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Restorative Justice and School Violence: Building Theory and Practice

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Addressing school violence has no easy answers. There have been journeys down many different avenues. We have swung between the libertarian ideal of rehabilitation for the damaged lives of perpetrators of violence and the more conservative punitive just deserts approach. Broadly speaking, the former values compassion, while the latter values accountability for individuals' actions. Both approaches aim to (1) achieve behavioural change for the individual; (2) keep our schools and communities safe. The evidence is mixed as to what works best. Is it possible to incorporate both compassion and accountability in the sanctions we impose when dealing with school violence? Advocates of restorative justice answer a tentative yes to this question. Restorative justice is about building communities of care around individuals while not condoning harmful behavior, in other words holding individuals accountable for their actions. This paper will explore recent developments in the building of theory and practice in the area of restorative justice, particularly in terms of addressing one form of school violence — school bullying. Addressing violence in schools is a pressing social issue. It needs to take center stage in developing the roots of a civil society (Morrison, forthcoming).

Violence in schools is being increasingly recognized as not only a social justice problem but also a public health problem (Mercy & O'Carroll, 1988). Violence casts a web of harm that captures the victims, the offenders and their communities. This web creates cycles of fear and distrust to all who befall its trap, perpetuating anti-social and self-critical cycles of behaviour.

Is it possible to incorporate both compassion and accountability in the sanctions we impose when dealing with school violence?

For offenders, longitudinal studies have shown that there is often a continuity of aggressive and dominating behaviors over time (Huesmann, Eron, Lefkowitz & Walder, 1984; McCord, 1991; Moffitt, 1993; Pepler & Rubin, 1991; Tremblay, McCord & Boileau, 1992). Victims carry with them the emotional scars of nagging self-criticism, suffering the long-term effects of perpetual victimhood (Callaghan & Joseph, 1995; Olweus, 1993; Slee, 1995). Both, in their own way, have been alienated from the communities in which they live. Both need to re-establish their ties with their community.

In the last decade or so we have become increasingly aware that bullying in schools is a serious, and insidious, form of violence that plagues the school system. Internationally, there are countless tragic stories to be told. There is also building empirical evidence of the consequences of its ill effects. Those who bully are more likely to drop out of school, use drugs and alcohol, as well as engage in subsequent delinquent and criminal behaviour (Gottfredson, Gottfredson & Hybl, 1993). Children who are bullied have higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, illness and suicidal ideation (Cox, 1995; Rigby, 1998; Rigby, 1999). For both, this web of fear becomes an obstacle to learning, self-development and effective citizenship. This fear breaks down the foundation of a civil society. Our concern must be at many levels, not only for the individuals themselves, and their families, but also society at large. For it is society that must support those who befall our justice and health care systems.

In Australia this evidence has been clearly recognised. The National Crime Prevention and the National Anti-Crime Strategy have identified school bullying as a risk factor associated with antisocial and criminal behaviour in their publication "Pathways to prevention: Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia" (National Crime Prevention,

1999). Early intervention has been advocated as the most appropriate way to break this cycle (Yoshikawa, 1994; Tremblay & Craig, 1995). Schools may be the most appropriate institution to target in addressing these issues, reducing antisocial and criminal behaviour patterns, while promoting productive citizenship and social responsibility.

Bullying, and victimization, within schools is an effective behavioural target as these behaviours signal the breakdown of social relationships. In such cases, the re-affirming of positive relationships is vital to individual and social well-being.

School Bullying as a Target of Early Intervention Practice

Schools are an appropriate target because they capture such a large proportion of the population base. They not only capture children in their formative years, they also capture parents in their most influential years with their children. Schools also capture other members of a child's community of support, such as grandparents, friends, teachers, instructors and coaches. Schools, in essence, are a microcosm of society. Schools have the developmental potential to both stigmatize and exclude, as well as nurture and integrate individuals within society. The process of becoming a chronic offender and victim in society is often fed by the cycles of bullying and victimization that develop in the school system. Bullying, and victimization, within schools is an effective behavioural target as these behaviours signal the breakdown of social relationships. In such cases, the re-affirming of positive relationships is vital to individual and social well-being. This is reflected in the increasing awareness of researchers who couch deviant behaviour not in terms of individual pathology but in terms of social relationships that sustain individual lives (Ahmed et al., forthcoming; Koh, 1998; Emler & Reicher, 1995; Tutu, 1999).

The task is to re-build relationships in individual's lives at the first sign that the child is becoming disenfranchised from the relationships that sustain their well-being during their years at school. Working with children who bully and who are bullied in schools, particularly in the primary years, seems an effective place to commit our resources. Bullying is an important target as it is one of the most prevalent and insidious forms of domination over others. The ethos of bullying values dominance and control as a powerful form of influence over others. Restorative justice recognizes the ill effects of this form of influence, for influence, through domination, results in an alienated society. The practice of restorative justice does not value dominance but offers mutual respect and human dignity, while holding individuals' accountable. School bullying reflects wider social processes of domination as a form of influence. The study of school bullying offers us an opportunity to not only understand and address the phenomenon itself but also explore wider social issues.

What is Bullying?

The most frequently cited definition of bullying is the "repeated oppression, psychological or physical of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons" (Rigby, 1996, p.15; see also Farrington, 1993; Olweus, 1993). Three critical points are important in this definition:

Power: Children who bully acquire their power through various means: physical size and strength; status within a peer group; and recruitment within the peer group so as to exclude others.

Frequency: Bullying is not a random act; it is characterized by its repetitive nature. Because it is repetitive, the children who are bullied not only have to survive the humiliation of the attack itself but live in constant fear of its re-occurrence.

Intent to harm: While not always fully conscious to the child who bullies, causing physical and emotional harm is a deliberative act. It puts the child who is bullied in a position of oppression by the child who bullies.

It is important to note that bullying does not define all forms of conflict. If the power balance is perceived to be relatively equal, bullying is not in play. The bullying battleground is not a level playing field. Bullying is the assertion of power through aggression and domination. It happens in government, corporate boardrooms and in our schools. The form that bullying takes changes with life stage: from playgroup bullying and gang violence, to sexual and workplace harassment, to child abuse and domestic violence, as well as abuse of our elders and disabled (Pepler & Craig, 1997). The exertion of power can be both verbal and physical and it can take many forms: through the overt use of physical size, strength and numbers, to the use of status within a group. The form can be face-to-face or insidiously indirect, through rumours, exclusion, stalking and setting people up through others (Olweus, 1991). The repetitive nature of bullying sets up an ongoing relationship of dominance and submission. Both patterns can have a negative impact on the individuals and the communities concerned. Both can be understood through an analysis of how we manage our social relationships — individually and collectively.

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How Pervasive is School Bullying?

Bullying in schools is a worldwide phenomenon. The data in Australia mirrors that of other countries, such as Canada (Bentley and Li, 1995; Pepler et al., 1997), Scandinavia (Olweus, 1991), Ireland (O'Moore, 1986) and England (Boulton and Underwood, 1992). Recent figures suggest that 50% of children have experienced being bullied at school at least once (Rigby, 1996). It has been estimated that for Australian students (between the age of 9 and 17) 1 student in 5 is bullied at least once a week (Rigby, 1996). That's 20% of Australian students being bullied each week. This amounts to 634, 320 students being bullied every week across Australia (based on 1997 census data). Verbal bullying was reported by both boys and girls as the most common form of bullying. Physical bullying was the form experienced least. For girls, a figure that stands out above the boys, is the occurrence of being excluded, on purpose.

While bullying comes and goes with age, there is a developmental pattern. At the ages of I I and 12, students are most likely to report bullying others (Pepler et al., 1997). In other words, the pattern changes once adolescence begins. Overall, reported bullying is higher in primary school than secondary school; however, the early years of secondary school are higher than the final year of primary school (Rigby, 1996).

If It's Everywhere, Is Bullying Just a Lesson in Life?

Bullying is widespread and always has been. There are numerous historical accounts, such as in the works of Charles Dickens (*Oliver Twist*, 1837; *Nicholas Nickleby*, 1838) and Thomas Hughes (*Tom Brown's School Days*, 1857), as well as other historical tales (see Ross, 1996). Even today, the exploits of the orphaned boys in *Oliver Twist* are alive and well in the hearts and minds of contemporary society, for the same issues are still alive today, and continue to present themselves. More recently, James Moloney's (1998) award-winning *Buzzard Breath and Brains* tells the contemporary tale of dominance and submission, in other words bullying. The behaviour may be common through the ages, but this is as much a reflection on having institutions that tolerate (even condone) bullying, as on the nature of children. Bullying is not just "kids being kids." Bullying is the systematic abuse of power. This paper is based on the premise that bullying should never be condoned at any age or stage of life's journey.

The acceptance of bullying as a normal part of life signals that intimidation and violence are acceptable ways to resolve conflict and influence others. We may always have to deal with some form of bullying but we should never have to nurture our children in its arms. Children who tread the path of bully and victim can carry the emotional turmoil with them for a lifetime. Not only does it harm their own sense of personal well-being, it also affects those who care for these children.

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To understand the problem of bullying and of being bullied, we must consider the developmental paths of children who dominate others and their victims. We must also examine the social systems in which bullying occurs, such as the family, peer groups, schools and other social institutions. We can not dismiss children who bully in schools as part of a behavioural cycle that they'll grow out of; likewise, we can not pass off children who are bullied as needing a lesson in learning to stand up for themselves. The evidence shows that we are not doing anyone a service by taking this stand.

What are the Developmental Paths of Bullies and Victims?

There isn't a single path that leads a child to bullying others or to being bullied. Generally, the path they tread reflects a pattern of poor social adjustment. A number of risk factors have been identified which generally fall into the categories of individual differences, family, and school. Wider social institutions also play a role (see Morrison, forthcoming). For example, one recent model found that school bullying was best predicted by family disharmony, perceived control of bullying in schools, school hassles, liking for schools, as well as the individual characteristics of impulsivity, empathy, self-esteem and internal locus of control (see Ahmed et al., forthcoming).

The purpose in this paper is not to review each of these factors but develop a theoretical framework through which to understand the problem and then use this framework to develop effective interventions. This was the approach advocated by the influential social scientist Kurt Lewin (1946), who said, "there is nothing as practical as a good theory."

Developing a Theoretical Framework

We will begin this endeavour with the finding that a lack of cooperation has been correlated with high involvement in school bullying (Rigby, Cox & Black, 1997). Two different theoretical perspectives may be helpful in explaining this finding: social identity (and self categorization) theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987) and reintegrative shaming theory (Braithwaite, 1989). The social identity perspective argues that social cooperation is a product of the salience (or activation) of a social identity. A social identity can be thought of as the psychological link between the self and the collective, in this case the school community. Through social identification, the school becomes a positive reference group for the student. When a student identifies with the school community, he or she will see themselves as interdependent with this community and behave

cooperatively, upholding the school's rules and values (Morrison, 1999). Tyler (1998) has made a similar point. He argues that there are two inter-related aspects to self-worth: collective and individual. In the context of the school, the collective aspect is reflected in pride in being a member of a school community. The individual aspect is reflected in having respect within that community. As self-worth within a community increases in terms of pride and respect, social cooperation within that community also increases. In other words each of us strives for a sense of belongingness and significance. As well as meeting our individual needs, being a member of a positive reference group is also importance to us. We are social animals.

For bullies, the evidence indicates that the school community is not seen as a positive reference group. Indeed the school may even become a negative reference group as a child drifts towards a delinquent identity (see Koh, 1998). The building of a positive identity within the school is not a simple and straightforward means to an end. There may be some barriers to the process of identifying with the school community. Work by Eliza Ahmed and her colleagues (2000) suggests that one barrier that needs to be addressed is the affective barrier associated with shame. The shame associated with a harmful act acts as a barrier to us thinking of ourselves as a fully integrated member of a community. Indeed, recent findings have shown that shame-management has been found to be an important mediating variable in the understanding of bullying and victimization (Ahmed et al., forthcoming).

This work, inspired by reintegrative shaming theory (Braithwaite, 1989), suggests that both shaming and the emotion of shame are of considerable importance in regulating social behaviour. When a member of our community has done something that the community does not condone, the act can be dealt with in two ways: one can belittle both the person and the behaviour, or one can respect the person while not condoning the behaviour.

The former is known as stigmatized shaming, a process that gives negative labels to both the person and the act; the latter is known as reintegrative shaming, a process that supports the person while not condoning the act. Within this framework, Ahmed has developed an integrated model of shame management and bullying. Building on many of the variables that have previously been found to influence bullying behaviour, such as family, school and individual difference variables, Ahmed shows how shame-management mediates many of these well acknowledged influences. In other words, failure to manage shame effectively is understood to be of importance in understanding and addressing school bullying.

Shame can be adaptive or maladaptive. Shame is adaptive when it activates an internal sanctioning mechanism that regulates the consistency and appropriateness of our social behaviour. The process can be understood as follows. Shame comes to the fore when we behave inappropriately in respect to an important community of support, for example our family or school. Through taking responsibility for the wrongdoing and making amends, the shame is acknowledged and discharged. Through this process, our feeling of connectedness to our community remains intact. Shame can be maladaptive when our internal sanctioning agent is functioning in such a way that does not allows us to discharge our shame over a wrongdoing. Why the sanctioning system is not operating at an optimal level can be determined through a number of processes. These have been discussed further by Eliza Ahmed elsewhere (Ahmed et al., forthcoming). Suffice to say for now that the shame has not been discharged and thus remains with the individual. This has consequences for our feeling of connectedness with others in our communities. This can be reflected in individuals' feelings of pride in their communities and respect within them, as supported by recent evidence by Morrison (forthcoming). Further, unacknowledged shame has the potential to be expressed as anger. The community that has evoked the shame can contribute further to its negative manifestation if the individual is subjected to further feelings of rejection from the community.

How was shame-management found to be different across the four categories of bullying behaviour (what we call bullying status): bullies, victims, bully/victims and non-bullies/non-victims)? Non-bullies/non-victims acknowledge shame and thus

discharge it; victims acknowledge shame but are caught up in self-critical thinking, through their ongoing feelings of rejection from others. Their shame becomes persistent, despite acknowledgement of the wrongdoing. Bullies are less likely to acknowledge shame and the shame is transformed, often manifested as anger. Bully/victims capture the worst of these two troublesome groups. They feel the shame but, like bullies, fail to acknowledge it. As such, they are also more likely to displace shame. Again their shame can be transformed into anti-social behaviour, such as anger. Further, like victims, they are caught up in self-critical thoughts.

Acknowledgment of shame can lead to greater integrity of the self and our social world; shame avoidance can lead to social alienation and conflict with the self and our social world.

How does shame management relate to some of our earlier risk factors for bullying behaviour? The influence of the family can be taken as one example. One family factor which has been found to be significantly influential is how wrongdoing is dealt with in the family. Is the process punitive or reintegrative? Does the process stigmatize the child into a certain pattern of behaviour or does the process allow the child to make amends and carry on as a respected member of the family? The evidence is consistent with the theory we have outlined: parents of children who bullied others report using stigmatized shaming more often as a child-rearing practice (Ahmed, et al., forthcoming).

In summary, both social identity theory and reintegrative shaming theory emphasize the importance of social relationships. This is consistent with other theorists, who stress the importance of social bonds. Lewis (1981, 1983) argues that connection with others is a primary motive in human behaviour. The maintenance of bonds is reciprocally related to and involves emotions: emotions are a means of cohesion. Nathanson (1992) has also argued that shame is the central social regulator that governs our social relations with others. Shame, as such, is intimately connected with solidarity (ingroup cooperation) and alienation (outgroup competition). Humans are inherently social animals; lapses in important social bonds affect us as individuals. Threatened or damaged bonds create an environment for shame. Chronic unacknowledged shame arises from and generates failure of social connectedness (Retzinger, 1991). Shame can be conceptualized as a thermostat; if it fails to function informatively about the state of our social relationships, regulation of relationships becomes impossible. Thus, shame is an important signal about the state of our social relationships. Shame management involves the search for coherence of identity. Acknowledgment of shame can lead to greater integrity of the self and our social world; shame avoidance can lead to social alienation and conflict with the self and our social world.

Restorative Justice and School Bullying: The Philosophy of the Practice

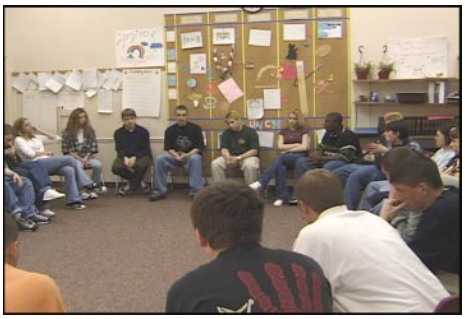
A central tenet that has developed in this chapter is the importance of social relationships to individual and social well-being. This is the central tenet of the practice of restorative justice, which at its heart holds that the nature of our social relationships is central to the nature of our individual lives. Reintegrative shaming theory upholds the practice of restorative justice. Based on this theory, Braithwaite (1989) has argued that there are two main features inherent to restorative processes. First, to achieve successful reintegration the process must involve the presence and participation of a community of support for the offender and the victim. This community would be made up of the people who respect and care most about these two (or more) people. Second, the process of shaming requires a confrontation over the wrongdoing between the victim and offender within this community of support (see Braithwaite, 1989, 1998). The theory argues that the process is restorative in that the intervention (1) makes it clear to the offender that their behaviour is not condoned within the community; (2) is respectful and supportive of the individual while not condoning the behaviour. The first point constitutes the shaming aspect of the intervention while the second point provides the basis by which the shaming process is of a reintegrative (rather than a stigmatizing) nature.

Restorative justice processes offer us an opportunity to get off the seesaw between punitive and moralistic approaches to addressing school bullying. Advocates of punitive approaches call for responsibility and accountability for behavior. Advocates of the libertarian approaches call for further care and support of the person. A restorative process involves both these components, in that: (1) a message is communicated to the offender that the behaviour is not condoned by a community; (2) the offender is offered respect, support and forgiveness by the community. In other words, efforts are made to separate the act (or behaviour) from the person.

In line with this ethos, we prefer to separate the act from the person and use the terms *students who bully* or *students who are bullied*. Commonly, literature on bullying uses the terms bullies and victims when referring to children involved in bullying. As many children may at some point take on either role, and because the terms bullies and victims label the children rather than the behaviour, these terms have

not been adopted in our work on restorative justice. An important tenet of restorative justice is the ability to conceptually separate the behaviour from the person. This is a philosophical point rather than a semantic preference. It is our hope that through approaching the problem in this way, children will not be polarized into these two positions and become stigmatized as problem kids with associated behavioural problems. At the same time we maintain that bullying, and other forms of violence, has no place in the school environment.

The aim of restorative programs is to reintegrate those affected by wrongdoing back into the community, to identify with the community, and become a cooperative member of that community, upholding its laws and values. A community accountability conference, which brings together victims, offenders and their respective communities of care, is one such intervention program. As Braithwaite states (1998), "Restorative justice conferences may prevent crime by facilitating a drift back to law-supportive identities from law-neutralizing ones" (p. 24). Community ac-



countability conferencing has been used well in schools, particularly in addressing bullying (see Cameron & Thorsborne, forthcoming; Wachtel & McCold, forthcoming). Further, restorative justice conferences work best when supported by a broader institutional culture that mirrors the values of restorative justice (see O'Connell & Ritchie, forthcoming). As well as reactive interventions, such as community accountability conferencing, proactive restorative interventions are also important. Pro-active programs, often called primary interventions in that they target the entire community, develop the understanding and practice of restorative processes for all students. One such program, piloted in Australia, is the Responsible Citizenship Program (RCP). This program has two explicit aims: (1) to build a community of care based on respect, consideration and participation; (2) develop student's conflict resolution skills based on principles of restorative justice.

Goleman's (1995) research on Emotional IQ provides support for the aspirations of this program. He argues that children need lessons in learning about and coping with a repertoire of emotions, particularly the emotions involved in conflicts, as these are the ones that are often masked. Becoming aware of our emotions, acknowledging them, speaking about and acting on them are healthy skills to develop. Through building this awareness, we can often front-end the escalation of conflict and reduce violence in our schools. Goleman (1995) comments:

> ... over the last decade or so 'wars' have been proclaimed, in turn, on teen pregnancy, dropping out, drugs, and most recently violence. The trouble with such campaigns, though, is that they come too late, after the targeted problem has reached epidemic proportions and taken firm root in the lives of the young. They are crisis interventions, the equivalent of solving a health problem by sending an ambulance to the rescue rather than giving an inoculation that would ward off the disease in the first place. Instead of more 'wars,' what we need to follow is the logic of prevention, offering our children the skills for facing life that will increase their chances of avoiding any and all these fates. (p. 256)

How do we as concerned parents, educators, researchers, policy makers and citizens increase our capacity to enable our children to manage their shame over wrongdoing and conflict more effectively? Is it possible to enable a child to increase their capacity to manage shame more effectively? Preliminary results of a pre/post self report evaluation of the Responsible Citizenship Program, using the Life at School Survey (Morrison, 2000), showed that students' use of a number of adaptive shame-management strategies increased while the use of some maladaptive shame-management strategies decreased. While this result is promising, it is only a start. As with a large number of school-based intervention programs, much more extensive and systematic evaluation work needs to be done. As a start, we are beginning to survey a number of restorative justice initiatives in Canada and Australia, using the Life at School Survey (Morrison, 2000).

The practice of restorative justice is a vehicle that offers hope to those affected by violent and aggressive acts. Hope for a different tomorrow is what brings participants together to talk through how these acts have affected them.

The practice of restorative justice is a vehicle that offers hope to those affected by violent and aggressive acts. Hope for a different tomorrow is what brings participants together to talk through how these acts have affected them. It is why people came forward to tell their stories of atrocious acts during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Archbishop Tutu shows that reconciliation after conflict is not easy but is the only way forward — whether at the political or personal level — and he offers inspirational advice on how we might make this principle work in a better, more humane future.

Desmond Tutu (1999) tells us of *ubuntu* — the essence of being human. That we "live in a delicate network of interdependence. ... That a person is a person

through other people. ... It says 'I am human because I belong.' I participate, I share." (p.35). We must cultivate a culture of hope for our children, for ourselves. We must ensure that children, from an early age, are educated in the skills of nurturing productive relationships and working through conflict. This is always difficult but we have ignored the importance of teaching children about conflict, its purpose and benefits, as well as skills in productive conflict resolution, for too long. Children will only benefit from education on the values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that enable them to resolve any dispute peacefully and in the spirit of respect for human dignity, tolerance and non-discrimination — the essence of democratic citizenship.

UNESCO has recognized this in their declaration and programme of action on a Culture of Peace. They have proclaimed the period 2001–2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the children of the world. Schools have an important agenda to take up here. Let us develop praxis based on the institutionalization of hope. Let's take a leaf from Desmond Tutu's book and cultivate the art of building relationships, and resolving conflicts productively, in our schools. Restorative justice offers us new insights, both in theory and practice, in taking a fresh look at addressing violence in schools.

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