

Creating Positive Learning Environments: Re-visioning the NYC School Discipline Code

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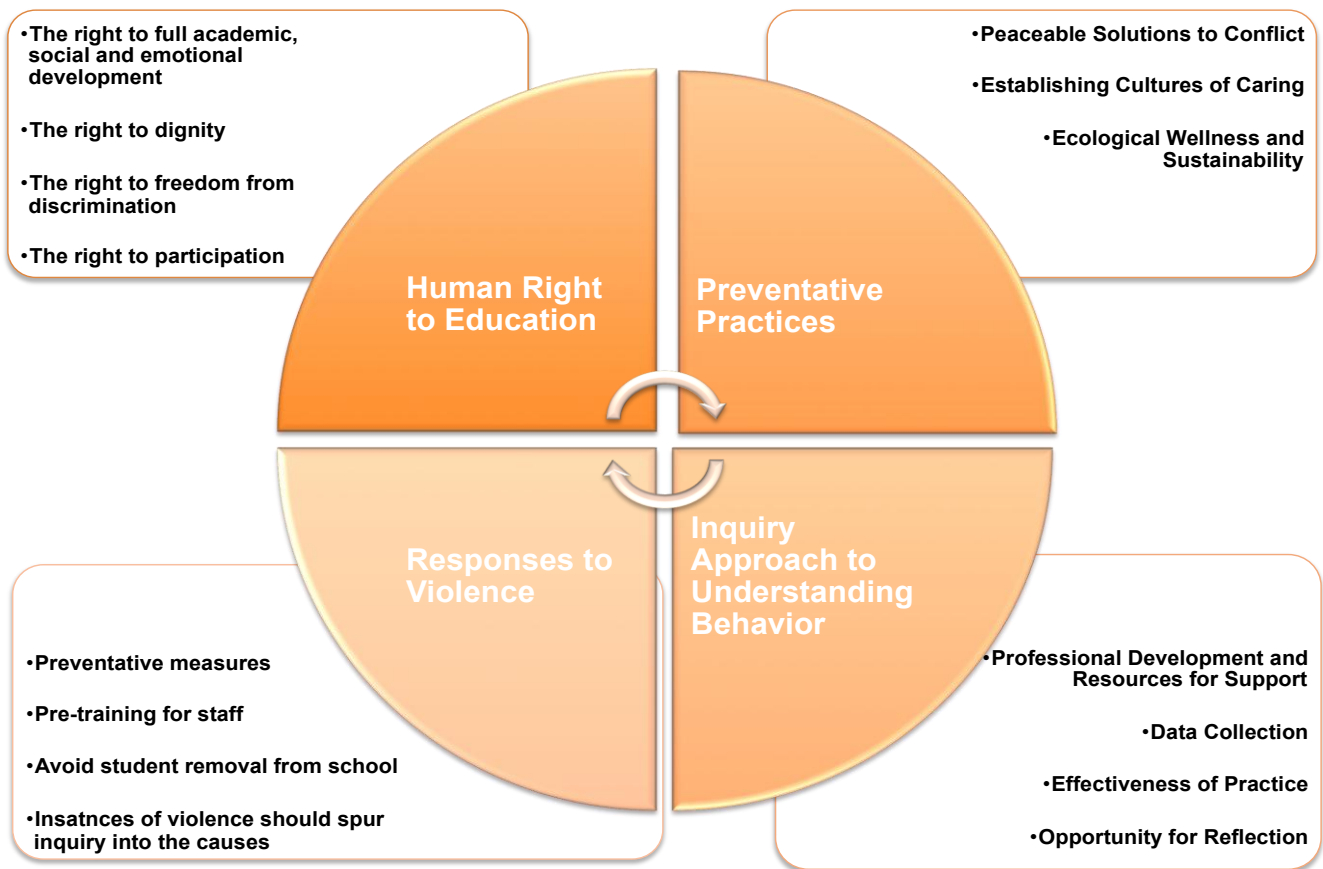
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C&T 5199: The School to Prison Pipeline

Teachers College, Columbia University

New York Discipline Code- Revised



Introduction: Rationale and Expectations

The following document presents an updated Discipline Code for the city of New York. This code breaks from previous New York City discipline codes, in that it does not provide a list of prescribed student behaviors and subsequent punishments. Such disciplinary measures—which focus primarily on the behavior of the child—often serve to exclude student groups.¹ They also often ignore the underlying causes of conflict and may undermine the intellectual and emotional growth of the student. As such, the use of punitive, zero-tolerance approaches to discipline violate the rights of children to an education directed toward their full potential.

Rather than assume a punitive approach to school discipline, this code approaches discipline through a more humanistic lens. We understand discipline to be a school-wide effort to establish and maintain more supportive and inclusive learning communities. Our code mandates a preventative approach to problems of conflict by offering a framework for school staff (administrators, teachers, related service providers, paraprofessionals and school safety officers²), students and parents to work together to build inclusive learning environments.

Discipline code as resource and as tool:

- This discipline code is meant to serve as a resource for members of the school community, as they work together to establish more humanizing, less punitive school environments necessary to provide the basic human rights to education. Such environments ensure safe school climates, by lessening the likelihood of conflict and affirmatively helping students become more independent, responsible, and caring learners.
- Additionally, this code is to serve as a tool for school staff, parents and students who wish to ensure that student rights to education are upheld.

Human Right to Education:

The aforementioned human right to education reads as follows: School-age children and youth have the human right to the learning tools and content necessary to reach their full potential, to participate fully and effectively in a free society, to live and work in dignity, to

¹ Skiba, R.J., & Knesting, K. (2002). *Zero tolerance, zero evidence: an analysis of school disciplinary practice*. In R.J. Skiba and G.G. Noam (Eds.), *New Directions for Youth Development: Zero tolerance: Can suspension and expulsion keep schools safe?* (pp. 17-43). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

² School safety officers (personnel hired by the NYPD and other monitors to ensure school safety) should be viewed as potential contributors to a culture of caring and involved in trainings in conflict resolution and dialogue about caring among teachers and other staff. In cases of extreme violence and physical harm, officers may intervene (see section below for more guidelines). Giving school safety officers opportunities and invitations to participate fully in the life of a school and helping them to get to know and understand students as much as possible can help shift their roles from control, surveillance and punishment of students to that of key figures in creating a positive, caring environment.

improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning throughout life.³

This right to education includes, but is not limited to:

- **The right to full academic, social and emotional development:** The purpose of building school discipline is to encourage safe, learning-focused environments with a focus on pro-social behavior. All students should feel free to express ideas, explore new content, and solve challenging problems in supportive classrooms while acknowledging, respecting and learning from difference.
- **The right to dignity:** Schools should create supportive and welcoming environments and respond to conflict with appropriate measures that address the students' needs. Any decision to transfer a child should require the full consideration of the child's right to an education and to develop his or her full potential with dignity.
- **The right to freedom from discrimination:** Schools must ensure equal access to and implementation of high quality educational services without discrimination. Similarly, schools must take appropriate measures to ensure that marginalized populations are not disproportionately impacted by school discipline policies.
- **The right to participation:** Students, parents and school staff should have an active voice in the classroom and in the development of contextually appropriate school rules and policies.

In order to provide environments that are supportive of these rights, school staff, students, and parents must collaborate to create a more humanizing and less punitive school culture. Supportive school environment also recognize and involve youth as active and effective participants in the educational process. This means working together to develop approaches that address the causes of conflict and meet students' needs.

To assist school communities in creating more humanizing and less punitive environments, the code includes the following 3 parts:

- The first part of our code identifies and outlines a few suggested practices for violence prevention that are in line with the human rights standards. Schools can then tailor these practices to their setting's particular values, norms, and cultures.
- An essential part of this process is understanding and addressing the underlying causes of conflict and violence. To this end, the second part of our code provides guidelines help schools assume an inquiry-based approach to student behavior.
- In the third and final part of this code, we offer clear guidelines for responding to cases of extreme violence and incidents where students pose a danger to themselves or other students.

³ Dignity in Schools (2000). Presenting a Human Rights Framework for Schools: A Model Code on Education and Dignity (*DRAFT for public comment*).

I. Preventative Practices

This section of our code identifies suggested practices that schools can use to prevent violence and conflict on their campuses and create more humanizing and less punitive school environments. In this section, we will outline a few preventative strategies that schools can employ and tailor to their setting's particular values, norms, and cultures. These include:

- (1) Peaceable Solutions to Conflict⁴
- (2) Establishing Cultures of Caring⁵
- (3) An Emphasis on Ecological Wellness and Sustainability⁶

Peaceable Solutions to Conflict:

Restorative Justice and Restorative Circles.

Restorative justice places importance on the restoration of relationships in the aftermath of a harm that happens within a community.⁷ The eventual goal of restorative justice is for parties who have committed harms against the other is to understand and empathize with each other's perspectives and points of view and to collaborate on solutions to resolving harm. The circle is the basis for this work and asks members of the community who have been impacted by and/or committed a harm to commune and address the harm through dialogue while sitting, literally, in a circle.

Restorative Circles in Practice.

During a restorative circle:

- Agreements are made on how the circle will be conducted and participants identify important values.
- For the remainder of the circle, participants share their thoughts and feelings on what harm has occurred, with the ultimate goal of trying to gain mutual understanding.
- Circles often conclude with participants determining what might be done to repair the harm that has been done, i.e. changing certain behaviors or attitudes.

Implementing Restorative Circles.

Circles can be implemented in classroom settings and a restorative philosophy can be infused across a school site. Educating staff members as facilitators and participants in restorative circles is essential in expanding restorative justice philosophy into classrooms and weaving a restorative philosophy into the fabric of the school.

Conflict Resolution.

Conflict resolution refers to the use of dialogue—especially through mediation and negotiation strategies—in order to resolve conflict. Conflict resolution outlines a series of useful

⁴ See Appendix A for more detailed explanations.

⁵ See Appendix B

⁶ See Appendix C

⁷ Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice. (2010). *School-Based Restorative Justice As an Alternative to Zero Tolerance Policies: Lessons from West Oakland*. Berkeley, CA: Sumner, M.D., Silverman, C.J., Frampton, M.L.

strategies that can be employed when two parties, simply stated, have differing wants and needs. Conflict resolution sessions are often much smaller and more intimate than restorative circles, which may involve a multiple number participants directly/indirectly involved.

Conflict Resolution in Practice.

While there are many different models, a conflict resolution session usually has three stages:

- The beginning: the parties in conflict decide on the norms that will be established and it the time where a rapport is potentially developed between participants.
- The middle: the wants and needs of each party in the conflict are identified and elaborated upon.
- The end: brainstorming session, the offering and collaboration on different solutions, or agreement that is arrived at to determine what can be done to meet all parties' needs.

Implementing Conflict Resolution.

To use such models inside of a school, training is needed for staff and students alike. All of the strategies outlined above can be learned through modeling and practice via brainstorming, discussion questions, role play, using scenarios, and viewing and closely analyzing video clips of conflicts from films or public debates in pairs or small groups. It is especially important to involve youth as well as staff in conflict resolution trainings. Instructing youth in mediation processes are effective in providing opportunities for youth to mentor each other and become leaders in implementing restorative practices and philosophies at school sites.

Cultures of Caring

What is Caring?

Schools are often hostile and alienating places for young people and staff members. When a school is place where youth feel cared for and all members of the institution feel as though they are valued and belong, there becomes far less of a need to manage discipline with zero-tolerance policies and removal of students from classroom and school. Caring refers to a fundamental concern about others. All schools committed to non-violence, peace, and non-punitive practices should prioritize caring as a component of the educational environment. Caring can be defined as the act of wanting to know, "*What are you going through?*"

Implementing Cultures of Caring.

Cultures of caring, which may seem rather vague and difficult to implement, can be enacted and sustained systemically. Giving teachers and students adequate time and space to communicate and interact with each other about caring and the roles of carers is central to the creation of such cultures. Structures of schools can be altered to help teachers build caring relationships with students. Here are some suggestions on how schools can create more caring environments:

- Looping students with teachers over multiple years helps students build stronger and in-depth relationships.
- Making class sizes smaller also allows for more personal engagement between instructional staff and students, which can contribute to a more humanizing environment in which teachers know their students and families.
- Encouraging teachers to conduct and building in after-school time for one-on-one conferences with students and families about their progress and their learning.

- Extracurricular programming for students during and after-school can be critical in developing caring cultures.
- Culturally responsive teaching and instruction and curriculum that responds to students' interests and intellectualism are also a part of a caring school.

The above structures, policies, and practices can lead to deeper relationships, conversations, and pedagogical enactments. When these relationships are in place, there is less likely to be a need to for zero-tolerance or harsh disciplinary policies and practices.

Ecological Wellness and Sustainability

A school's commitment to sustainability is another preventative element in creating peaceable, caring climates at a school. When schools teach students and staff about sustainable living and schools engage in green practices (e.g., recycling programs, school gardens, or green energy), they are also promoting a culture in which peace not only means the absence of violence, but it also requires that we obtain ecological security and recognize the extent to which we are protected and nourished by nature.

Implementing a Culture of Ecological Wellness.

Incorporating environmental education and sustainability within a school involves a shift towards *ecological thinking*. Ecological thinking demands that we consider our relationship to the natural world, and how our actions tear apart and dismantle natural systems.⁸

- Curriculum around environmental sustainability can be integrated across subject matters, such as lessons on renewable energy sources, or doing a unit on oral histories of people's experiences in natural or nuclear disasters.
- Alterations can be made to the school facilities. Spaces can be opened up for natural light, for example, thereby reducing each classroom's energy use.
- Schools can have their own gardens that produce food for the community or the school cafeteria. Gardens and constructing green spaces on campus provide invaluable learning opportunities in the sciences and the arts.

III. Inquiry Approach⁹ to Understanding Behavior

This code assumes that all students will exhibit behavior learned through prior experiences to communicate their wants, needs, and emotions. These prior experiences will vary from student to student as each student has a different racial cultural experience and a different lived experience. Thus, while providing the rights listed above, school staff will seek to understand student behavior, to adapt practices to make room for difference, and to provide supports to students universally and individually. This work will seek to support students in communication through behaviors that will be understood and well received within the culture of the school community¹⁰.

⁸Kobayashi, Victor. (2007). Recursive Patterns That Engage and Disengage: Comparative Education, Research, and Practice. *Comparative Education Review* 51(3), 261-280.

⁹ Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. (2009). *Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research in the Next Generation (Practitioners Inquiry)*. New York: Teachers College Press.

¹⁰ Greene, R. (2009). *Lost at school: Why our kids with behavioral challenges are falling through the cracks and how we can help them*. New York: Scribner.

- **Professional Development and Resources for Support:** In seeking to understand student behavior school staff will regularly engage in shared readings regarding the research and the practices relevant to the field. Staff will regularly create, recreate and questions their own understanding of behavior and expectations of behavior. This can include support from outside resources and school inter-visitation.
- **Data Collection:** Work around behavior, positive behavior supports and interventions will be driven by qualitative and quantitative data. This data can consist of student-centered case studies, teacher-centered case studies, and teacher inter-visitation observations. Data should be used to understand how behavioral expectations are enacted in the classroom, where they may conflict with student expectation, where practices may need to change because of their basis in a normative or exclusionary stance, where school staff needs to support students because of social alienation, any academic concerns that may be related to behavioral issues, and the functional cause of any violent tendencies.
- **Effectiveness of Practice:** Using the above data collection methods in conjunction with the regular reading about relevant practices, staff will develop specific interventions for students who display anti-social or disruptive behaviors. The data referred to above along with a record of behavioral issues and their nature complete with student statements should be kept in order to track the outcomes of the interventions.
- **Opportunity for Reflection:** Key to this particular approach to behavior intervention is time for personal reflection of teachers about their practices, their success, and their frustrations. In particular, it is within reflection that teachers will be able to recognize which of their practices may be culturally irresponsible or biased and what assumptions they may be making about the behaviors of students.

In early implementations of preventative discipline, including classroom community building, school staff will work together to take note of students whose actions may pose a danger to themselves or others. Observational data could include aggression to peers, bullying, and threats to staff. Students who seem to be displaying violent behaviors or precursors to violent behaviors should be foci for individual case studies that seek to determine emotional and behavioral triggers before then teaching replacement behaviors and self-regulation skills. The RALLY program, and others like it, provides suggestions for working with individuals displaying aggressive behaviors that may lead to violence¹¹. The goal of this updated discipline code is to work to prevent violence and keep students in schools at all costs. Further, the onus of preventing violence at all costs is borne by the adults in schools.

VI. Responses to Violence

In the case of extreme violence and incidents where students pose a danger to themselves or other students, guidelines must be in place for teacher and administrative responses. The following guidelines discuss what interventions should be in place to identify students with violent reactions, what administrators and teachers should do when violence occurs, and long-term considerations for school violence.

¹¹ Skiba, R.J., & Noam, G.G. (2002). *New Directions for Youth Development: Zero tolerance: Can suspension and expulsion keep schools safe?* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Violence can be considered any form of extended endangerment when students harm themselves or others. For example, hitting another child is an instance that should be handled by the teacher and classroom community. Instances of horseplay or threats of violence will be handled within the school community. However, serious violence is constituted as violence that involves use of extreme force against peers or school staff.¹² Other forms of violence that require administrative response are use of weapons to inflict harm on other students or school staff. Most importantly, incidents that constitute violence must include a visible intent to cause harm to oneself or others.

Too often, administrators interpret intent to cause harm and implement serious consequences. For example, students in New York City have been suspended for bringing toy baseball bats to school, with no intent to inflict harm.¹³ Such incidents will no longer be considered dangerous or incidents of violence under this updated code. Further, violence must entail extended outbursts. Fights that are easily controlled by teachers and other staff within the classroom cannot result in immediate classroom removal and should instead be managed through the conflict resolution mandates.

Any forms of violence that are manageable by adults must be dealt with in the school community using methods of conflict resolution including restorative justice practices. These instances can include, but are not limited to:

- Horseplay
- Bullying
- Minor fights
- Disruptive behavior (banging pencils, throwing things)
- Disrespectful behavior (talking back, eye rolling)
- Verbal threats

Any forms of violence that are not manageable by adults in the classroom must be dealt with using the following measures while accounting for any specific strategies mandated on individual IEPs:

1. Staff witnesses must initially demand that students immediately cease, provide verbal warnings and options for alternative settings to calm down.
2. If not already present, administrators and school safety officials should be contacted and made aware of the site and incident. Administrators are primarily responsible in school settings and school safety officers are there to assist.
3. If all verbal warnings fail, ONLY administrators and/or school safety can physically remove a student from the classroom or hallway.
4. Students should be transported to an available “cool-down” location where they are isolated from their peers to calm down. At no point should students be removed from the school building or restrained.

¹² New York City School Discipline Code

¹³ NYCLU Suspension Report

5. Administrators must remain with students during this period. The role of school safety officer is to provide support. No legal action should be taken against students.
6. Prior to return to the classroom, conflict resolution or restorative justice should take place with the intent of understanding and resolving the underlying problem while fairly and appropriately consequenceing the action.
7. If, for any reason, children are unable to deescalate after removal from the classroom, families will be contacted and the student will be sent home, with classwork, for the remainder of the school day.
8. Once students have composed themselves, s/he should prepare for return to the classroom community. Again, the goal is for students to remain with class and return to classrooms as soon as possible.
9. No child, unless medical attention is necessary, should be denied entry to school for a period longer than the remainder of the school day. In any instance of extreme violence, students can be isolated from peers for a day and may return to school the following day.
10. All staff should be educated in both preventative and responsive measures prior to the start of the school year.

When any student returns to class after a violent interaction, it is imperative that the classroom community implement communication through conflict resolution and/or restorative justice. The removed child should be accepted back into the classroom community by both school staff and students. The removed student should have the opportunity to share what triggered violence and what they plan to do to avoid similar situation the future. Anyone involved in the incident should have the opportunity to communicate about and around the incident. School staff should use the experience to build understanding and what preventative measures might have prevented the incident and could be implemented in the future.

All measures listed in this section should be reserved for instances of extreme school violence. The majority of school discipline is intended to create safe and accepting school communities built on caring environments. These guidelines should be utilized in the rare circumstance that various preventative measures have failed.

Preventative Practices Resources

For further guidance in implementing preventative measures as school discipline that ensures the right of the human to education, please see the attached appendices or any of the following resources:

Appendices

These appendices describe in-depth the suggested practices that schools can use to prevent violence and conflict on their campuses and create more humanizing and less punitive school environments. These are outlines of preventative strategies that schools can employ and tailor to their setting's particular values, norms, and cultures. These include:

- Appendix A: Peaceable Solutions to Conflict
- Appendix B: Establishing Cultures of Caring and
- Appendix C: An Emphasis on Ecological Wellness and Sustainability.

Other

Books:

- *Lost in School* by Ross Greene
- *The Challenge to Care in Schools* by Nel Noddings
- *Engaging Troubling Students: A Constructivist Approach* by Scot Danforth and Terry Jo Smith
- *The Little Books of Restorative Justice (The little books of justice and peace building)* by Howard Zehr

Websites:

- www.pbis.org
- www.transformingconflict.org

Appendix A

Peaceable Solutions to Conflict:

Restorative Justice and Restorative Circles

Restorative justice places importance on the restoration of relationships in the aftermath of a harm that happens within a community. The model is grounded in indigenous philosophies in which, rather than seeking out retribution for wrongs that are committed, respect, reparation of relationships and the community at large, and responsibility towards each other are instead emphasized. The eventual goal of restorative justice is for parties who have committed harms against the other is to and empathize with each other's perspectives and points of view and to collaborate on solutions to resolving harm. Restorative circles can be used in many different kinds of conflict, such as between teachers and students or intra-student conflicts. Circles, grounded in dialogue and equality between participants, is key in giving students opportunities to voice their concerns or air grievances with the staff or the institution as large.

Typically, within a restorative justice model, the circle is the basis for this work. A circle asks members of the community who have been impacted by and/or committed a harm to commune and address the harm through dialogue while sitting, literally, in a circle. Circles usually have two different roles: *circle participants* and *circle keepers*. Participants include teachers, students, parents, and others who have a stake in having the harm resolved. The circle keeper facilitates the conversation and this person is trained and experienced in organizing and running circles. This person also has not been directly involved in the harm done and from a neutral standpoint. Along these same lines, the circle keeper does not impose solutions or judgment but is present to ensure that all participants in the circle have an opportunity to speak.

Restorative Circles in Practice

At the beginning of a circle, agreements are made on how the circle will be conducted and participants identify important values. It is crucial that participants establish their own norms and draw upon their own values and cultures in how to go about the process of resolving the harm. Sometimes, these norms are grounded in school-wide values that were previously created by staff and students, such as: learning together, respect, community, support, or diversity, etc. Giving voice and asking for participation from the beginning of circle demonstrates commitment to collaboration, listening, and valuing all members of the circles. Examples of such norms might include:

- Listen to one another
- Respect one another
- Don't talk while others are talking
- Talk and contribute to the conversation

For the remainder of the circle, participants share their thoughts and feelings on what harm has occurred, with the ultimate goal of trying to gain mutual understanding. To make sure that all participants feel as though they have an opportunity to share their thoughts without interruption, some circles use symbolic objects to pass around to indicate who has the space to speak during that time. Often times, circles conclude with participants determining what might be done to repair the harm that has been done, i.e. changing certain behaviors or attitudes. Some circles end

with a reading of a poem or some other kind of ritual to reinforce that the special nature of the space for talk, resolution, and healing.

Implementing Restorative Circles

Circles can be implemented in classroom settings and a restorative philosophy can be infused across a school site. Training teachers and staff members as facilitators and participants in restorative circles is essential in expanding restorative justice philosophy into classrooms and inculcating a restorative philosophy into the fabric of the school. Such trainings can emphasize that restorative circles can be used regularly in classrooms dialogue, community building exercises, addressing conflicts or disruptions that happen inside of a classroom, or integrated into subject-matter instruction. Students can also be trained as Circle Keepers and play an important role in the restorative process (see below for more information on peer mediation).

Conflict Resolution

One of the other major alternatives to punitive, zero-tolerance policies is the use of the classroom community. The goal of restorative justice is to use instances of disorder or conflict resolution as a peaceable alternative to dealing with discord on school campuses. Conflict resolution, which has a great deal of overlap with restorative justice models, refers to the use of dialogue—especially through mediation and negotiation strategies—in order to resolve conflict. Conflict resolution models differ slightly from restorative justice, which place special importance on healing, assuaging harm, and repairing relationships. Alternatively, conflict resolution outlines a series of useful strategies that can be employed when two parties, simply stated, have differing wants and needs. Conflict resolution can be *problem solving* or *transformational* in nature. In the former, the goal of resolution is simply to solve the problem at hand; in the latter, the conflict that is mediated is deeper and often more relational in nature. Where restorative justice is often concerned with transformational resolutions, conflict resolution models can focus on resolving immediate problems (e.g., a grading issue between students and teachers) as well as repairing relationships or resolving deeper tensions or issues (e.g., racial tension, emotional difficulties). Conflict resolution sessions are often much smaller and more intimate than restorative circles, which may involve a multiple number participants who are directly/indirectly involved in an incident of harm or are present to consult or speak to the harm. However, both are fundamentally grounded in the use of peaceable forms of communication and dialogue to resolve conflicts.

Conflict Resolution in Practice

While there are many different models that can be used by schools, a conflict resolution session usually has three stages. Sometimes, all of these stages are facilitated by a third party mediator, especially in cases where emotions are intense or communication is so difficult between parties that it requires facilitation, though this is not always the case.¹⁴ In the beginning, the parties in conflict, like in restorative justice models, decide on the norms that will be established and it is the time where a rapport is potentially developed between participants. Before parties enter a session, a fair amount of preparation is usually done, such as information gathering and attempting to understand as much as possible about the other party's worldviews and perspectives. Mediators usually present "opening statements" in which they talk about their

¹⁴ Moore, C.W. (2003). *The mediation process: Practical strategies for resolving conflicts*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

non-partiality, confidentiality, and ask participants how they wish to proceed or any ground rules they wish to be in place. The middle of a session is the longest part and it is the time that the wants and needs of each party in the conflict are identified and elaborated upon. Also, at this middle stage, the conflict is “re-framed” in terms of each party’s needs so that common ground can be established. Mediators often play a substantial role in re-framing the conflict in terms of each party’s needs. In this middle section, skills like probing, listening with empathy and paraphrasing, and generating open-ended questions all are critical in getting at underlying needs and moving towards resolution. Lastly, in a conflict resolution session there is traditionally a brainstorming session, the offering and collaboration on different solutions, or agreement that is arrived at to determine what can be done to meet all parties’ needs.

There is much deviation in what shape a session can take; regardless, some of the basic tools described here, such as paraphrase, re-framing, illuminating assumptions, understanding worldviews about parties in conflict, etc. are useful tools in encouraging alternative, non-punitive approaches to school discipline.

Implementing Conflict Resolution

To use such models inside of a school, training is needed for staff and students alike. All of the strategies outlined above can be learned through modeling and practice via brainstorming, discussion questions, role play, using scenarios, and viewing and closely analyzing video clips of conflicts from films or public debates in pairs or small groups. There are rich discussions around “What is conflict?” that can begin this type of training. Also, giving staff and students the opportunity to repeatedly practice skills, like paraphrasing or acting as mediators who help establish norms and probe parties for their underlying needs, are all critical parts of conflict resolution training.

Furthermore, it is important in a training to learn and talk about all of the different approaches and styles that people use in conflict, which can differ across cultures. Self-awareness of one’s own conflict style is critical to participating in a conflict resolution session and finding peaceable strategies to resolve conflict. Such self-awareness allows not only for understanding others but also for increased understandings of the complexities and layered nature of conflict, and the role of silence, emotions, and non-verbal gestures. For example, some people may show a great deal of emotion while others may not; consequently, the display of emotion often shapes the course of a session. Knowing how parties may draw upon emotions distinctively and at different moments in the conversation (and how to respond as a mediator or participant) is of great significance in understanding the perspectives of each party and how to approach a resolution. One useful typology of conflict styles is the Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory¹⁵, a self-test that can provide students and staff with a language to describe and identifying characteristics that different people use to approach conflict. Once learned, all of these strategies may be employed in the above-described restorative circles, in classrooms, or advisory classes.

It is especially important to involve youth as well as staff in conflict resolution trainings. Instructing youth in mediation processes are effective in providing opportunities for youth to mentor each other and become leaders in implementing restorative practices and philosophies at school sites. Schools may consider establishing peer mediation programs in which students mentor and mediate conflicts among themselves. These programs can have a multi-week

¹⁵ Kobayashi, Victor. (2007). Recursive Patterns That Engage and Disengage: Comparative Education, Research, and Practice. *Comparative Education Review* 51(3), 261-280.

training program in which students become certified as mediators and are involved in organizing and running various peaceable responses to conflict at the school, which may take a multitude of forms: restorative circles, grievance or justice panels, or conflict resolution sessions.

Appendix B

Cultures of Caring:

What is Caring?

Schools are often hostile and alienating places for young people and staff members. Such hostility contributes to climates of mistrust and often is the underlying cause for why incidences of violence occur at school sites. When a school is place where youth feel cared for and all members of the institution feel as though they are valued and belong, there becomes far less of a need to manage discipline with zero-tolerance policies and removal of students from classroom and school.

Caring refers to a fundamental concern about others. All schools committed to non-violence, peace, and non-punitive practices should operate in environments that prioritize caring. Caring is the act of wanting to know, “*What are you going through?*”¹⁶ Therefore, caring is less concerned with a specific set of behaviors but with relationships between persons. The following passage from Noddings (1992) describes how, while all people have a desire and need to be *cared for*, being *cared for* is especially important for adolescents who are in the critical stages in their identity development:

We wonder whether there is life after death, whether there is a deity who cares about us, whether we are loved by those we love, whether we belong anywhere; we wonder what we will become, who we are, how much control we have over our own fate. For adolescents these are among the most pressing questions: Who am I? What kind of person will I be? Who will love me? How do others see me? Yet schools spend more time on the quadratic formula than on any of these existential questions? (p. 20)

When schools spend too little time building caring relationships (i.e., on the “quadratic formula”) young people are alienated and resist the oppressiveness of school by acting and operating in ways that are deemed as “disciplinary problems.” What would happen, then, if schools were to focus on the questions asked above, and were partners in helping youth to make sense of *who they are* and *who they will be*? Schools that are concerned in being a part of this process are ones in which caring predominates. Classrooms and schools have the potential to be places which reflect caring and are places that build the capacity and the desire to care.

Implementing Cultures of Caring

Cultures of caring, which may seem rather nebulous and difficult to implement, can be encouraged and sustained systemically. Giving teachers and students adequate time and spaces with which to be communally with each other, and to dialogue extensively about how each of us become carers, what is defined as caring, and how we opt to enact caring. Such conversations can lead to a collaborative development of a school mission, in which teachers and students alike are committed to shared goals that integrate caring and empathy into every aspect of school life.

Structures of schools can be altered to help teachers build caring relationships with students. Here are some suggestions on how schools can create more caring environments:

¹⁶ Noddings, N. (1992). *The Challenge to Care in Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- Looping students with teachers over multiple years helps students build stronger and in-depth relationships.
- Making class sizes smaller also allows for more personal engagement between instructional staff and students, which can contribute to a more humanizing environment in which teachers know and learn about their students and families.
- Encouraging teachers to conduct and building in after-school time for one-on-one conferences with students and families about their progress and their learning, and how to be more responsive to students' individualized needs, is another way that caring relationships could be inculcated within a school site.
- Extracurricular programming for students during and after-school--sports, arts, theater, field trips etc.--can also be critical in developing caring cultures in which youth feel a sense of belonging to their school.
- Culturally responsive teaching and instruction and curriculum that responds to students' interests and intellectualism are also a part of a caring school.

The above structures, policies, and practices can lead to deeper relationships, conversations, and pedagogical enactments. All of these are part of students and teachers coming to know one another. When these relationships are in place, there is less likely to be a need to for zero-tolerance or harsh disciplinary policies and practices.

Appendix C

Ecological Wellness and Sustainability

A school's commitment to sustainability is another preventative element in creating peaceable, caring climates at a school. When schools teach students and staff about sustainable living and schools engage in green practices (e.g., recycling programs, school gardens, or green energy), they are also promoting a culture in which peace not only means the absence of violence, but it also requires that we obtain ecological security and recognize the extent to which we are protected and nourished by nature. If schools encourage an understanding of the larger ecological systems in which we are a part and to which we have great obligation, schools also support students in living more responsively/responsibly, all of which is an important part of creating safer, peaceable schools.

Implementing a Culture of Ecological Wellness

Incorporating environmental education and sustainability within a school involves a shift towards *ecological thinking*. Ecological thinking demands that we consider our relationship to the natural world, and how our actions tear apart and dismantle natural systems.

- Curriculum around environmental sustainability can be integrated across subject-matters, such as lessons on renewable energy sources, or doing a unit on oral histories of people's experiences in natural or nuclear disasters.
- Alterations can be made to the school facilities themselves and with the active participation of staff, teachers, and students. Spaces can be opened up for natural light, for example, thereby reducing each classroom's energy use.
- Schools can have their own gardens which produce food for the community or the school cafeteria. Gardens and constructing green spaces on campus provide invaluable learning opportunities in the sciences and the arts.