relationship and to the community as a whole.

In order to realize this paradigm shifting change of attitude in any of our schools, we (leadership, staff, students and parents) must commit to moving from a culture of blame to one that values taking responsibility: a 'Culture of Self Reflection'

But, how do we get there? How do we 'make' people look inward first and possibly confront some shortcomings, rather than reflexively responding with an accusatory tone or physical attack? Simply put, we work together, as a team.

As we all know, changing any of our behaviors, (be it with family at home, at work, as an individual, etc.) is very hard to accomplish by ourselves. This is why we join Weight Watchers or do the Nutra-System program to lose weight, join a gym, yoga or aerobics class to get in shape, etc. People need support to break out of old/bad habits and we find our greatest success when surrounded by people of a like mind who have the same goal. And, when we have a vision of what we want to accomplish, have a plan/program to get there and have a dynamic leader, instructor or sensei to help guide us there, we can make progress toward our goal.

It's the same with changing school culture. If we want to get students to respond differently to problems with each other or with teachers, if we want our staffs to stop blaming their students and their students' families for kids' poor test scores or attendance rates and start looking at their own pedagogy and attitudes, then we must set up a school culture that will support such introspection and taking of responsibility. Let's face it, we live in a culture that blames and punishes people when they make mistakes.

Look at our mass incarceration rates for people, mostly people of color, who have committed non-violent crimes. They are, in a way, being punished for being poor and for making survival choices which took them outside the law. Rehabilitation programs, job skills training and higher education inside the prison walls have all been cut back in recent years. And so, formerly incarcerated individuals have little chance to change their lifestyle when they do get released from prison. When they are 'on the outside' the stigma of being an 'ex-con' follows them and is supported by laws which prevent formerly incarcerated individuals from voting, applying for many jobs, being denied higher education and/or financial aid and living in public housing. Their options/outlets for being able to establish themselves a life 'within the law' are seriously circumscribed. In effect, they are being punished a second time after they have served their time! Politicians rarely look at the big picture and criticize themselves and their policies, such as 'Zero Tolerance', 'Three Strikes', etc. as being contributing parts of the problem, nor do they look at the great income inequality in our nation which sets the condition for poor people to commit crimes. No responsibility is taken by those in power. The 'other', the poorer, darker skinned underclass bears the brunt of society's failings.

And, our school system recreates such a culture of blame and punishment. Politicians grandstand and blame school staff for poor test scores, Principals blame their teachers and teachers blame the young people and their families. Children who act out in any way or disrupt class are removed and punished in most cases. Rather than working with the student, getting down to what was going on with the child and teaching them skills to better deal with the situation, they are suspended. And, upon returning to school and facing the same conditions and attitudes, they act out again and are suspended again – leading to, in far too many cases, dropping out and being incarcerated. Simply put, this is what is known as the School to Prison Pipeline. And, as with the criminal 'injustice' system, the overwhelming majority of students suspended multiple times, are Black and Brown skinned. Hence, the racist nature of the Zero Tolerance approach, is recreated as well, in our schools.

If this is the pattern that we want to break as we look to build healthy schools, then we must begin to construct an alternative way for all people in the school's community, regardless of age or job category, to act. One based on everyone, from the adult point of view, agreeing that we are all here to help our students grow both emotionally and academically. And, from the student point of view, that they are here to work with caring adults and each other to learn not only academically, but how to best get along in the world and feel good while doing it.

And, finally, we all need to agree that when things go wrong/mistakes are made, we will not rush to blame someone else and disregard our own missteps; rather we will listen to others and see how our actions impacted them. We will evaluate our actions, feelings and thoughts first and work to fix/rectify what we have messed up and, only secondarily, be critical of the others involved. **If we can do this, we will be firmly on the way to making our school one which is rooted in the Restorative Justice approach. We will have established a Culture of Self-Reflection (CoSR)**

Now, clearly, this is a monumental task and it must be acknowledged that it will take years to achieve. As with any other attempt at cultural change, be it corporate, familial or nationwide, (think about our changes in attitudes toward cigarette smoking), it will be a long term endeavor which will be waged on many fronts. **So, people who want to do this must be ready, willing and able to give it their all.** Toward this end, I will lay out a set of tools, structures, practices and approaches that can (and in some cases should), be part of making this sea change within a school.

III Essential Building Blocks – we'll start with the big picture pieces, which have been noted in many a document on changing school culture.

- A) **Vision** – Any efforts to change school culture must be based on a vision of how people will treat each other and how the school will run when we've reached our goal. This vision, preferably, will be crafted by a cross section of community members dedicated to making these fundamental changes. Every category of school worker, including students and parents can be part of this, (teachers, guidance, deans, office workers, school safety, etc.). They all have a stake in what goes on in the building. At minimum, you need a small group developing the picture of where they want to move the school and be able to articulate how we can step by step get there.
- B) **Mobilizing Your Community** – Everyone should be on board and understand the whys and wherefores of the transformation process. This will necessitate the leadership group sitting down with the various sectors of the school and dialoguing about the vision with them. For example, meeting with teachers by grade, with the Parent Association, with student leaders and School Safety Agents and addressing their questions, concerns, etc. about Restorative Justice practices. In these meetings, you'll be able to get a sense of the levels of support you'll have and opposition that you'll encounter as you move forward. Thus, you'll be better able to adjust your implementation plan to address the desires and concerns of your school's community.
- C) **Walking the Talk** – Your leadership team should be fully committed to embodying the principles/ways of being that you'd like everyone to eventually adopt. Thus, if a

Principal, Dean, or Guidance Counselor (anyone in the leadership group) is disrespectful in some way to another community member, they must role model by being self-reflective and looking critically at their behavior first and then taking responsibility for it by apologizing and working cooperatively with the other person, be they staff or student, to resolve the situation. **The power of this ‘walking the talk’ is immense.**

- D) **Infusing the New Values into Everyday Life** – Our/your new emphasis on social-emotional development, looking inward first and making amends when necessary, needs to permeate all aspects of school life. This means people (students and staff) are held accountable not only in their advisory class, but in all classes, meetings and conferences, the hallways, the cafeteria, stairways, etc. But how will we get this done? **There are myriad ways that your culture can be changed, community built and self-reflection promoted.** So many, in fact, that we have devoted a whole section (IV) to how to alter the way your school is run in order to encourage people taking responsibility for their thoughts, words and actions.
- E) **Developing a Common Language, Behavioral Guidelines and a Set of Responses to “Infractions”** – If you want everybody to be respected and to act respectfully, you must engage everyone in developing a school wide understanding of what exactly ‘respect’ means. As Aretha said, “R-E-S-P-E-C-T, find out what it means to me”. If we don’t have these understandings in common, then a school will be plagued by repeated miscommunication and limited ability to work together. Each person may well have a different interpretation of what respectful behavior looks and feels like. Given the wide age, ethnic/nationality, class, color, religious, gender and sexual orientation diversity in all of our schools, much disagreement exists and manifests every day. This leads, invariably, to student misinterpretation of their peers or staff members’ actions and to, many times, inappropriate responses to the perceived ‘diss’. In turn, staff having different interpretations of what ‘respect’ means, leads to arguments over what was or wasn’t a ‘violation of our district’s discipline code’ and ‘how we should respond to such behavior outside of the Code’s parameters’.

This is why a school needs to 1) develop a common language (understanding) of what words like dignity, respect, responsibility, etc. mean; 2) develop a common understanding of the ‘does and don’ts of behavior in school; and 3) develop a common set of responses to such ‘misbehaviors’.

For example, many schools (particularly in the ‘small schools’ movement in NYC) have ‘core values’ (justice, responsibility, creativity respect, etc.), but just what exactly do these words mean? It may be that the school’s founders agreed on what responsibility looks like for staff and students, but would today’s staff readily agree on what those words mean? And, perhaps more importantly, what are the student body’s

interpretation of the core values? What are their understandings (at their different cognitive levels) of creativity, responsibility, respect? They may be very different than the staff's and, given the aforementioned ethnic, gender, orientation, etc. differences, there may be differences among the students as well.

To remedy this situation, which many times exists even in some of the most progressive schools in NYC, teaching time and energy and staff meeting time and energy must be put in to discussing 1) the values of the school, 2) a definition of respectful behavior and 3) how we are going to respond to 'misbehavior'. Once we are clear on these 3 critical elements, we have set the foundation for a common vision to be lived everyday throughout your school.

When agreement is reached on the meaning of your core values, you can move on to having everyone in your building participate in defining what are the behavioral 'does and don'ts' related to the values of responsibility, peacekeeping, respect, etc. Then, you will have clarified desired behavioral guidelines and they will have been created by all your staff and students.

Finally, a school can set up a number of 'restorative structures and processes' through which to remedy/deal with any violations of your collectively constructed behavioral guidelines. They can be, Advisory circles, Fairness Committees, Repairing Harm (Tier II) Circles, Peer Mediation, No Excuses Mediations, Public Apologies Community Service etc. With the above done, a school now has a common language to use when addressing our common set of behavioral expectations and utilizing a clearly understood set of restorative practices to resolve acting out or anti-social behavior. Suspensions are used, if and when the above techniques cannot fully address the situation – eg, laws are broken and/or people's safety are the main concern.

Lastly, when people try and succeed with using the new ways of being – i.e., when they mediate their problem rather than fight, when they apologize privately and, possibly, publicly, etc. they need to be praised privately and publicly. This positive reinforcement, sends a message to the individuals and the whole school that our new approach toward handling problems with each other works and that those involved are appreciated for doing it. Seeing the positive effect on those given this recognition/praise for being a trailblazer will encourage others to follow suit and try resolving their conflicts more peacefully.

(Note: The above general plan is modelled on what we did at East Side Community HS when I led the development of our 100% RESPECT! Campaign from 2005-2009. Following this general formulation, we were able to calm the cafeteria, hallways, and classrooms so that our academic program could take off. In advisory and separate staff meetings, everyone in the school

participated in defining what respectful behavior should look like among students and between students and staff. Importantly, adding how staff needed to treat students to make our youngsters feel respected in East Side, went a long way toward creating a cooperative, communal feeling in our building. Counselors, deans, classroom teachers, support staff, school leaders and student leaders (RESPECT! Reps) were constantly asking the questions: Was that respectful? Did you follow our guidelines? They could all easily reference the RESPECT! Guidelines because they were posted in many classrooms and all hallways. We had a common language and behavioral code and, as Deans, my office developed our own set of restorative practices-No Excuses Mediations, Public Apologies, School Wide Discussions and more. We dropped suspensions by 51% within the first 2 years and this set the basis for our literacy program to take off. **(More information on the 100% RESPECT! Campaign can be found in the attached Appendix A).**

IV Vehicles and Structures through which we can Change Culture and Build a Culture of Self-Reflection

- A) **Advisory** – This first structure may be familiar to many people, as it has been an integral part of the small schools movement nationwide since the 1980's. Alternatively called family group, extended homeroom and, more recently, 'crew', **Advisory is the home base for a school's social-emotional work with its students.** Purposefully kept to a class size limit of no more than 18, (15 is seen as ideal) Advisory gives us a space within the school in which to discuss a wide range of issues that our students face on a daily basis. From learning how to open up and take risks by sharing your feelings and ideas with others, to developing skills on handling strong emotions (anger, sadness, depression, etc.), to brainstorming strategies on reducing bullying at your school, **Advisory can become the central space for community building and honest conversation between students and staff in your building.**

Of course, with few of our staff members having been trained in how to lead these discussions and run a successful Advisory, those of us in the Small Schools and Restorative Justice communities have come to rely on each other by sharing our successful curricular pieces and instructional techniques. Where possible, we train our colleagues in how to be a 'good advisor' and press our school's administration and the local school board to provide such trainings. Presently, there are quite a few advisory curricula that have been published and many schools take materials from them. Others get together a group of their best teachers and have them develop a set of lessons tailored to the school population's particular needs within the social and emotional sphere.

But, how do we get our students to open up? To listen to each other? To respect each other's opinions?

- B) Circles** – This form, which has been used in indigenous cultures to resolve family and community problems and used in western cultures as part of alternative to incarceration programs for non-violent offenders, is proving to be an excellent vehicle through which we can foster respect and create an environment safe enough for children, teens and adults to share their feelings on many issues while in school.

In Advisory circles, all can participate and communicate by having everyone sit facing each other, by having the full Advisory set the ground rules (or norms) for speaking and listening to each other and by allowing students to suggest some discussion topics. Doing these things helps us establish a calm and cooperative environment in which our Advisor can slowly build trust among everyone in her/his Advisory (and, at the same time, slowly learn how to become a good Advisor.)

With trust established over time, teens and adults can more easily take risks and work on changing behaviors. It is possible to create, within a few months, a feeling of community within each advisory. When practiced throughout the school, and with similar lessons done/similar issues explored by all, a camaraderie is built within the building. Circles can help our students and staff buy-in. Fortunately, there are already many books available on how to facilitate a circle (this is called ‘circle keeping’) and many lessons and curricula have been written with social emotional themes designed for the circle format.

In addition, since circles are an essential component within the restorative justice movement and because the movement has been growing rapidly this past decade, many school districts have been forced by their communities to move away from Zero Tolerance Policies and toward Restorative Justice Practices. Thus, many school districts now sponsor trainings by CBOs or educators on how to run these community building circles. In the ‘Oakland model’ of RJ circles, which is now being used here in NYC, they are called ‘Tier I’ circles.

- C) Academic Circles** – The Circles used in Advisory focus on social-emotional content and fit well within Advisory’s goal of building community. Here, all participants in the Circle learn to listen to and hear each other’s feelings and speak their truths/points of view without judgment. In Advisory, the lessons are geared to helping students mature emotionally.

However, this emotions-centered focus is not the only content that can be delivered in circle. Many academic, if not all academic subjects, can have some of their content readily adapted to the Circle format. For example, the discussion on the themes and characters of a novel can easily be reformatted to be done in Circle. The same can be done in History class, when discussing/debating people, movements, motivation and outcomes. Science and Math curricula, as well, can be reconfigured to have some problem solving/brainstorming be done in Circle by the class at the outset of a project. Students

can then work on the problem solo or in group and then, finally, come back to the Circle to present their findings/rationales.

In these brief examples, we can see that learning in Circle works to build a cooperative culture in your school; one where students and staff learn and teach to and from each other. It also allows many levels of academic ability to be included and then validated in the discussion. Early adaptors of the Circle culture/ethic are usually the first to experiment with bringing Circle work into their academic subject classes.

- D) **Teaching Staff Grade and Department Meetings Held in Circle** – These professional meetings can be done in circle to allow every teacher on a grade or within a discipline to participate in a more equal fashion rather than be led by an AP or team leader. The APs' role might change to that of being 'circle-keeper' (facilitator of the circle) at first rather than being the dominant voice in the room. As the circle-keeper, the AP would pose questions to the group which would be collectively discussed and brought to resolution by all, rather than having the AP tell the team what the Administration had decided. Later, as leadership is shared, other faculty can take a turn at being facilitator/circle-keeper of the meeting. This change would mark a shift in the relationships among the teaching staff in the building and between teachers and administrators.

The self-reflection piece can easily be built in to these weekly professional meetings by suggesting/calling for semi-annual or quarterly self-assessments within each grade or department team which are shared with everyone on the team and discussed collectively to allow colleagues to give each other critical feedback. This reformulation of professional staff meetings lends itself not only to collegial criticism, but to classroom inter-visitation. **With each teacher looking at their strengths and weaknesses and asking for help from their team, a stronger community is built among this main sector of adults within your building.**

- E) **Teacher Led Pre and Post Observation Conferences** – When school leaders conduct their mandatory observations of pedagogical staff (using the Danielson or other rubrics), the pre and post observation conferences are usually led by the Principal or one of the Asst. Principals. After a short self-assessment is asked for at the outset of the meeting, ("So, Ms. X how do you think the lesson went?"), the meeting usually devolves into the school leader dispensing praise or criticism to/at the classroom teacher. This dynamic needs to be turned around.

What if each teacher outlined their strengths and weaknesses in an in-depth document at the beginning of the year (and many schools have started doing this) and met with their supervisor or the Principal to lay out their professional goals for the year. This outline could then be used as the jumping off point for any planning or debriefing

of an observed lesson at any point during the year. This approach would put a great deal of the responsibility for the teacher's professional growth squarely in their own hands, which is where it belongs.

The post-observation debrief would begin with an in-depth evaluation of the lesson by the teacher herself. This self-evaluation could put special focus on the areas the teacher defined as weaknesses in September. The Supervisor could then add whatever she felt the teacher had neglected. This 'turned around' approach shows respect for the classroom pedagogue as a professional and, because of that, has the potential for accelerating their growth curve. **Coupled with the department and grade self-assessments (and, they will overlap), a school can transform their professional development paradigm to one which focuses on self-reflection first and foremost and completed by community support to grow.**

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- F) **Professional Development Circles for Support Staff (school aides, para-professionals, community workers, secretaries)** – Talk about a paradigm needing some changing! In most NYC schools, workers in the 'support staff' category usually have 'time off', do clerical work or manual labor tasks or, just 'get lost' during these professional development time slots. Why not change this dynamic and work to include them in to the staff's professional ranks by developing their skill sets and asking for their input on child related issues? How about having professional development circles for these workers? At first, they would be run by a member of the schools' admin team, and later run by the support staff themselves. Topics can be developed by the paras, school aides, community workers and be focused on the children that they work with. *Respecting the jobs that they do and helping them to help themselves take the lead in doing those jobs better, will broaden the ranks of the school's professional community.* **It will also be a powerful step toward overturning the racial and class divides existing in most schools, as most support staff are people of color and get paid a fraction of what the predominantly white teaching staff receive.** Of course, these meetings/circles will include the self-assessment and collegial feedback component in order to help these 'allied' workers begin to take charge of their growth.
- G) **Parent Association (PA)/ School Leadership Team (SLT) meetings** – In order to fully transform a school's culture, of course, we must include the parents/guardians/families of our students in this endeavor. Once Circle culture has been established in a school building, many school leaders have introduced Circles in specific and RJ in general, to their PA leadership .

Once 'bitten by the Circle bug', PA leaders have used Circles as the vehicle with in which to hold the bulk of their meetings. **The great majority of parents are open to meeting in Circle because it affords them a chance to be heard by school leadership and staff.** It

also allows them to communicate deeply with each other. Of course, this further builds your community to reach outside of your building's 4 walls.

When coupled with relevant topics such as parenting, school safety, academic success, and, of course, a good meal, the Circle culture is slowly spread out to our families. Including parents in the process of change in this way (and in others, such as having Advisors introduce RJ practices to parents in their regularly scheduled Advisory calls with families), prepares parents/guardians for if and when we have to use a Circle to resolve a conflict that their child might be involved in. **Being used to addressing issues together, cooperatively, will make it easier for parents to participate in and/or encourage their youngsters to work within a Circle to resolve conflicts.**

Circles can also fit very well with the running of School Leadership Teams (SLTs). These are the leadership bodies of each school in NYC. This is where staff, parents, admin, union reps and students meet monthly to hash out a document (The Comprehensive Education Plan) outlining the academic, attendance, behavioral and cultural goals of their particular school. Of course, passing the 'talking piece' will afford all members the chance to speak and be heard. This, in turn, can work to decentralize power and decision-making in this important body.

- H) **Changing the Nature of the Deans' Role in the School** – Of course, how the 'discipline people in a school interact with our students and what their function is, is key to moving any school away from a punitive, Zero Tolerance approach and toward becoming a community which handles acting out/misbehavior/mistakes with a wide range of restorative practices.

Central to making these changes is to re conceptualize Deans as people who will help students mature by helping them learn from their mistakes. Rather than blaming or demonizing young people when they lose their tempers, take out their frustrations on others, or act without thinking, our Deans are charged with helping our pre-teens and teens explore why they chose to do what they did, understand the affect/effects that their actions had on others and, ultimately, work to fix what they have broken (repair harm). They do this by changing their approach and talking WITH our youngsters and helping them figure out why they acted as they did, rather than talking AT them and dispensing punishments. Only when the actions are egregious (gang assault, sexual assault, gun in school) and/or the students in question refuse to engage in the new, restorative path, are we forced to go anywhere near the old road of suspensions for more than a day.

Due to the great importance of the Deans role in the transitional process to becoming an RJ practicing school, we have devoted a separate section of this paper to focus in on how to do what we call 'Restorative Deaning'.

- I) Student-Led Report Card Conferences** – The last of our suggestions for moving a school toward being a conscious, reflective community is to have the students lead their report card conferences with their parents and teachers. Granted, this is not something you'll put in to place during your first year in transition, but it is able to be achieved once the adults are using and modelling how to be self-reflective and take responsibility for their actions. Once the Deans consistently use self-reflection in their work with the students who act out, your school should be ready to take this big step. In this context, advisors can work with their advisees to be able to give an in depth breakdown to their parents about why they received a 75 in Algebra, a 90 in English or a 55 in History. **Ultimately, after being taught the necessary social skills, our youngsters will be able to take the lead in report card conferences just as their teachers will have taken the lead in their post observation conferences.**

V Conclusion – Establishing the above practices and structures as part and parcel of your school's daily, weekly and monthly cycles, will firmly ground your culture in a more self-reflective and collaborative model. Developing a shared vision, a common language, shared behavioral expectations and an agreed upon set of restorative responses will begin to build trust and camaraderie among, not only staff, but students and parents as well. Urging/supporting everyone to look at their thoughts, words and actions first and to be constructively critical of others, second, will root your school in a culture of self-reflection which will help everyone mature/grow professionally. **Every adult 'walking the talk' by being self-reflective, by being supportive of each other as professionals and human beings and by working *with* our children/young people/students to help them mature emotionally as well as academically, will allow us to transform our schools into caring communities with the ability to thrive on multiple levels.**

Appendix A: The “The 100% RESPECT! Campaign”

The 100% RESPECT! Campaign – Part 1 – The Defining RESPECT! Activity (DRA)

I Introduction –

The underlying philosophy of the 100% RESPECT! Campaign is that everyone, regardless of age, class, gender, color, nationality, sexual orientation, etc. is equal and does, in fact, deserve 100% respect. It acknowledges, also, that we are all different, and that in the school community we each fulfill certain roles, eg, student, teacher, para - educator, principal, etc.

The second pillar upon which the Campaign rests is that of interactivity. Since we are all very different people, coming together to do a common purpose, (public school in the U.S.) and each of us brings in our (to some degree, at least) differing world views, there is a great need for constant communication between all members of the school community. If we don't communicate with each other how will we really know what the other is thinking or feeling? If we don't talk to each other, we will be left to assume where the other person is coming from. ... and, you know where assuming gets us?!!

In order to bridge all the gaps/divides/different life experiences that the above social differences put before us, I needed to create structures and activities that would include all members of the school community in the development of what respectful behavior meant to them. That would give us a common language and goals. I also needed to develop ways that we could hold each other accountable for any violations of the agreements that we had collectively defined.

II The Defining RESPECT! Activity (DRA) – Getting Everyone on the Same Page

- In Advisory, during 4 sessions at the end of September, all students participate in defining what respectful behavior should look like: 1) student to student, 2) student to staff, and 3) staff to student
- Staff has meetings in which they, too, define respectful behavior in these 3 arenas
- A ‘RESPECT! Rep’ is chosen from each Advisory
- The Reps work with your RJAT to review all the charts created in Advisories and staff meetings and craft them into 3 comprehensive lists of RESPECT! Guidelines
- See Guidelines example

III Town Hall Meetings – Making Things Clear to All and Voting for Change

- The Guidelines are presented to each grade in Town Hall Meetings. The size of each grade will determine the venue that you use for this meeting. For small schools, with grade sizes under 100, many times the library can be a big, yet intimate spot.
- The Guidelines are presented by the RESPECT! Reps on each grade. Examples given, questions taken and clarifications made. They are ratified by each grade.
- Afterwards, they are posted in classrooms and hallways
- *One final note on the guidelines. The 3rd category; Teacher to Student RESPECT! is what really separates the 100% RESPECT! Campaign from other attempts or functioning programs geared at including students in on setting behavioral norms.* This project asks staff to change/respond to student feedback on what respectful/disrespectful adult behavior looks and feels like to teens/preteens. Again, it puts students and teachers (and later all adults in the building), on an

equal footing. *The work that the staff has to do regarding how they relate to their students is seen as staff professional development.* Learning what is respectful to teens and altering your behavior accordingly, makes you better able to communicate with your students and opens them to learning, academically and emotionally from you.

IV Developing Consistent Restorative Responses – The Hard Part!

- At the end of August, in a series of workshops, we'll be working with your Deans and Counselors to work up a menu of restorative responses to violations of the Guidelines
- Examples are: Peer Mediation, 'The Talk' – a version of the classic Restorative Chat, a 'No Excuses Mediation' – a version of the Restorative Conference, Community Service, a Repairing the Harm Circle and more.

V Conclusion –

If done faithfully, this beginning piece of our Campaign will get everyone in your school on the same page to begin moving away from punitive discipline and toward creating a restorative culture in your school.