

## Connecting Restorative School Practices to Brain Research and Bullying Prevention

Presented at the  
International Institute of Restorative Practices 15<sup>th</sup> World Conference

By  
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Research presented at the conference of the Association for Psychological Science in 2010 found that today's college students (n=14,000) are far less empathic than their counterparts 30 years ago with the sharpest drop in empathy occurring in the last nine years.

Konrath, S., O'Brien, E., Hsing, C., Changes in dispositional empathy in American college students over time: A meta-analysis. *Pers Soc Psychol Rev*. 2011 May;15(2):180-98. Epub 2010 Aug 5

## What is the Problem?

### A lack of **Connectedness**...

- close connections to other people
- deep connections to moral and spiritual meaning

...is a pervasive problem for today's youth.

**Hardwired to Connect** - <http://www.americanvalues.org/html/hardwired.html>

The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities

**Leading theories of aggression contend that negative feelings resulting from peer conflict are especially likely to result in retaliation when they are accompanied by the belief that one is unlikely to be re-included (Williams, 2009).**

From : Adolescents' Implicit Theories Predict Desire for Vengeance After Remembered and Hypothetical Peer Conflicts: Correlational and Experimental Evidence 2010

David S. Yeager -Stanford University

Kali H. Trzesniewski -University of California, Davis

Kirsi Tirri and Petri Nokelainen- University of Helsinki

Carol S. Dweck- Stanford University

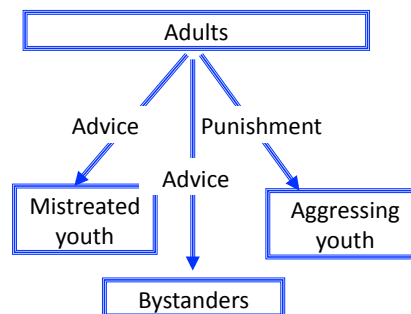
## The history of bullying prevention

Version 1: brief interventions by adults aimed at changing the behavior of individuals. Assumption: adults know which youth actions will stop bullying

- V 1.1 "Stop tattling." "Only tell me if there's blood."
- V 1.2 "If you have high self esteem, no one will mistreat you, and you won't mistreat others."
- V 1.3 "Don't act like a victim." "Stand tall and make eye contact." "Pretend it doesn't bother you." "Tell them to stop." "Just walk away."
- V 1.4 "Bullying is mean!" No-bully zone.
- V 1.5 "You're suspended!" Zero tolerance methods
- V. 1.6 "Say you're sorry." "Now say it's OK."
- V. 1.7 (to bystanders) "Confront bullying behavior."

Slide by Stan Davis [www.stopbullyingnow.com](http://www.stopbullyingnow.com), used with permission

## Bullying prevention V 1.1- 1.7



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**Brief history of bullying prevention**

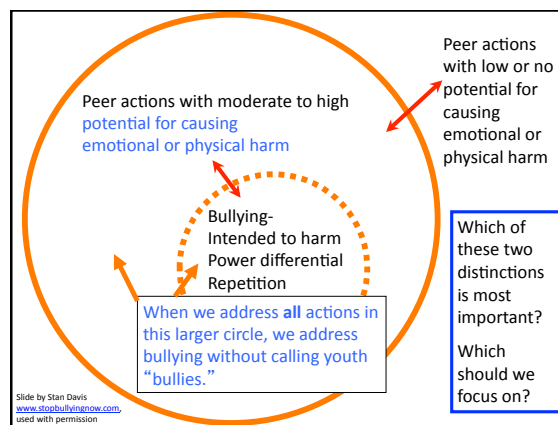
Version 2: Long term data-driven systemic interventions which work to change school climate and peer norms. Assumptions: What people in a school **do** influences outcomes.

- V 2.1 Adult-directed systemic interventions
- V 2.2 Integrate social justice initiatives into 2.1 (Greene)
- V 2.3 Integrate restorative practice into 2.1 (Saufier, Riese,...)
- V 2.4 Integrate peer mentoring into 2.1 (Koebecke,...)

V 2.5 Collaborative **inquiry-based** data-driven systemic interventions in which **youth define** peer behaviors of concern, helpful interventions by targets, adults, and peer allies, and obstacles to success.

Adult roles are ongoing: ask good questions, contribute knowledge of prevention science, follow through on disciplinary approaches using youth input, build connections with all, work **with** young people to create positive climate and peer norms school-wide .

Slide by Stan Davis [www.stopbullyingnow.com](http://www.stopbullyingnow.com), used with permission



**Where do we go now?**

**A Restorative Approach** to school. The Restorative approach is a philosophy or guiding principle (not a program or specific activity) that sees *relationships as central to learning, growth and a healthy school climate for students and adults.*

**Why the Restorative Approach?**

- School-to-Prison Pipeline  
("Test, Punish, & Push Out: How Zero-Tolerance and High-Stakes Testing Funnel Youth into the School-to-Prison Pipeline," Advancement Project, March 2010.)
- The Link between "School Connectedness" and Student Academic Success  
( [www.jhsph.edu/wingspread](http://www.jhsph.edu/wingspread) )
- Brain & School Climate Research  
(Ellen J. Langer Ph.D, Daniel Siegel, M.D. and the DANA Foundation)

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**Bullying behavior is about the culture of your school and community.**

"While eliminating violent acts is imperative, reducing the concept of a hostile school environment to the acts of individual (troubled) students who can be rehabilitated merely contains and manages the violence, rather than addressing its causes. *When the absence of reported bullying functions as the indicator of a safe or inclusive school for targeted students and families, we fail to account for the social processes at work in sustaining the patterns of this aggression.*"

Elizabeth Payne –Huffington Post – Blog 6/12/12

"Shifting the definition of "the problem" in this way demands a different framing of peer-to-peer aggression than that which underlies the dominant bullying discourse. *It requires recognition of how patterns of targeting serve the purpose of enforcing strict cultural expectations around gender, race, ses, and sexuality -- and how these cultural expectations are being taught and reinforced by the schools themselves.* Further, this shift calls for an examination of how aggression functions in youths' pursuit of social status in elementary, middle and high school."

Elizabeth Payne –Huffington Post – Blog 6/12/12

*Culture is the result of messages that are received about what is really valued. People align their behavior to these messages in order to fit in. Changing culture requires a systematic and planned change to these messages, whose sources are behavior, symbols and systems.*

Taylor C (2004) 'The Power of Culture: Turning the Soft Stuff into Business Advantage' in Barker, C & Coy, R (eds) The Power of Culture: Driving Today's Organisation. McGraw Hill, Australia. p.3

**The Brain is an Anticipation Machine**

- The brain automatically evaluates every situation for **safety first**.
- If anything in the environment poses a "threat" the brain will not be able to focus fully on anything **else until the threat is resolved**.
- School climate is the **affective resonance** of your school.

**Impact of Social Environments on the Brain**

|                           |   |  |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| High<br>Boundaries/Limits | <p><b>Doing To Authoritarian Punitive Stigmatizing</b></p> <p>Hyper-vigilance for threat<br/>Memory and executive functions hampered<br/><b>BRAIN state: Reactive Defensive</b></p> | <p><b>Doing With Authoritative Connected Trusting</b></p> <p>Builds attunement, connections, accountability, cause and effect thinking, reflective, pro-social<br/><b>BRAIN state: Relaxed Alertness</b></p> |
|                           | <p><b>Doing Nothing Uninvolved Ignoring Unresponsive</b></p> <p>Distress<br/>Negative impact on attention, memory, emotions and behavior<br/><b>BRAIN state: Hypervigilance</b></p> | <p><b>Doing For Permissive Excusing Reasoning</b></p> <p>Connects negative behaviors with positive feelings<br/>Reinforcing negative behaviors<br/><b>Brain state: Passive Enabled</b></p>                   |
| Low                       | Low   | High   |

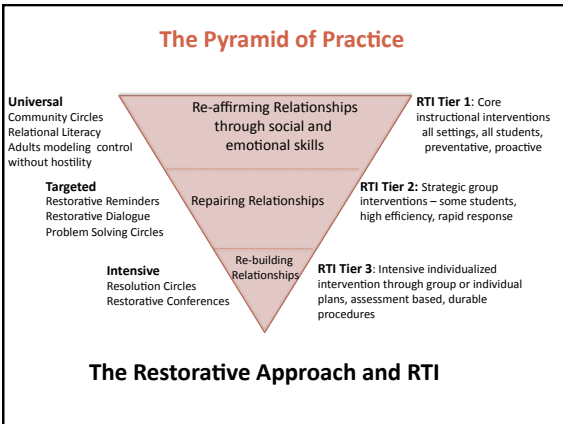
© Chuck Sauffer 2012 Chart is modified from Diana Baumrind's parenting research

**Cultural Change**

- the introduction of restorative practice challenges deeply held beliefs (mindsets) around notions of discipline and authority
- Most of us grew up with tradition of punitive discipline and have practiced our teaching and behavior management in ways which reflect these beliefs, despite holding values about people and relationships which are often in conflict with these practices
- Restorative practices focus our attention on the quality of relationships between **all** members of the school community
- This challenging of mindsets is where true culture change begins.

**Some Cultural Cues**  
(not an exhaustive list)

- how management speak to staff
- how staff speak about the management in their absence
- how management and staff speak about students and parents
- what the patterns of communication are like in staff meetings and what is said immediately after a meeting
- how criticism and disagreement are handled
- how the school invites, promotes and supports initiatives and individual vision
- how the school responds to identified needs among students or staff



**The Restorative Approach is about  
the context of your school or classroom.**

**Restorative practices create a relational context that will support and improve the implementation of any other program be it academic, or socially oriented.**

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Current research on social psychological interventions explains the power of this type of approach as creating an environment in which positive recursive processes are established **that support a change in behavioral trajectory rather than just changing a specific behavior....** These interactions become **naturally occurring recursive processes** in daily life at school. (See, for example, "Social Psychological Interventions in Education: They're not Magic" <http://rer.sagepub.com/content/81/2/267.>)

**3 Reasons Change Initiatives Fail**

1. Leaders announce the change and think that's enough.
2. People's concerns are not heard.
3. Those expected to change are not included in the change process.

**LACK of FAIR PROCESS**

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**The Challenge**

**Develop a roll-out strategy that will capitalize on the strengths of believers and minimize the resistance of others.**

**The Challenge of Culture Change: Embedding Restorative Practice in Schools.**

**Peta Blood and Margaret Thorsborne**

Paper presented at the Sixth International Conference on Conferencing, Circles and other Restorative Practices: "Building a Global Alliance for Restorative Practices and Family Empowerment". Sydney, Australia, March 3-5, 2005.

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**Restorative School Practices of Maine  
Wordpress Site**

**Handouts  
Information  
Articles**

<http://rspm.rjpmidcoast.org>