



Restorative Justice in Education: *An Introduction*

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AS WE PREPARED this edited volume for press, and COVID-19 emerged, evolved, and wreaked havoc, we were abruptly confronted with ruptures in our ways of living and understandings of “normalcy.” The systemwide lack of preparedness that characterized the education landscape of the United States pointed to the glaring absence of future-oriented frameworks. Unsurprisingly, too, educational inequities were deplorably exacerbated as school systems, educators, at-home caregivers, and students in vastly different conditions and with vastly different resources and access scrambled to reimagine teaching and learning while “sheltering in place” and practicing “social distancing” in an unscripted time.

On March 7, 2020, the fifth-largest school district in California, Elk Grove Unified School District, became the first in the state to close, yet a plan for distance learning was not announced until March 23, 2020—to begin in mid-April.¹ Other districts chose to end the academic year early or had to suspend distance learning to work out technical difficulties. Yet, Andover Public Schools in Massachusetts was able to almost immediately create a “Continuous Learning Family and Caregiver Playbook,” featuring resources to set up a productive learning environment at home, activities for play and mindfulness, links to websites, and information about food and resource distribution.² This useful playbook became

a tool that may be used beyond the pandemic and in other incidences of rupture.

Inundated with the immediate, people everywhere witnessed a great divide in how learning communities were able (or unable) to respond and continue adapting to distance learning.³ Some of this work involved tangible outcomes, such as the provision of Chromebooks and Wi-Fi hot spots, but also playing out were mindset shifts. Community needed to be cultivated in unprecedented ways; inclusion and exclusion took on new forms that gave some of us pause; a lot of thought was given to how to approach the establishment of emotional space to support children and their families; and educators were widely honored for being essential. After such an awakening, can we embrace the opportunity to radically reimagine a school system deeply committed to the futures of all children? How can teaching and learning cultivate and nurture purpose and belonging for educators and students? Can that vision extend beyond classrooms and school buildings? What paradigms are needed to engage in future-oriented pedagogies? What mindsets? What skill sets?

Award-winning novelist Arundhati Roy asserts, “Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. . . . [The pandemic then becomes] a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.”⁴ Restorative justice is a paradigm that is incredibly relevant to the current moment, as it accounts for emotional well-being and strengthens community, offering a pathway for building relationships that are affirming, inclusive, and centered on human flourishing and resilience—whether the learning community is gathered in a school building or in our own homes. Children and youth who are multiply-marginalized have long been familiar with metaphorical social distancing as an overarching aspect of their schooling experiences. The notion of “social distancing,” which may more appropriately be thought of as “physical distancing,” was not only metaphorical, either, for many decades, but policy and practice have segregated specific cohorts of young learners through trips to the office, forcible isolation from their classroom learning and their peers, and entanglement with law enforcement.⁵

Only a few weeks before parts of the United States called for COVID-related school closures, six-year-old Kaia, an African American girl, was placed under arrest by a police officer in Orlando, Florida—for having a

tantrum.⁶ While this news story was quickly overshadowed by the threat of coronavirus, the extreme nature and outcomes of this encounter felt sickeningly familiar and status quo to numerous Black students, Indigenous students, Latinx students, students with special needs, emergent bilinguals, and undocumented students.

In this edited volume, teachers, youth workers, teacher-educators, and education researchers, many of whom represent many or all of these intersectional identities, situate restorative justice as a timely paradigm that can be leveraged to spark intellectual curiosity and relational dynamics that yield transformative possibilities. The clearest pathway to this pursuit—Transformative Justice Teacher Education—is restorative justice in action across the disciplines, an equity-oriented and justice-seeking ethos and culture of teaching and learning.⁷ The associated work of embracing this paradigm and related approach to teacher education reclaims the “justice” centering of “restorative justice,” in intentional contrast to “restorative practice” approaches gaining traction in schools across the United States that avoid the call and urgency of undermining and eliminating pervasive inequities in education.⁸ All of us who contributed to create this volume also feel strongly that “transformative” is a more appropriate naming convention for the work we describe herein, because we acknowledge that “justice” in many education contexts cannot be restored because it has never yet existed for all.

Much like schools’ rush to “practice,” early thought leaders envisioning and putting into action Transformative Justice Teacher Education programming nearly made the mistake of omitting “justice”—at least in the terminology of that era. In 2013, Maisha T. Winn initially asked what literacy teaching looks like, sounds like, and feels like through a restorative justice paradigm, asserting that it was possible and necessary for English educators and administrators to “grapple with tensions in classrooms and schools initiated by zero-tolerance policies and reimagine English classrooms as sites for relationship-building, peacemaking, and peacekeeping.”⁹ Study of a high school community committed to restorative justice subsequently demonstrated, though, that restorative justice in the context of education was essentially about “justice on both sides” and pointed to the importance of naming justice as an action that must be part of healing work.¹⁰

Over time, as we continued to fine-tune our ideas about how transformative justice could and should be enacted in contexts of schooling, we were inspired by scholars considering how carceral logics shape mathematics education,¹¹ the criticality of culturally relevant pedagogy and digital media production,¹² the role of translanguaging in “upending” colonial harm in English language arts,¹³ and Wholistic Science Pedagogy.¹⁴ In many ways, this edited volume begins where *Justice on Both Sides* ended in 2018,¹⁵ in that the contributing authors seek to map transformative justice possibilities onto the teaching of math, English language arts, science, and social studies. The tool to get us there, *Transformative Justice in Teacher Education*, effectively serves as a portal through which static, top-down visions of education and related lenses of rigid, nonhumanizing classroom management and discipline are actively and rightfully replaced by future-oriented thinking that is inclusive, affirming, expansive, and justice seeking.

FROM ONE WORLD TO THE NEXT

The portal we describe is a space in which we come to be guided by complementary pedagogical stances that inform the sections and final chapter of this book: *History Matters*, *Race Matters*, *Justice Matters*, *Language Matters*, and *Futures Matter*. While the author-contributors certainly honor all of these stances in their work and their writing, these chapters highlight how educators and those who teach them might begin to engage specific stances as their work unfolds in diverse educational settings.

In Section I, “Why History Matters,” Lopez, Duñas, and Lopez; Annamma; and Lawrence T. Winn illuminate the importance, rationale, and work of connecting histories to futures—even when students are unable to make such connections themselves. This section is guided by questions about what it means to historicize one’s self in the process of imagining one’s future, what educators can learn from historiographies of learning communities, and how access to history and histories can promote agency for and among students who are Black, Indigenous, Latinx, differently abled, and otherwise excluded in education contexts and society more broadly.

Section II, “Why Race Matters,” includes scholars who grapple with early childhood education and math education. Souto-Manning, Chajed, Emerson, Ghim, and Nicol explore how racist ideas serve to reproduce inequities in early childhood education. The authors shed light on the power and promise of a transformative justice in education framework in early childhood education. Bullock and Meiners reveal how mathematics and mathematics education have functioned as agents of the carceral state and argue for the reimagining of mathematics education as a tool to dismantle oppressive systems. Robinson, Gholson, and Ball analyze a restorative approach to the teaching of mathematics. They address the racialized nature of mathematics and highlight the brilliance, creativity, and abilities of Black math learners.

In Section III, “Why Justice Matters,” Patterson Williams, Gray, Brown, Bailey, and Rodriguez describe transformative justice as it applies to identity and sense of belonging. Patterson Williams and Gray offer a curricular model, the (W)holistic Science Pedagogy (WSP), that encourages teachers to provide historically marginalized students with educational quality. Brown and Bailey’s chapter features social justice education using restorative justice practices to help students rethink their identities as troublemakers to community leaders. Rodriguez grapples with how concepts of obedience, patriotism, and personal responsibility are often associated with white children while Black and Latinx children often experience discipline and punishment. She argues that a transformative justice approach in civics education is needed to disrupt this narrative and experience.

Finally, in Section IV, “Why Language Matters,” Graham, Musser, Montaña, Braaten, and Maisha T. Winn write about language as a valuable tool, resource, and asset. The authors share their experiences as classroom teachers and educators creating humanizing and transformative classrooms where students are valued, appreciated, and respected. Key to this “language work” is having the right mindset and shifting away from deficit language. The authors refuse to label students but instead redefine notions of citizenship and pursue epistemic justice. They see language as a way of cultivating bright and joyful futures.