



TEN NEWSLETTER

Bimonthly Newsletter of the
Transformative Education Network
at Montclair State University

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Photo by Mike Peters

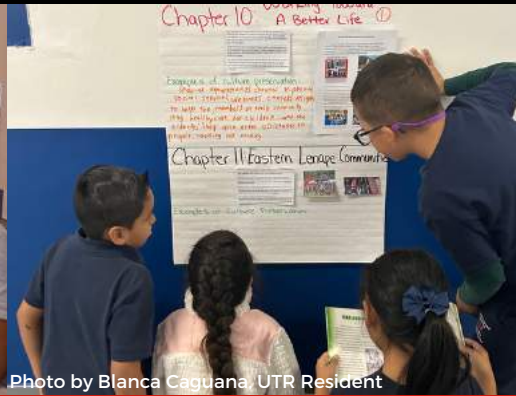


Photo by Blanca Caguana, UTR Resident

RETHINKING DISCIPLINE: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN SCHOOLS

"We are committed to collectively, lovingly, and courageously working vigorously for freedom and justice for Black people and, by extension, all people. As we forge our path, we intentionally build and nurture a beloved community that is bonded together through a beautiful struggle that is restorative, not depleting" (BLM@schools).

The above quote describes Restorative Justice, the first principle in the [BLM@Schools 13 principles](#). Restorative Justice is a practice that seeks to interrupt punitive discipline systems and instead focus on mediation and agreement. The concept of restorative justice originated from Indigenous peoples around the world. The practices of restorative justice seek to: build relationships, be respectful to all, provide an opportunity for equitable dialogue and participatory decision-making, involve all relevant stakeholders, address harms, needs, obligations, and causes of conflict and harm, and encourage all to take responsibility ([OUSD Restorative Justice Implementation Guide \(PDF\)](#)).

Restorative Justice practices at schools can be powerful tools for disrupting the carceral nature of schooling and the over-policing of Black and Brown students. However, this is fully dependent on how these practices are enacted in a specific school setting.

When thinking about Restorative Justice in school settings, we often think of mediation, restorative circles, or even the "[Counselors Not Cops](#)" movement, which seeks to replace police officers in schools with counselors and other mental health professionals. What is often missing from the way these restorative practices unfold are the ways that we address current and historical systems of oppression and advantage that are present within schools. Using the [Four I's of oppression](#) and advantage as a tool to understand these practices; we can see many of the more popular strategies focus on Interpersonal oppression and advantage and how to resolve interpersonal conflict while doing little to examine the ways Institutional oppression is continually enacted in schools. "Focusing only on practices such as circles, rather than the philosophy of promoting justice, allows leaders to bypass fundamental conversations about power- conversations that are needed to address and end racially disproportionate patterns of discipline..." ([Wadhawa, 2020](#)). In other words, "we must also change the practices of schools to eradicate policing and intersecting oppressive systems from their culture" ([Williams, 2020](#)).

Restorative justice "attempts to restore to the condition before the harm took place. However, usually, that original condition is itself one that has a number of injustices built into it" ([Stapleton, 2020](#)). As we think about the ways we use restorative justice practices in our schools, it is important to consider how these practices can exist beyond the vacuum of your classroom but also be embedded in the institutional practices of the school community in order to transform conditions that allow harm to occur in schools in the first place. Continue reading this month's newsletter for more ideas and resources, and remember, schools will never transform on their own as they are ingrained in the context of society. If we meet resistance to restorative practices at the school level, the best thing we can do is work to transform our own practices and engage in dialogue with others.

SPOTLIGHT ON...

Dr. Deonna Smith is a former teacher, school leader, and educational justice advocate. In her work, she strives to make theories and pedagogies accessible and applicable to teachers and learners. Dr. Smith works with education stakeholders nationwide to fight for joyful, inclusive, and equitable student spaces. Dr. Smith's latest book, *Rooted in Joy: Creating a Classroom Community of Equity, Belonging, and Care*, is a guide that blends theory, narrative, and practical tools to help teachers and leaders build spaces for their students to thrive.



UPCOMING EVENTS



- December 14: 5:00 - 6:00 pm EST via [Zoom](#)
Virtual Open House: UTR (MAT)
- January 19: 9:00 - 3:00 pm EST
Mentor Professional Development
- March 21: 5:00 - 7:30 pm EST via [Zoom](#)
CUE Presents: Dr. Deonna Smith

What is your connection to TEN?

Well, my involvement with TEN first started when I read Dr. Picower's book - Reading, Writing and Racism, and I was really excited about her book. Actually, I just reached out to her on Instagram, if you can believe it, and she actually messaged me back and we were able to chat. Then Bree [and Tanya] reached out and asked me to create resources for the TEN program so we ended up working together and it just blossomed from there.

What is your "why" for antiracist/social justice education?

I would say my why really just started with my own experience. Even though I didn't know it at the time, as a student, I was navigating systemic forces, structural racism and intergenerational poverty. As a child, you're just trying to do your best and get a scholarship and get to the next level of your education. I really didn't have a critical lens about what I was experiencing, and why it was so hard for my family, despite being smart, hard working people to just catch a break. So when I went to college and started to learn more, I realized that my heritage or my culture wasn't a "problem" to overcome. Instead, there was something that was put in place to block me for very specific reasons, so people that look like me don't get access to these spaces. Once I realized that it wasn't just a coincidence and it was very intentional, I knew that I wanted to be part of breaking that down.

How does antiracist classroom management fit into a restorative justice framework?

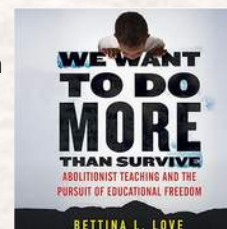
I love what restorative and transformative justice practices have been able to do in the classroom. However, what's going on in the classroom is complex: teachers see the convergence of many different intersections: racism, ableism, sexism as well as carceral practices that are borrowed from the criminal injustice system. Teachers are critical in disrupting that but teachers can also perpetuate it in both small and big ways that they aren't trained to look out for, so they don't see it. Interventions like restorative justice are an important piece of the puzzle. But you still have to contend with the fact that schools were designed to perpetuate racism. You have to deal with that overall structure and the intersections of ableism and other systems of oppression. So restorative justice is a piece and then anti racism is another piece. But even those two are not the full puzzle together. It can be overwhelming for teachers. But what makes me excited is that there are many teachers that are seeing these connections and want to unpack and disrupt it. And it's not overwhelming for them! Instead it's exciting, right? Because they're rebuilding and freedom dreaming this whole new thing!

What is one change you would like to see in public education?

One significant change I'd like to see in public education is a shift towards recognizing the transformative and liberatory power of joy. Currently, we're pushing up against all of these systems. There's just so much work to do, and we frame it as "work". The system wants us to be exhausted so that we get burnt out. But I think the way that we can push back against that is seeing resistance and liberation as joy.

What's the book that changed your life?

I have to give it up- props to the OG Bettina Love's, "We Want to Do More Than Survive". Before I read that book, I was definitely part of the camp that understood resistance to White supremacy culture in education to be couched in the idea of improving test scores for Black and Brown students or character education. Reading the book, I realized, that's not the path of liberation, that's really a very reformist perspective as opposed to a revolutionary one. There were so many mindset shifts in that book that really needed to happen for me to create and promote a practice that is liberatory.



What inspired you to write your book, *Rooted in Joy*?

I was inspired to write "Rooted in Joy" after years of working in education, specifically in cultural responsiveness, abolition, and anti-racism. I realized that our conversations were missing the element of joy as a secret ingredient in resistance. Seeing burnout in educators and students, especially after the pandemic, made me want to be part of a solution that refused to tax and toll Black and Brown people even more, but instead was like energy giving. So the approach is for every teacher, every stakeholder who is brave enough to believe that the solution might be joy, not more testing, not cracking down, not stricter rules, not tighter schedules, but rather allowing for joy, healing, childhood, care and belonging. So this book is really a love letter to teachers that are brave enough to say what if we root everything we do in joy?



DID YOU KNOW?

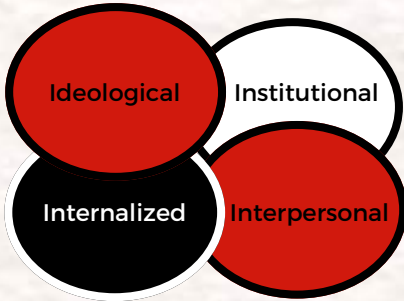


Restorative Justice can be rooted within the larger framework of Transformative Justice which seeks not only to address harm but also the conditions that allowed the harm to take place.

TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

Click to Watch

Four Is of Oppression



What is Restorative Justice?

Restorative justice is a system and approach aiming to address the aftermath of harm and wrongdoing by bringing together the individuals who were affected by the harm - the survivors and the perpetrators - in a collaborative and cooperative process. The main goal of restorative justice is to hold the person responsible for causing harm accountable for their actions while fostering healing and forgiveness. [To learn more, click here for a short video.](#)

What is Transformative Justice?

Transformative justice (TJ) goes beyond immediate harm, delving into the root causes of injustice and systemic issues to create lasting positive change for individuals, communities, and societies. It considers the broader context and societal responsibility that perpetuates harm. Through dialogue, reflection, and action, TJ fosters personal growth and drives the evolution of more just, equitable, and compassionate societal norms and systems. [To learn more, click here for a short video.](#)

INCLUSIVITY
COMMUNITY

BEYOND RESISTANCE

EMPOWERMENT
TOGETHER

IMAGINE A WORLD WHERE WE ALL COUNT



REIMAGINING JUSTICE

Punitive Justice

PJ is rooted in the carceral system. The consequence of harm-doing results in punishment or removal from community in some way
i.e. timeout, suspension



Restorative Justice

RJ seeks to restore and repair the relationship that existed before harm was done
i.e. community service, restorative circles, apology



Transformative Justice

TJ seeks to change the larger social structure as well as the personal structure of those involved.



TOOLS FOR DISMANTLING EDUCATIONAL OPPRESSION



Restorative Justice and Transformative Justice exist on a continuum. They are not different from each other, rather TJ looks beyond the current circumstances. When rooted in anti-racist principles, RJ/TJ are powerful tools for examining where systemic oppression exists in education. RJ which is inspired by indigenous wisdom, fosters relationships, amplifies voices, and promotes equitable dialogue, involving all stakeholders. It addresses interpersonal conflicts within educational settings and builds communities of respect. TJ broadens that lens hoping to shift the ideological and institutional conditions that allow for harm to occur. These approaches have the potential to disrupt punitive structures that disproportionately harm Black and Brown students, though success depends on school-specific implementation. While RJ aims to prevent harm, it often encounters inherently unjust conditions which is why we must transform not only classroom practices but also institutional norms. The powerful resources on this page can help us identify ways to change school cultures towards care and community accountability.


RESOURCES

Healing-Centered Practices

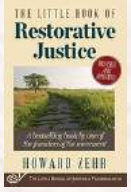
Restorative Approaches

Classroom Supports

Community Circles



Healing School Project believes that "healed teachers heal students". They use an equity-centered approach to provide space and tools for educators to heal, connect and cope. [Join their monthly circle to learn more.](#)




Howard Zehr proposes workable principles and practices for making Restorative Justice possible.



[Watch Linda Cliatt-Wayman's TED talk.](#)

Delve into 'Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community'




Learn to enhance communication, resolve conflicts, and create an inclusive, harmonious school culture where students flourish and connections thrive.

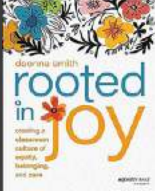


An overview of Restorative Justice history, philosophy, practices, and values. Breaking down definitions, punitive vs. restorative approaches, punishment, consequences, and discipline.

 **WATCH NOW**




The Dignity in Schools promotes **alternatives** to a culture of zero-tolerance, punishment, criminalization and the dismantling of public schools.



Educator, Dr. Deonna Smith offers a unique blend of theory practical advice, and resources for teachers to unlock the power of inclusivity and joy in their classrooms.



Based on a true story, **Katie Smith Milway's inspiring tale** shows how a desperate situation can be improved by finding common ground through play. It provides a starting point for discussing social justice issues.



Restorative justice circles, rooted in indigenous societies, emphasize communal bonds and positive relationships. Everyone is valued for their knowledge and uniqueness, fostering a sense of unity and reciprocity. Circles cultivate accountability among individuals and their wider community.



Interested in restorative justice in action? [Watch a community-building circle take place in Oakland schools.](#)

