

**Restorative Justice as a Window into Relationships:
Student Experiences of Social Control and Social Engagement in
Scotland and Canada**

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Abstract

The practice and popularity of restorative justice (RJ) in education has been growing in recent years. There is, however, no universal understanding of RJ and its objectives. RJ can be understood in dramatically different ways by those implementing it: as an approach that challenges taken-for-granted structures and systems of discipline and control in schools; or as simply another tool that emphasizes compliance and punishment. Little research has been conducted that makes these differences explicit, and what the impact these different understandings of RJ might have on students. This multi-site case study examined how RJ was applied, how it was understood and what its intended objectives were in two schools, set in different contexts – Scotland and Canada. Although data was collected from teachers and principals to understand the context, my primary focus was on the students, those whom RJ was most intended to affect. Through questionnaires, observations, learning circles and engaging students as co-researchers, this study situates the student experience of RJ within particular school, regional and national contexts. The study finds that RJ in schools is a window into what is most fundamental to students: relationships. Viewing relationships through the window of RJ reveals both their centrality to students and their character of being of social control or social engagement. The study argues that RJ, by itself, does not guarantee certain qualities of relationship, but it does allow us to examine those qualities and ask questions of how school relationships are used to engage and/or control.

Dedication

For Oscar

Who made completing this study more difficult
and much, much more meaningful.

I love you.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Restorative justice is an idea whose time may have finally arrived (Hopkins, 2004; McCluskey, 2011). Although the concept has ancient roots and the term has existed since the 1970s, only recently has it gained general public recognition (Warner Roberts, 2004; Wheeldon, 2009; Woolford, 2009). For example, in 2006, the United Nations released a restorative justice handbook “in the context of an emerging international normative framework” (United Nations, 2006, p. 2). As a proxy for popular interest, the Oprah Winfrey Network launched *Confronting* in 2011, a show documenting restorative victim-offender mediation processes. In 2015, restorative justice was in the headlines in Canada, as Dalhousie University’s administration chose to enter into a restorative justice process to address a sexual harassment case in their dentistry program. These are all signs that restorative justice has gone mainstream.

This recent public attention, however, has generated unease among some restorative justice (RJ) advocates. Many advocates understand RJ to be a countercultural approach, radically different than mainstream ways of approaching such issues as crime and misbehaviour (Sullivan & Tifft, 2001; Zehr & Toews, 2004). These advocates claim that RJ, in its ideal, is a transforming justice and, as such, can be used in a variety of circumstances to ask difficult questions of how our societies are structured (Bergen, 2011; Elliott, 2011; Lockhart & Zammit, 2005; Woolford, 2009). As RJ is embraced by mainstream society, these advocates wonder if what is embraced is the same version of RJ as they support and understand. Mainstream attention raises the question, asked by advocates since the birth of RJ as a social movement, what do the majority of people involved in RJ (practitioners, state agencies, stakeholders, community members, etc.) actually understand RJ to be? And, what do they see as its broader goals?

RJ is a multi-layered concept, making it difficult to define in any uniform manner (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007; Woolford, 2009) and, thus, difficult to answer the question as to what most restorative practitioners, advocates and academics understand RJ to be. Several scholars, however, have attempted to categorize conceptualizations of RJ. Woolford and Ratner (2003) suggested two broad categories to describe different understandings of RJ and its goals. They use the name *communitarian* for organizations that view RJ as a vehicle to foster transformative community change and critically explore the broad context of power in which offences occur; and the term *governmentalist* for those that view RJ as a tool to assist and support the existing system uncritically. Communitarians would consider RJ to be a countercultural approach; governmentals would have no issue with RJ as part of the mainstream. Similar to Woolford and Ratner, Braithwaite (2002) distinguishes between *social justice* and *administrative* RJ practitioners. Although these scholars may set up dichotomies to illustrate the “ideal-typical characterizations of the organizations that operate within the boundaries of this movement” (Woolford & Ratner, 2003, p. 181), most acknowledge that understandings of RJ exist on a continuum between the two extremes.

In the school context, McCluskey et al. (2008a) discuss examples from a Scottish pilot project of how RJ can be understood in dramatically different ways by those implementing it. In some pilot project schools, staff understood RJ to challenge taken-for-granted structures and systems of discipline and control in schools; in these schools, the head teachers advocated for abandoning punishment completely and focused on creating and sustaining positive relationships. In other schools, staff members viewed RJ as simply another tool in the toolbox along with disciplinary practices that emphasized compliance and punishment; in these schools, obedience was sought through both RJ and other measures. As McCluskey et al. (2008a) show, RJ can be

used either to disrupt the status quo and transform a school's ethos or to maintain the status quo, reinforcing compliance and obedience.

The way people using RJ understand (or choose to understand) the goals of RJ has profound effects on whether RJ is used to affirm or transform institutions, the people in them, and societies. Woolford (2009) refers to these understandings, goals and the context in which they operate, as the *politics* of RJ. Woolford (2009) sees RJ used either as an *object* of politics, employed by political actors to maintain the status quo, or as a *project* of politics, a social movement working for social and political change.

With this study, I entered into an exploration of the politics in and through which RJ operates in education, specifically by attending to the student experience in schools. This multi-site case study examined the understandings and goals that drive the use of RJ in two schools, set in different contexts – in Scotland and in Canada. Although I collected data from teachers and principals in order to understand the broad context, my primary focus was on the people in schools whom RJ was most intended to affect: the students. This case study did not measure or compare the sites; rather, I conducted an inquiry of understanding, allowing lessons that emerged in one context to speak to findings in the other (Setati & Barwell, 2006; Vaandering, 2009).

Scotland and Canada were chosen due to their different experiences with RJ. RJ has deep roots in Canada, tied to both the traditions of Canada's First Nations people and to early efforts within the mainstream criminal justice system (Eagle, 2011; Elliot, 2011; Vaandering, 2009). In Canada, RJ has been applied in schools for over 20 years (Drewery & Winslade, 2003; Morrison, 2007b). Scotland, in contrast, introduced its first school-based RJ pilot project in 2004 (Hendry, 2009; McCluskey et al., 2008b). Scottish practitioners drew on the experience of other countries to gather information, using previously developed ideas to build their own specific Scottish

model (Hendry, 2009). The Canadian and Scottish schools in this study were selected for similarities in age of students and the length of time the schools had been involved with RJ.

Defining the Research Questions

As the popularity of RJ in schools increases, so, too, does the research – gradually. Most studies are focused on the effectiveness of RJ (Arnott, 2007; Chmelynski, 2005; Lewis, 2009; Porter, 2007) and on issues of implementation and sustainability (Cavanagh, 2010; Karp & Breslin, 2001; Morrison, 2007a; Reimer, 2009; Riestenberg, 2003; Wearmouth, McKinney & Glynn, 2007). There are a handful of studies that ask philosophical questions about tensions between RJ and norms of schooling (McCluskey et al., 2008a; Vaandering, 2009). My research takes these questions further by specifically exploring the distinct understandings of RJ that underlie its use in schools and by placing these understandings within Woolford's (2009) framework of the politics of RJ.

To explore the understandings and goals that drive the use of RJ in schools, I turned to the students, the people in schools RJ is most often intended to affect. Student voice, although touted as key to the practice of RJ, has been missing from much of the research, particularly in North America. Where qualitative studies of RJ in North American schools exist, they tend to focus on the adult experience (Karp & Breslin, 2001; Reimer, 2009; Vaandering, 2009). This study prioritizes the student experience, asking students to offer their expertise as to the effect RJ has on their schools. Drawing on the insights of the research on *student voice*, my methodological approach was premised on the convictions as articulated by Cook-Sather (2006): “that young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching and schooling; that their insights warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults; and, that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education” (p. 359). Viewing students as experts of their own

realities and providing opportunities for them to engage in an inquiry into their realities, builds our body of knowledge and enriches the experience of those students who participated in the study. As a product, the research community gains knowledge in order to understand the complexities of school; as a process, the students involved have their voices and experiences validated. In this study, student co-researchers were invaluable to understanding the actual impact of RJ on students – rather than the one intended by adults.

Layering student voices and perspectives into the broader discussion produces a rich understanding of RJ and its goals. To examine RJ from the student perspective, my research was guided by three central questions: How do students in Scotland and Canada perceive RJ in schools? What do students' perspectives reveal about the politics of RJ in Scottish and Canadian schools? How are discourses of transformation and discourses of affirmation evident in Scottish and Canadian school contexts?

I asked these questions in two separate case studies – one in Scotland and one in Canada. RJ in these countries has emerged from differing contexts and differing discourses. By exploring the experience of students in Scotland and Canada, I highlighted the role that context plays in the student experience of RJ. According to Adamson (2012), educational researchers who carry out studies of two or more cultures, although sometimes hesitating – as I do – to label themselves comparativists, use comparative methods to “bring their findings into sharper relief” (p. 647). This study of the experience of Scottish and Canadian students brings into sharp relief both common themes (e.g., students in both locales felt more respected by adults than by other students) and themes unique to each context (e.g., students in Canada felt their opinions made a difference in the school whereas pupils in Scotland were unclear as to whether their opinions mattered; the discrepancy highlighted the character and quality of teacher-student relationships).

The research questions are answered with layers and complexity that would otherwise be absent if looking only at one context.

Autobiographical Statement

I come to this research as an RJ practitioner and advocate. I first received training in the field in 1999 in Ontario as a volunteer with a victim-offender mediation centre. Subsequently, I worked and studied in the United States for six years in the fields of conflict transformation and RJ. My RJ work included facilitating meetings between juvenile offenders and their victims, working with victims and perpetrators of crimes of severe violence, assisting churches to think through restorative responses to harm, helping to facilitate restorative circles in schools to deal with incidents of harm and, as part of a team, training volunteer facilitators in RJ philosophy and process. More recently I volunteered with several Ottawa RJ organizations: facilitating victim-offender meetings; supporting a long-term sex offender in living safely within the community; and as part of the Ottawa-area Restorative Justice Network, a group that seeks to expand RJ services and public awareness.

As a researcher, my Master's dissertation focused on educational leadership, exploring how teachers and administrators think, feel about and actually employ RJ (Reimer, 2009). As a teacher educator, I designed a course currently offered to teacher candidates at the University of Ottawa about living out a restorative philosophy in the classroom. In this course, I seek to encourage teacher candidates to ask difficult questions of the structure of schools (Bargen, 2011; Elliott, 2011; Lockhart & Zammit, 2005; Sullivan & Tifft, 2001) and to use RJ to transform the school ethos rather than as a kinder, gentler way to punish (Enns & Myers, 2011; McCluskey et al., 2008a). As is true for all researchers, I do not approach my research from a neutral position.

I entered into this research not to substantiate my own beliefs, but to understand as fully as possible how students experience RJ and what their experience reveals about the state of RJ in schools. I was not interested in confirming my belief that RJ was the panacea that would transform conflict, people, schools and societal conditions; I wanted to know if transformation was indeed the experience – or part of the experience – of students. I embarked on the study with a curiosity born of my own personal commitment to a transformative vision of RJ. This curiosity assisted me in being a critical researcher, asking questions of people, contexts and discourses so as to fully understand the politics of RJ in the schools studied in Scotland and Canada. Indeed, this curiosity led me to answers I never expected, answers that deeply impact my own experience of RJ.

Definitions

Defining restorative justice. RJ is a diverse, multi-layered concept that does not easily lend itself to a universal definition (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007; Woolford, 2009). Broadly, RJ views harm not primarily as a violation of rules or laws, but as a violation of people and relationships (Zehr, 2002). The centrality of relationships makes RJ relevant not only to the justice system, but to most social units, organizations or institutions – from neighbourhoods and families to places of worship and schools.

There is nothing radically new about RJ. Elliot (2011) lists among its many roots: alternative dispute resolution, Aboriginal teachings and circle processes, faith-based approaches, victimology, therapeutic discourses, peacemaking criminology, and penal abolitionism. While its exact origins may be disputed (Daly, 2002), and the term has only been articulated in Western society since the early 1970s, there is no doubt that RJ's inherent values resonate with many

traditions and communities (Sawatsky, 2001). People intimately understand that harm is a violation of people and relationships, not only laws.

The Western practice of RJ emerged from discontent with the perceived inflexibility and impersonal nature of the retributive model of state justice. Zehr (1990) depicts the modern retributive justice system as one where the state is viewed as the victim and actual victims are denied any participatory role. Former Ottawa police chief and current Canadian Senator, Vernon White, concurred with Zehr, characterizing justice in Canada as a “system that is increasingly institutionalized, bureaucratized and less personal than it was previously” (White, 1998, p. 4). In contrast, Morrison (2007a) writes that the essence of RJ is “creating safe spaces for dialogue through building communities of care, where storytelling and listening are valued and emotional understanding is developed, so individuals are enriched with the capacity, and given the opportunity, to take responsibility for harm done, and to repair it” (p. 6).

Defining restorative justice in schools. While RJ has been used broadly within and as an alternative to the criminal justice system, its popularity and practice in education is relatively recent worldwide (Bargen, 2010; Drewery, 2004; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Nevertheless, it appears to be rising in popularity in schools in North America and around the world (Lewis, 2009; McCluskey et al., 2008b; Morrison, 2007b; Solinas, 2007; Wachtel, 2009; Wearmouth et al., 2007). This expansion has a number of motives, unique to the school involved: a desire to lower suspension and expulsion rates (Vaandering, 2009); a realization that punitive discipline is ineffective for long-term change (Morrison, 2007a; Stinchomb, Bazemore & Riestenberg, 2006); and a call to find substantive solutions for student disengagement, discipline issues, bullying, conflict and violence (Bargen, 2010; McCluskey et al., 2008b; Morrison, 2007a; Smith, 2006).

Built upon the same principles and practices as in the criminal justice setting, RJ in schools diverges from traditional discipline in which punishment is meted out by an authority above when a rule is broken. Instead, RJ seeks to empower the school community to collectively create safe and just schools. How schools approach the breaking of rules – whether as offences unto themselves or as an indication of a community or individual issue to be addressed – suggests where schools fall on a punitive to restorative continuum (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Hendry, 2009; Raby, 2012). Restorative schools recognize the needs and purposes behind rule-breaking behaviour and seek solutions to address those needs, as well as to make school safe for all its members.

In North America, in particular, RJ draws upon the strength of a number of similar movements such as conflict resolution education, character education, moral education and emotional literacy (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Morrison, 2007b; Schweigert, 1999). RJ marries the skills of conflict resolution education with the relational focus of the other movements. Amstutz & Mullet (2005) write, “The first focuses on finding a solution that is fair and acceptable to all parties; restorative discipline adds the additional layer of working on the relationship that was harmed or deterred” (p. 20).

Hendry (2009) agrees, stating that RJ in schools is a philosophical approach that is fundamentally about building, maintaining and repairing relationships. This relational approach translates into a view of the classroom or school as a socially responsible community in which individuals are seen as connected and accountable to one another (Hopkins, 2011). RJ plays out in a continuum of practices, ranging from classroom meetings to peer mediation to multi-party restorative conferences. While descriptions of such a continuum vary, most agree that the practices range from proactive measures on one side to dealing with serious incidents of harm on

the other (Morrison, 2007b). Common to all practices is an understanding that communication and dialogue are essential for dealing with issues and for building and maintaining relationships (Hendry, 2009; Hopkins, 2011). As mentioned earlier, however, the varied understandings of the philosophy and practices result in approaches that look and feel quite different from one school to another.

A Question of Language

Intentional choices have been made in this dissertation in regards to language. The first involves my choice to use the term, *RJ*, throughout most of the dissertation. Some who apply restorative philosophy in schools tend to replace the term *justice* with restorative *approaches*, restorative *practices*, restorative *discipline* or restorative *schools* to distance it from its criminal justice connotations (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Morrison, 2007b; Vaandering, 2011). Indeed, the Scottish school in this study consciously chose to use the term *restorative approaches* or *RA* to encompass their broad understanding of the approach. The Alberta school, however, used a mixture of terms – from *RJ* to *RA* to simply *restorative*. I have chosen to use the term *RJ* as the default term in this dissertation. I do this for two reasons: first, to eliminate any confusion that excessive switching between various terms might produce; second, and more fundamentally, it aligns with Vaandering's (2011) argument that the use of *restorative* paired with *justice* is significant, and serves as a "compass needle guiding proponents in the field to their desired destinations" (p. 308) in a way that *practice* or *approach* cannot. Vaandering explores in depth the two concepts (*restorative* and *justice*) and concludes that when justice is understood as "honoring the worth of the other through relationship" (p. 324) then the pairing of the terms accurately describes restorative process, outcomes and philosophy. Thus, using the term *RJ* is not a narrowing of restorative ideas to the criminal justice setting, but rather an expansion of what

constitutes justice in all settings. That said, in an attempt to honour the intentions of the Scottish school and to provide an accurate description of the Scottish setting, I use the term *RA* to set the context of the Scottish region and school and in the Scottish findings chapter.

In line with my use of *RA* for the Scottish school, the other language choice is necessitated by the multi-site case study being set in two different countries – Scotland and Canada – in which differing words are used to describe the same concept. (See Appendix A for a glossary of Scottish terms). For example, relevant for this study, *pupils* in Scotland are referred to as *students* in Canada; *principals* in Canada are referred to as *head teachers* in Scotland. I have chosen to use the term most common to the country to which I am referring. My choice to switch between terms is driven by a desire to provide the reader with an authentic view of the context in which the cases are set, staying true to the language the reader would hear when immersed in the setting. When writing about both cases or more generally, however, I default to the term most common to Canada.

The Structure of the Thesis

This research study is organized into nine chapters. The introductory chapter presents the research question and relevant definitions and situates me as the researcher. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on restorative justice, in particular the divergent goals underpinning differing understandings of RJ. This chapter also explains Woolford's (2009) conceptual framework of the politics of RJ, with which I approach my research. Chapter 3 details the methodological approach I take with this multi-site case study, from design through to analysis. Chapters 4 and 5, in line with case study methodology, describe in detail the contexts of the cases, Scotland and Alberta, respectively. Chapters 6 and 7, again parsed by country, provide an analysis of the themes identified in each case. Chapter 8 brings the cases together in a discussion

of the lessons learned when the cases are held side by side. Chapter 9, the conclusion, summarizes the study, provides an interpretation of the findings, identifies limitations and makes recommendations for further research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

When discussing the potential of RJ, one concept that often emerges is *transformation* – transformation of conflict or harm, of people, of relationships, and of societal conditions (Elliott, 2011; Lockhart & Zammit, 2005; Sullivan & Tifft, 2001; Woolford, 2009; Woolford & Ratner, 2003; Zehr & Toews, 2004). In identifying this transformative understanding of RJ as his preference, Woolford (2009) describes RJ as creating conditions for personal and social change. He writes that RJ must be about “fostering opportunities for individuals and collectives to evaluate their lives and their worlds, and to initiate attempts to bring change into these arenas: to address injustice and to improve the lives of the many” (Woolford, 2009, p. 17).

Understanding RJ as transformative resonates with many RJ advocates. More than just a technique to be used for isolated incidents, many advocates view RJ as a way of life or a worldview (Bargen, 2011; Eagle, 2011; Hendry, 2009; Umbreit & Armour, 2010; Zehr, 2010), situating RJ as a radical paradigm shift, with the potential to address societal injustices and power imbalances (Llewellyn, 2011a; Lyons, 2011; Sullivan & Tifft, 2001; Zehr, 1990). Elliot (2011) succinctly sums up the core of this encompassing, transformative understanding of RJ: “In philosophy and practice, restorative justice asks what is necessary to live collectively and as our ‘best selves’” (p. 5).

RJ, however, is a contested concept and a realm of diverse beliefs (Aertsen, Parmentier, Vanfraechem, Walgrave & Zinsstag, 2013; Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007; MacAllister, 2013; Woolford, 2009). The transformative view introduced in the preceding paragraphs is not the only way to understand RJ. Woolford (2009), calling upon Nancy Fraser’s (1997, 2000) theory of justice, suggests all responses to injustice can be understood as either affirmative or transformative. Affirmative responses, according to Woolford (2009), usually deal with

individual behaviour without challenging the systemic roots of injustice. An affirmative understanding of RJ focuses on addressing isolated incidents of harm and on challenging individual behaviour, rather than societal injustices. In schools, for example, an affirmative expression of RJ might bring together two disruptive students, hoping through dialogue to change their behaviour so as to better fit with the norms of the classroom. Affirmative RJ, in this example, would not ask questions about whether the classroom norms are equitable or unfairly target students of colour or students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds; affirmative RJ would not engage in processes in which the hierarchy of school relationships are examined as a factor in the teacher deeming the students to be disruptive. Affirmative RJ would only deal with the disruptive behaviour, hoping to change it – through dialogue rather than punishment – to bring order to the classroom. Scholars who advocate for an affirmative understanding of RJ (among them: Daly, 2000; Duff, 2003; London, 2011; MacAllister, 2013; Tonry, 2011; Wheeldon, 2009) believe RJ to be a worthwhile approach that improves upon – rather than dismantles – existing systems.

This literature review explores these two different understandings of RJ – affirmative and transformative. It is important to state that these understandings exist on a continuum. Although the bulk of their writings may situate specific scholars as advocating for either affirmative or transformative RJ, their individual views and writings are often complex and nuanced, with some scholars holding to ideas that cross over into the opposite side of the continuum. I do not wish to simplify these ideas or those who support them. However, to clearly delineate between affirmative and transformative RJ, I present the two ends of the continuum.

Also important to clarify is my decision to cite scholars writing about RJ within the criminal justice system alongside those writing about RJ within the school system. As was

highlighted in the introduction, although RJ in the school system has its own unique body of literature that has evolved separately from the criminal justice body of literature, the theoretical roots of RJ are the same in both domains. I believe a literature review comparing affirmative and transformative RJ focused solely on educational literature would lack both the historical and conceptual depth contained in a review that combines the two. I specify in which domain scholars are working when that knowledge is crucial to the argument; at other times, when the argument is more general, I cite criminal justice and educational scholars side by side.

This chapter begins with an introduction to the two realms of understanding – affirmative RJ and transformative RJ. Following the presentation of the affirmative-transformative continuum, I identify the purposes that underpin the two understandings. I argue that affirmative RJ is underpinned by a desire for social control; transformative RJ is underpinned by a desire for social engagement. I then break down the concepts of social control and social engagement into varied components, so as to better relate the concepts to my own research into student perspectives of RJ. The affirmative-transformative continuum, and the purposes that underpin it, are part of the conceptual framework with which I have organized this study. I re-visit the continuum throughout the study, seeking its assistance in making my data meaningful. The chapter ends with an overview of Woolford's (2009) understanding of the politics of RJ, the conceptual framework that I marry with the affirmative-transformative continuum in order to assess how RJ is constructed within schools in affirmative ways, emphasizing social control, as well as in transformative ways, encouraging social engagement.

Restorative Justice as Affirmative

Woolford (2009), a transformative RJ advocate, insists, "anything less than a transformative approach to injustice tends to only scratch the surface of the problem, ignoring its

deeper cultural, structural, and political roots” (p. 153). Those who advocate for an affirmative understanding of RJ, however, claim that they are not ignoring these deeper roots, but are rather being pragmatic. By focusing on individual behaviour, these scholars assert that the likelihood is increased that institutions will actually adopt RJ (London, 2011; MacAllister, 2013; Wheeldon, 2009). Institutions are unlikely to adopt RJ if it is presented as boundless, or a “way of life” (Llewellyn, 2011b). Llewellyn (2011b), although embracing many aspects of transformative RJ, advocates for limiting RJ’s scope to issues of wrongdoing, rather than a more open-ended approach. MacAllister (2013), writing about the role of RJ in schools, concurs, suggesting that RJ is more relevant if proponents restrict themselves to modest, specific claims about RJ’s educational potential.

RJ is seen to be more relevant to institutions if presented with a narrow scope; some scholars also believe RJ is often only allowed to operate within institutions – criminal justice or schools – if it does not challenge core elements of the system (Elliot, 2011). Vaandering (2009), in her research into the implementation of RJ in two Ontario elementary schools, observed the tendency of institutions to avoid challenge, finding that schools were open to dialogue until the analysis was turned on their own structures. In her research into conflict resolution initiatives in schools, Bickmore (1998) found that initiatives such as peer mediation were limited in scope to reducing student conflict. These initiatives were not given the latitude to address policies and practices that exacerbated conflict; such initiatives did not challenge broader patterns of discipline and control; neither did they address adult conflict (Bickmore, 1998). Vaandering and Bickmore are transformative RJ advocates using their research to critique what they see as only partial implementation of such initiatives; seen through an affirmative lens, however, their studies

reveal that a focus on individual student behaviour allows RJ and conflict resolution initiatives to be partially accepted by schools, a better outcome than outright rejection.

If full acceptance of RJ by institutions and society is the goal, then Wheeldon (2009) argues for increased engagement between the criminal justice system and RJ, recommending that RJ proponents cooperate more with the state and find ways to fit into existing criminology approaches rather than advocating for a radically different approach. London (2011) believes that transformative RJ advocates have created false dilemmas by insisting on revolution over reform, rejecting all useful aspects of the old system and uncritically accepting all features of the new paradigm. He insists that viewing RJ as a radical alternative will relegate RJ to the margins (London, 2011). Since mainstream society values punitive measures for wrongdoing, for example, some RJ scholars believe that incorporating punishment into RJ processes might make RJ more generally palatable (Daly, 2000; London, 2011).

In schools, research attests to how increased engagement between RJ and conventional systems can be achieved. Most research in schools is conducted from an affirmative RJ stance, focusing on the effectiveness of RJ to attend to individual misbehaviour (McCluskey, 2013). Success of RJ initiatives is often measured by reduced expulsion rates or fewer visits to the principal's office (Arnott, 2007; Chmelynski, 2005; Lewis, 2009; Porter, 2007; Wachtel, 2012). For the most part, measuring affirmative outcomes numerically has cast RJ in a favourable light. One high school in Pennsylvania that implemented an RJ program in 1998 found that disciplinary referrals to the school office fell from 1752 in 1999 to 815 in 2003 (Chmelynski, 2005). Corroborating this finding, after introducing RJ in 2005, a middle school in Michigan reported a 15 per cent drop in suspensions at the same time that suspensions in other schools in the same district were rising (Porter, 2007). Over five years of RJ implementation, a school in Baltimore

found an overall decrease of 26 per cent in the number of detentions, coinciding with a 25 per cent increase in enrollment (Wachtel, 2012). Moving outside the United States, the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, in an evaluation of school-wide restorative practices across 26 schools, found that restorative conferences usually led to successful resolutions and that teachers perceived an improvement in student behaviour compared to non-restorative schools (Youth Justice Board, 2004).

The few studies conducted in Canadian schools, focusing also on indicators of affirmative RJ, reveal similar findings about the effectiveness of RJ. A year after the Waterloo Region District School Board in Ontario implemented RJ, circles/conferences were used instead of suspensions to deal with 115 students, and the conferences assisted eight students in avoiding full expulsion (Arnott, 2007). Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board in Ontario has been implementing restorative practices in their schools since 2004. They reported that suspensions in secondary schools dropped from 8480 in 2005-2006 to 7821 in 2007-2008 (Lewis, 2009). Given these positive results – accomplished by working within the system and focusing on individual behaviour – affirmative RJ advocates suggest that it could be counterproductive and distracting for RJ to also attempt broader systemic transformation.

Affirmative RJ advocates often dilute the more transformative message of RJ in order for it to fit within various systems. Note that while many of the scholars listed in this section are transformative RJ scholars and generally advocate for transformative RJ, their research reveals how RJ, in practice, is often affirmative. In schools, for example, RJ is made more palatable when educators are encouraged to view it as one more tool to deal with behaviour issues along with other tools that emphasize compliance and punishment (Bargen, 2010; McCluskey et al., 2008a; McCluskey, 2013; Vaandering, 2009). Indeed, teachers are assured that RJ is simply

another way of thinking about what they are already doing, rather than an idea based on a radically different paradigm (Vaandering, 2009). Schools also tend to use RJ to deal with individual behaviour as separate from systemic issues. As McCluskey et al. (2008b) critique, “By focusing on the individual pathology of a wrongdoer and without questioning how a person comes to be identified as ‘having wronged’ or ‘being wronged’, restorative justice cannot fully respond to essential questions of power, class and gender” (p. 206). The critique suggests that issues such as classism, racism, or sexism might play a role in how individuals are identified and that affirmative RJ, by attending only to behaviour, ignores and potentially perpetuates these systemic issues.

Affirmative RJ advocates wonder, however, whether it is possible – and therefore productive – to even attempt to fully respond to those *essential questions*. Llewellyn (2011b) bridges the divide between transformative and affirmative scholars, suggesting that even if RJ cannot fully address such questions, RJ can open the conversation. Sullivan and Tifft (2001), transformative RJ advocates, counter that opening the conversation is not sufficient; it is irresponsible for RJ to deal with individual harmful acts without examining the unjust structures in which those acts occur, as well as our own complicity with those structures. These transformative-affirmative arguments are ongoing within the RJ field (Aertsen et al., 2013), whether in criminal justice, school or other settings. Enns and Myers (2011) summarize the arguments: “In the end, however, restorative justice advocates must determine whether (or to what degree) they are seeking to represent a transforming *alternative* to the system’s core philosophy of retribution, or merely a subsidiary *complement* that attempts to make the criminal justice system a little kinder and gentler where and when possible” (p. 24, emphasis in original). From an affirmative point of view, RJ as complement to the system is a worthwhile goal.

Restorative Justice as Transformative

From a transformative point of view, making the system kinder and gentler is not enough. What RJ actually requires – in philosophy and practice – is an examination of society in terms of taken-for-granted assumptions, power dynamics, and structural injustice. Some transformative RJ advocates suggest that if people are grounded in principles and values of transformative RJ, then they inevitably attend to issues of social injustice and unhealthy power dynamics (Bargen, 2011; Conrad & Unger, 2011; Elliot, 2011). Enns and Myers (2009) strongly support this claim, showing how holistic peacemaking – a broader framework into which transformative RJ fits – identifies both the particularities of the harmful act, as well as the influence of larger discourses or forces. They employ Camara's (1971) *spiral of violence* model which reveals how structural injustice is usually invisible, woven into the fabric of society and accepted as normal; what is visible is the rage that erupts from people who have been victim to invisible, structural violence. Similarly, Conrad and Unger (2011) draw upon Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) to tie interpersonal violence at school to the violence of schooling, a symbolic, structural, taken-for-granted violence. Although RJ allows for attention to both the specific and the structural wrongdoing (Llewellyn, 2011b), Enns and Myers (2009) claim that RJ often responds to the visible violence without acknowledging the structural violence. To be transformative, however, it is necessary to attend to both. Vaandering (2009) agrees, holding to a vision of not simply restoring a school community to its same taken-for-granted structures but “transforming it to what it could be – a place characterized by possibility, relationship, hope, and justice” (p. 39).

Radical change is difficult for both individuals and institutions. Social institutions shape and reinforce the norms by which we live and thus it is an immense task to even recognize our underlying assumptions, let alone challenge them. Worldviews are not easily dismissed so, as

Vaandering (2009) points out, RJ often gets shaped to serve the dominant worldview. In schools, for instance, there are inherent tensions between values that underpin RJ and those that underpin more common approaches based on behavioural theories (Hendry, 2009; McCluskey et al., 2008a; Morrison, 2007a; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Reimer, 2009) and even teachers who are committed to RJ often maintain or revert to prevailing authoritarian, punitive approaches (Thorsborne, 2013; Vaandering, 2009). In the justice setting, too, the norms used as the standard of comparison limit RJ to that which has been labeled *crime* by the system rather than a more encompassing view of injustice (Cunneen, 2012; Daly, 2002; Elliot, 2011; Hendry, 2009; Miller & Schacter, 2000). Inertia within systems and societies are barriers to the implementation of transformative RJ.

Some RJ advocates argue, however, that the transformative potential of RJ is hindered by more than inertia. It is also often not within the interest of the institution and the powers behind it to open itself to challenge (Illich, 1971/1983). As Elliot (2011) charges, “the needs of these institutions are viewed as more important than the needs of the people they were meant to serve” (p. 169). The transformative message of RJ is sometimes intentionally altered so as to minimize its potential and strengthen existing structures. Zehr warned in 2010: “Change efforts are often first ignored, then resisted, then likely to be co-opted. Indeed, there are ample signs of the latter already in the field” (p. viii). Woolford (2009) alerts us to the fact that RJ can be used to “create individual citizens who are non-combative and peaceable resolvers of conflict. Such individuals are obviously appealing to governments that would like to have a passive citizenry more apt to engage in talk than to protest and undertake acts of civil disobedience” (p. 86). Some RJ scholars have pointed out that governments tend to re-package old practices under the name of RJ, simply modifying RJ principles to fit a more retributive agenda (Daly, 2002; Pawlychka, 2012; Sullivan

& Tift, 2001) and to make harsher aspects of that agenda more palatable (Cunneen, 2012). Clearly not only are there differing opinions as to the focus of RJ (affirmative or transformative), but active resistance – at least to transformative RJ – as well.

Although the idea of transformation is celebrated by many RJ advocates, research is scarce. In schools, as mentioned, research tends to focus on the effectiveness of RJ (Arnott, 2007; Chmelynski, 2005; Lewis, 2009; Porter, 2007) and on identifying best practices for implementation (Cavanagh, 2010; Karp & Breslin, 2001; Morrison, 2007a; Riestenberg, 2003; Wearmouth et al., 2007). In my Master's thesis, I also explored implementation, how teachers and principals thought and felt about, and actually employed, RJ (Reimer, 2009). Despite personal commitment to the practice of RJ by teachers and principals, I concluded that necessary structures and cultural systems were not in place to sustain RJ. Inconsistent support from upper administration within the region and province hindered its implementation. Questions emerged for me about what understanding of RJ – transformative or affirmative – is actually encouraged when the support does exist. These questions prompted my doctoral research.

Some themes of transformation and affirmation do emerge within the research into implementation of RJ: schools need to first ask whether the values of RJ fit their school culture (Hendry, 2009; Wearmouth et al., 2007); principals, teachers and other staff members are socialized in a retributive culture and their reluctance (or inability) to abandon that culture could be a major obstacle for implementing RJ (Karp & Breslin, 2001; Thorsborne, 2013); tensions are evident between existing philosophies and discipline practices and the philosophy of RJ (McCluskey et al., 2008a; Riestenberg, 2003; Thorsborne, 2013). I know of only one study that specifically examines a transformative understanding of RJ in schools. In her doctoral research, Dorothy Vaandering (2009) explored the implementation and sustainability of RJ in two

Canadian schools and found that most participants understood RJ affirmatively, viewing RJ as a technique or strategy for managing conflict at a behavioral level. Vaandering's (2009) work focused mostly on the adults involved – teachers and principals – and what they were communicating through the use of RJ. I built on this work in my doctoral study, moving the primary focus to students. By understanding how students viewed RJ, a deeper assessment of the use and understanding – affirmative or transformative – of RJ in schools was explored.

As helpful as the affirmative-transformative RJ continuum is to my work, I found that it represented more of a starting than ending point for understanding the construction of RJ within schools. The continuum describes two distinct understandings of RJ and the reasons that some RJ scholars favour one over the other. My study was undertaken to understand not only what perspective is utilized in schools and thus experienced by students, but also what drives the use of that particular perspective. The continuum on its own does not clearly delineate the goals or purposes underpinning either understanding, nor does it indicate how a researcher might identify affirmative or transformative RJ in schools. For clarity, the next section delves into what I argue are the purposes underpinning affirmative and transformative RJ in schools – a desire for social control versus a desire for social engagement.

Social Control or Social Engagement

The divergent goals underpinning affirmative and transformative understandings of RJ in schools help to further distinguish the two perspectives. Morrison and Vaandering (2012) draw upon Elliott (2011), Morrison (2011) and Zehr (2005) to write that institutions that embrace RJ experience a paradigm change characterized “as a shift away from being a rule-based institution to a relationship-based institution, or from being an institution whose purpose is social control to being an institution that nurtures social engagement” (p. 145). I would argue that this difference

in purpose – social control or social engagement – also describes that which underpins affirmative RJ and transformative RJ, respectively.

Affirmative RJ as social control. In this section, four identified components of social control – *compliance, rules, behaviour and punishment*, and a *focus on the individual* – are explored and the connection between affirmative understandings of RJ and social control is clarified.

Compliance, order, management. School staff face both external and internal pressure to achieve a variety of often competing goals – academic, pedagogic, social and cultural. As McCluskey (2013) writes, it is hardly surprising that, in the face of such pressure, “school leaders and teachers may come to see compliant students as good students, a quiet class as a good class, and a good school as one where there is no conflict” (p. 135). Teachers rarely identify compliant students as an end goal of education. Yet, varied educational studies have shown that even caring teachers committed to inclusive, participatory ideals find that the reality and stress of the job (e.g., large class sizes, student disinterest, hierarchical schooling structure) lead them to resort to authoritarian, controlling measures (Cavanagh, 2011; Herr & Anderson, 2003; Porter, 1996; Raby, 2012; Vaandering, 2013). Usually undertaken with noble intentions, many educators view compliance and order as prerequisites for learning; this view opens the potential, however, for compliance and order to become ends in themselves (Thorsborne, 2013). The assertion that order is a prerequisite for learning, a cornerstone of most theories of classroom management, is linked to beliefs about how learning should look – quiet, disciplined, and predictable (Raby, 2012). Interrelated is the view that compliance and order are independent goods, teaching submission to authority and preparing students for hierarchy and power imbalances present in greater society (Raby, 2012).

Naturally, views of compliance as essential to learning and life do not occur within a vacuum. Staff members who take this view are both reflecting and affirming similar discourses within educational culture and society as a whole. In reference to the inclination in secondary schools to obedience-oriented discipline, Raby (2012) writes, “Dominant beliefs about teenagers as needing containment, concern with losing order, and fears regarding classroom safety may shape this institutional culture” (p. 83). Raby’s writing concurs with that of Foucault (1979) who identified similarities between schools and prisons, both founded as disciplinary bodies. Foucault’s (1991) idea of governmentality showed how individuals become constituted as objects of power as power is wielded over them through institutionalized practices. Some educational scholars see this wielding happening in schools where the purposes of control and compliance are embedded and difficult to change (Harber & Sakade, 2009; Kohn, 1996). Most scholars who conduct research in schools agree that an educational focus on control and compliance teaches students to obey authority; these scholars differ, however, on whether this is a positive or negative outcome (Cavanagh, 2011; Raby, 2012).

At first glance, authoritarian approaches such as those outlined above seem antithetical to RJ. Yet if order is indeed accepted as a prerequisite for learning, the allure of RJ as a technique to accomplish this order becomes apparent. Teachers are often told that RJ will “help them *manage* student behaviour and that working WITH students is for the purpose of regulation and social order, not relationship” (Vaandering, 2013, p. 322, emphasis in original). Through interviews with 14 Canadian educators, Vaandering (2013) found that adults appreciated RJ’s focus on student voice; if that student voice, however, did not comply with their expectations, teachers felt justified in ignoring students and enforcing their own ideas. This understanding of RJ – what I have identified as affirmative RJ – is critiqued by Vaandering (2013) as being narrowly focused

on behaviour and discipline and thus redirects attention to rules, blame and punishment, and away from relationships and social engagement.

Rules. As Vaandering (2013) points out, emphasis on compliance, order and management often leads to discussion about the role of rules in enforcing such order. A common societal view is that rules are necessary for people to co-exist successfully. Raby (2012) agrees with this, but also problematizes the usual view of rules as common sense; she points out that rules reflect deep beliefs about human nature and, in schools, are “grounded in assumptions about what is acceptable behaviour in the school as an institution of containment, hierarchy, education, and preparation for future roles” (p. 4). Drawing from her own study of three Ontario secondary schools, Raby (2012) identifies values and assumptions commonly underpinning school rules: acceptance of authority, particularly in preparation for work; construction of certain kinds of workers and citizens, those who are “obedient, punctual and restrained in dress, rather than innovative, independent, or defiant in the face of inequality”; and reflection and production of dominant culture morality (p. 27).

Nucci (2001) explored how children distinguish between moral, conventional and personal domains. Building on this work, Raby (2012) categorizes school rules into these three domains: moral rules refer to actions innately seen as wrong, whether a rule exists or not; conventional rules are contextual and supported through consensus or authority; and personal rules cover individual choice within cultural parameters. Raby’s (2012) study found that most students appreciated moral rules (e.g., no bullying, no theft) and accepted conventional rules (e.g., no smoking, follow dress code) as long as they did not encroach on their personal domain. Studies in American (Goodman, 2006), British (Rowe, 2006) and Canadian (Raby, 2012) schools found that most school behaviour codes do not distinguish between moral and conventional codes

leading to conflict between staff and students. Teachers might view lateness as a moral issue of order and respect; students often view it as contextual and distinct from morality. When conventional rules are ascribed moral status, Goodman (2006) refers to this as “derivatively moral.” Codes of conduct most often express expectations for student behaviour, with no mention of staff behaviour (Raby, 2012). The ability for adults to ascribe rules with morality, as well as the primary attention given to student behaviour, points to the role of rules in maintaining student compliance and social order.

Behaviour and punishment. In order for rules to be effective in maintaining order in schools and classrooms, the rules need to be enforced, usually through attention to student behaviour. As a tidy cyclical relationship, approaches that concentrate primarily on behaviour tend to reinforce social control and education as compliance (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Interestingly, Hoy and Weinstein (2006) found that while teachers commonly focus on student behaviour, seeking respect, cooperation and compliance, students value relationships with teachers, seeking respect, trust, patience, communication, clear limits and a degree of choice. This discrepancy in focus mirrors the difference in purposes – social control and social engagement – in affirmative and transformative RJ. RJ brought into schools in an affirmative sense is seen as a behaviour management practice, another tool to deal with student disruption, disengagement and disaffection (McCluskey, 2013). The focus of RJ, if brought in as such a tool, is on changing student behaviour to better fit teacher and school expectations.

To change student behaviour so that rules are followed, social order is maintained and learning can occur, the most common method is one of punishment and consequences. McCluskey et al. (2013) found that although students felt that behavioral change could be best accomplished through rewards and recognition, teachers were more likely to rely on punishments

and sanctions. Again, the reliance on punishment fits into a broad societal view that values punishment as both necessary and effective (London, 2011; Thorsborne, 2013). Punishment is an ambiguous, rarely defined term, yet it evokes strong feelings (Pawlychka, 2012). Many schools shy away from using the term *punishment*, preferring instead the language of *consequences*, which connote a guiding of students to learn appropriate future behaviour (Raby, 2012). Yet Kohn (1996) sees little distinction between *punishments* and *consequences* from the student point of view: regardless of the word used, students either choose to behave or suffer penalties. Raby (2012), too, found that only a minority of participants in her study – staff or students – identified a difference between punishments and consequences.

RJ, often framed as an alternative to punishment, would not seem to sit comfortably with such a practice and focus. However, as Morrison and Vaandering (2012) assert, “while educators readily embrace the RJ premise that relationship is more important than the behavioural incident, they are reluctant to let go of the option to punish and exclude” (p. 148). In this sense, RJ needs to be understood within a wide societal framework that is increasingly comfortable with punitive measures (Cunneen, 2012). Indeed, one of the tensions between affirmative and transformative RJ centres on the role of punishment. Critiquing RJ from a transformative perspective, Cunneen (2012) writes, RJ “has not been a counterweight to increased punitiveness, nor has it grown in isolation from these broader trends in penalty” (p. 21). For affirmative advocates, the alignment of RJ with punishment is not a problem; Tonry (2011) identifies RJ as one of the “new paradigms of punishment” (p. 22). As a new paradigm of punishment, the purpose of punishment is seen as moral reparation (Duff, 2001) and restoration of belief in a just and orderly world (London, 2011). According to London (2011), studies do not prove that restorative measures alone are more conducive to healing and the restoration of social trust than punishment. In his view, the

ideal RJ combination would be appropriate punishment, sincere apology and a form of restitution (London, 2011).

A focus on the individual. Underlying all aspects of social control in schools is a neoliberal conception of the individual as rational, independent and distinct from a network of relationships (Llewellyn, 2011b; Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming). According to Meyers (1997), “the view of the self that has dominated contemporary Anglo-American moral and political philosophy is that of homo-economicus – the free and rational chooser and actor whose desires are ranked in a coherent order and whose aim is to maximize desire, satisfaction. This conception of the self isolates the individual from personal relationships and larger social focus” (p. 2). In this conception, even if relationships are discussed, Llewellyn (2011b) contends that they are appreciated only for how they can be useful to the individual.

In schools, the effort to control behaviour as detailed above is reinforced by a focus on individuals and specific incidents (McCluskey, 2008b; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Schools focusing on behaviour will define the child or culture as deviant, without shedding light on larger social inequalities that might also play a role (Morris, 2005; Raby, 2012). Raby (2012) illustrates this phenomenon through a look at *repeat offenders* in schools. Students who repeatedly break school rules are characterized as defiant, thus conflating conventional rule violations into moral ones. She found that minority, working-class or otherwise marginalized students were more likely to have their actions noticed and recorded and, therefore, more likely to be defined as defiant (Raby, 2012). Seen only as individuals, responsible for their own failure to comply with rules, systemic and structural inequalities are ignored.

Affirmative RJ also takes an individualistic perspective, often focusing on specific incidents involving those identified, even in schools, as *victims* and *offenders* (Cunneen, 2012;

McCluskey, 2013). This vision of RJ is decontextualized from wider societal conditions and ignores the complexity of relationships often involved in specific incidents of harm (Cunneen, 2012; McCluskey, 2013). One consequence of such an individualized view is that a distinction is made between *good* students who might benefit from an RJ process and *bad* students who are deemed to present too great a risk for RJ (Cunneen, 2012; Raby, 2012). As in the previous repeat offender example, most marginalized groups are seen to present the greatest risk and are often subjected to punishment without an RJ process (Cunneen, 2012).

Affirmative RJ and social control. Cunneen (2012) identifies what he calls the paradox of RJ: “It promotes a more socially responsible and emancipatory approach to criminal justice and penalty, yet it is an approach that fits with at least some of the values that predominate within more punitive law-and-order politics” (p. 3). I would argue that this assertion is particularly true for affirmative understandings of RJ, driven by a purpose of social control.

As pointed out, RJ has emerged within societal discourses that uphold the individual as more important than the collective, view order and compliance as prerequisites to learning and as goods in and of themselves, and utilize external rules and punishment to control behaviour and reinforce social order. In many ways, RJ practices and theories have been “unwittingly influenced by a liberal individualistic approach” (Llewellyn, 2011b, p. 100); RJ is limited by the structures within which it operates (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming).

RJ has come, in an affirmative sense, to mirror the very structures it claims to critique. The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), an international not-for-profit organization that is a prolific RJ training centre, for example, offers decontextualized training models to schools in Canada, the United States, Australia and Europe (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming). Vaandering (2013), in an examination of one of IIRP’s main training components,

the social discipline window (McCold & Wachtel, 2003), points out that the language of dominance (terms such as *authority*, *regulation of behaviour*, *maintaining social order*, and *social control*) takes precedence in this model over the language of relationships. Vaandering (2013) argues that juxtaposing words such as behaviour and social order with concepts of relationships and people result in confusion and diluted (or, I would say, affirmative) versions of RJ. Besides the main centre in the United States, IIRP has ten international offices or affiliates (IIRP, 2013). Although exact numbers are not available, anecdotally the influence of IIRP and its presentation of a mostly affirmative version of RJ is significant. Both schools in my study, for example, mentioned at least minimal connection to IIRP.

Affirmative RJ, undertaken for the purpose of social control in schools, fits comfortably within schools, reinforcing existing structures and programs that encourage compliance through a focus on rules, individual behaviour and punishment. Morrison and Vaandering (2012) warn against an increasing trend in Canadian schools to align RJ with safe school initiatives that, while having some similar traits to RJ, are behavioural approaches that focus on social control. Even one of the main components of RJ – the involvement of student voice – seems to be easily coopted in some schools to fit into the frame of social control. For example, one reason that staff encouraged student participation in Raby’s study was to ensure buy-in to school rules or staff decisions (Raby, 2012). Students are led to believe that they have freedom and yet that freedom is “passive, evident only when students follow the rules” (Raby, 2012, p. 79). Cunneen (2012) laments that, for the most part, RJ has taken its place in the world smoothly, without significant challenge to the values underpinning that world order. This smooth transition, however, only applies to affirmative RJ and is not the case for transformative RJ.

Transformative RJ as social engagement. In this section, I explore four identified components of social engagement – *relationships, mutuality, a broad focus beyond harm, and attention to power relations* – and clarify the connection between transformative understandings of RJ and social engagement.

Relationships. Contrary to the view of students primarily as individuals to be managed, transformative RJ is grounded in the idea that humans are relational and thrive in contexts of social engagement rather than social control (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). The understanding of life as built upon personal connections and interactivity is consistent with most lived experiences and social and individual realities. Yet given the neoliberal individualistic conception in which much social science, public policy and political narrative is steeped, a conceptual shift is required to assert the primacy and reality of relationships. Educators experience this tension in schools, feeling the need to control students while at the same time recognizing that they, as teachers, are “in the business of relationships” (Thorsborne, 2013, p. 48). Cavanagh (2011) pushes this idea further: “Relationships are at the core of who we are and what we are in schools. These relationships need to be based on honouring the dignity of all persons, building people’s capacity to solve their own problems rather than relying on experts, and creating a sense of all for all” (p. 139). Social engagement shifts the focus from managing behaviour to honouring the dignity and humanity of all members of the school community (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Several RJ writers in recent years have placed RJ within the framework of relational theory (Llewellyn, 2011b; Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Although relationships have always been central to an understanding of RJ, they have often been couched in religious or spiritual terms (Llewellyn, 2011b) or coopted for the purpose of social control. Relational theory claims that humans are fundamentally relational and relations must be

carefully understood and developed (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming). The theory is both an old and relatively recent idea, drawing on such thinkers as Buber, Bakhtin, Dewey, Gadamer, Heidegger, Noddings, Gilligan, Freire, as well as additional feminist scholars and critical theorists (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Llewellyn, 2011b; Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming) to put forward a cohesive frame of reference “based on the assumption that relations have primacy over isolated self” (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004, p. 2). Relational theorists offer an account of the self as constituted in and through relationship with others (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming). This understanding of self does not deny the meaningful existence of individuals, but challenges the conception of individuals as distinct and apart from relationship. According to Bingham and Sidorkin (2004), “The self is a knot in the web of multiple intersecting relations; pull relations out of the web, and find no self. We do not have relations; relations have us” (p. 6). When focusing on the individual, such as in affirmative RJ, relationships are seen to be in service to the individual; in contrast, a relational view claims that relationships are essential to the imagining, understanding and constituting of an individual. The self does not exist in isolation.

Relationships, though crucial, are not inherently good. A relational view is fundamentally concerned with the character and conditions of relationships (Llewellyn, 2011b); this concern extends not only to interpersonal relationships, but to the full range of relationships – personal and public – in which humans exist and are constituted (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming). Bishop, Ladwig and Berryman (2014), in a study focused on Maori students, learned that the quality of in-class relationships and interactions with teachers were the main influence on the students’ educational achievements. Within those relationships, most teachers reproduced society-wide power imbalances and demonstrated low expectations for students; students

reciprocated with low educational achievements (Bishop et al., 2014). In contrast, students thrived in classrooms characterized by caring relationships and high expectations (Bishop et al., 2014). The Manifesto of Relational Pedagogy found in Bingham & Sidorkin's (2004) book, *No Education Without Relation*, states, "Human relationality is not an ethical value. Domination is as relational as love" (p. 7). Justice, Llewellyn (2011b) suggests, is also relational. Justice, experienced as equality of relationships, requires respect, concern and dignity (Llewellyn, 2011b). These values are made meaningful and lived out within relationship in all contexts including classrooms. Given the profound impact that relations have in human lives, it is imperative that attention be paid to the nature of those relations.

Llewellyn (2011b) sees potential in employing relational theory to both challenge affirmative RJ and develop transformative RJ. Morrison & Vaandering (2012) call for RJ to be grounded in relational pedagogy, describing how RJ "honors individual self-worth, but also nurtures relational, classroom ecologies that provide spaces for students to gain appropriate status within a web of relationships that exists amongst all participants in a school community" (p. 151). In this transformative sense, the success of RJ is not measured in behaviour modification, but by the change in the quality of social relationships that result (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming).

Mutuality. In order for social engagement to be fully enacted, the character and conditions of relationships need to be further explored. According to Llewellyn (2011b), what is ultimately sought is relational justice that "aims at realizing the conditions of relationships required for well-being and flourishing" and is characterized by "equality of relationships" (p. 91). Equality is contextual and grounded in lived relationships, underpinned by mutual respect, concern and dignity (Llewellyn, 2011b). She elaborates on these three essential qualities: respect,

rooted in a context of concern for others, recognizes the rights and needs of others; concern emerges out of knowledge of another's needs, aims and positions, and is revealed through interconnectedness; and dignity resides not solely within an individual but within those interconnections. Thus relational justice is realized as these qualities are experienced in different contexts.

In schools, equality of relationships is experienced when adults view students as humans to be engaged with rather than as objects to be controlled (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). This view shifts the onus from adults who control the decisions and choices to mutual decision-making and sense-making, whether in pedagogy or other aspects of schooling. Equality of relationships means that expectations and support can be given and received by any individual of any age (Morrison, 2010). In its purest form, equality of relationships would result in radically different schooling experiences than those found in most mainstream western schools. Writing about implementing effective relational pedagogy for Maori students, Bishop et al. (2014) recommend a classroom where power is shared and teachers relate to and interact with students so that new knowledge is co-created. "Such a classroom will generate totally different power relationships, interaction patterns, and educational outcomes" (Bishop et al., 2014, p. 210). Noddings (2004) concurs, highlighting how mutually enhanced learning for teachers and students is a product of relational pedagogy. Genuine student participation – such as when students are involved in meaningful mutual decision-making and sense-making – both erodes the gap that usually exists between teachers and students and fosters democratic citizenship (Noddings, 2004; Raby, 2012).

Affirmative RJ tends to focus primarily on modifying student behaviour and attitudes. In acknowledgement of the mutuality required for equality of relationships, transformative RJ

advocates call attention to the necessity for adults, too, to be open to asking questions of their own relationships and behaviours. Vaandering (2013) suggests that adults in schools need to commit to living restoratively with each other before or at the same time as students are introduced to RJ. Thorsborne (2013) agrees, calling for RJ values to be seen as equally important for adults as for students. The call for RJ to be seen as relevant to adults as to students refers both to how specific incidents of harm are dealt with, as well as broader implications.

A broad focus beyond harm. A focus on equality of relationships creates space to respond not only to incidents of harm, but to all relationships, policy decisions, pedagogy, curriculum, professional development and institutional development (Conrad & Unger, 2011; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Cavanagh (2011) refers to this encompassing vision as creating a culture of care. He outlines three domains of this culture: being in relationship (situating relationships at the core of schooling); living in relationships (creating a sense of community in schools which includes using RJ to respond to harm); and learning in relationships (viewing relationships and interactions as central to learning) (Cavanagh, 2011).

When relationships and interactions are viewed as central to learning, both the content of lessons and pedagogical choices are affected (Noddings, 2004; Vaandering, 2013). Interconnectivity becomes key to engaged teaching and learning (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming). Often students are asked to separate school from their personal and cultural space; relational pedagogy opens up ideas about what a learning classroom looks like, inviting students to make connections between their identities and relationships and classroom content (Raby, 2012). For Llewellyn and Llewellyn (forthcoming), this interconnectivity in the classroom is the basis for critical thinking and good judgment. While such attributes and skills are often portrayed as dependent upon individual capacity, Llewellyn and Llewellyn (forthcoming) understand them

as emerging from the community. They draw on Haraway (1990) to assert that relational critical thinking does not equate with mindless consensus; rather, classrooms need to be seen as spaces for contradictory standpoints and embodied realities that provide for “transgressive boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities” (p. 198).

Attention to power relations. When students and teachers focus on the connectedness of people, one of the *dangerous possibilities* is that power relations become more visible and contested (Llewellyn and Llewellyn, forthcoming). To create a culture of care built on equality of relationships requires attention to social injustices, dominating and hierarchical systems of power in schools, disparities and symbolic violence (Cavanagh, 2011; Conrad & Unger, 2011). It is not enough to attend to injustice in interpersonal relations if there are broader injustices underpinning those relations. Relational equality “must be concerned not only with inequality resulting from specific wrongdoing but also with the general state of inequality in social relations” (Llewellyn, 2011b). Relational equality seeks the broader realignment of power.

Bishop et al. (2014) provide an example of what this realignment of power could look like in the context of education for Maori students. They envision pedagogies rooted in Maori epistemological terms that address ongoing power imbalances and racism and “would create a context that would reorder the relationships between teachers and students in classrooms and mainstream/public schools” (p. 190). What is required in this instance is the combination of a culturally responsive approach with broad critical, sociocultural approaches to learning (Bishop et al., 2014). Raby (2012) agrees that culturally responsible classroom management as put forward by Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke and Curran (2004) affirms the cultural background of students while enhancing awareness of wider unequal social, economic and political contexts.

Genuine engagement between students and teachers, based on equality of relationships, could raise more holistic questions about the organization of schools and their focus on rules, competition, and individualism (Raby, 2012). Students and staff have the potential, to varying degrees, to replicate such discourses and/or transform them; they are “thoroughly enmeshed in the social fabric, both reproducing and disrupting it” (Raby, 2012, p. 204). Although some educational scholars feel it is misleading to encourage students to play a role in altering unequal structures of schooling given how entrenched these systems are, others feel that the only way to break collective disenfranchisement is for students to become more equipped in engaging in such actions (Raby, 2012). Raby (2012) concludes that student participation in schools is ultimately desirable and beneficial for democracy, but tempers this assertion by insisting that school staff need to be genuinely open to potential, possibly radical, changes resulting from student participation. Llewellyn and Llewellyn (forthcoming) elaborate, writing that it is not enough to simply make people feel included, inquiry “must be undertaken with a genuine appreciation for what is said and not said, and in that the ‘answers’ might make a difference to the outcome” (p. 16). This is what McCluskey (2013) refers to as a “radical re-imagining” of school relationships and school structures.

Transformative RJ and social engagement. Transformative RJ, underpinned by social engagement and not by social control, is “attentive to the range of private and public relationships that support, or potentially thwart, human flourishing” (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming). Transformative RJ is not committed to preserving existing relations or restoring relations to a prior state, but, rather, attends to the current conditions and characteristics of relations so that they can be transformed to the ideal of equality of relationship (Llewellyn, 2011b). This understanding of RJ entails a future-orientation, assessing current conditions and relations to

understand how best to create or sustain conditions of equal relationship in the future (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming).

As a concrete example of RJ as social engagement, Vaandering (2013) has taken McCold and Wachtel's (2003) social discipline window, critiqued as a social control and affirmative RJ model, and modified it to become a relationship window. The relationship window identifies interactions that either diminish or nurture one's inherent worth as a human being. She shifts the focus from managing behaviour to honoring connections, dignity and humanity. McCluskey (2013) also offers specific recommendations for how to live out social engagement or what she names a *strong* version of RJ. For McCluskey (2013), characteristics of strong RJ in schools are:

positive leadership; adults who talk to each other; openness to challenge and risk; openness to collaboration with students, parents, carers and local community; monitoring the effect of disadvantage and the impact of inequality and discrimination; time spent on reflection; reflection on power differentials in school community and effect of asymmetrical relationships between and among members of school community; seeing school as a community, not an institution; rejecting the need for schools to maintain the right to exclude; high academic aspirations; pedagogy and curriculum influenced by restorative principles; and adults who model positive ways of working and communicating. (pp. 135-136)

According to McCluskey (2013) the most convincing sign that a school has embraced a strong version of RJ is that members of that school community continually insist that the school is not restorative enough; transformative RJ is dynamic and contextual, requiring continual reflection and action.

Transformative RJ, as outlined here, is based on social engagement, holding relationships at its core and insisting that those relationships are grounded in mutuality, encompass all aspects of schooling and attend to structural and power imbalances. Transformative RJ seeks to disrupt the usual discourses that value individuals, order, compliance, rules, behaviour and social control. Disrupting these discourses is much more difficult than aligning oneself with them, as affirmative RJ often does. Yet, transformative RJ advocates would insist that disruption is required if we are, as Elliot (2011) puts it, to live collectively as our best selves.

Conceptual Framework

As addressed in the first part of the chapter, the affirmative-transformative continuum, underpinned by the purposes of social control and social engagement, partially constitutes my conceptual framework, organizing my thoughts and assisting in making data meaningful. I return to the continuum in the findings and discussion chapters of this dissertation. Adding to this conceptual framework, to assess how RJ was being constructed in affirmative and transformative manners in the schools I studied, I turned to Woolford's (2009) political understanding and analysis of RJ. Woolford defines politics broadly as the economic, societal and cultural forces that shape governance and everyday life. Woolford (2009) sees RJ used either as an *object* of politics, employed by political actors to maintain the status quo, or as a *project* of politics, a social movement working for social and political change. This distinction between political object and project parallels that of affirmative and transformative RJ or of social control and social engagement. The former reinforces the status quo while the latter disrupts it.

Furthermore, whether used as object or project, Woolford (2009) argues that RJ is political in at least three senses: RJ exists in a political context; RJ is itself a form of governance;

and RJ requires a mobilization of politics in order to realize its broader transformative goals. I elaborate on these three conceptual interpretations below.

First, RJ exists in a political context that is at times favourable, unfavourable or indifferent to its existence. Dominant discourses, ideologies and institutional arrangements affect how RJ is received, implemented, and practiced. Used in an affirmative manner, RJ reinforces these dominant discourses and arrangements. Woolford (2009) gives the example of how RJ provides a less costly method for dealing with minor crimes, thus allowing the system to direct punitive resources to more serious crimes. With this use, the criminal justice system is not threatened; on the contrary, RJ reduces the system's costs and workload, enabling the state to focus on being *tough on crime*. Cunneen (2012) concurs with this symbiotic relationship between RJ and the system, identifying how, in countries with western-style democracies, those that have some of the highest imprisonment rates (United States and New Zealand) are also the main exporters of RJ. In schools, this reinforcement of dominant discourses can be seen when RJ is used to deal with *good* students and the *repeat offenders* are severely punished. Yet even within such political contexts, there exists the possibility for RJ to be a transformative political project, to disrupt the dominant discourses. Essential to this disruption is a critical understanding of the discourses that shape the logic of governance.

In Woolford's (2009) second sense of how RJ is political, RJ is itself a form of governance. Woolford (2009) explains that RJ complements governmental goals of social peace by attempting to change offender behaviour, heal victims, and revitalize communities. In an affirmative manner, RJ helps the state to govern in two ways: First, by dealing with people who have violated state-defined norms (as in the examples above), thus legitimizing and naturalizing those norms. Through RJ the state "potentially achieves more direct penetration and greater

dispersal into civil society” (Cunneen, 2012). Second, by providing people with insights and tools to assist in governing themselves. Self-governance, while not innately affirmative, can impose a type of social control that promotes passive acceptance. As Woolford (2009) writes,

There is nothing inherently wrong with restorative justice promoting that people learn how to communicate effectively and resolve conflicts on their own, unless this is encouraged in a manner where the person does not reflect on the nature of the conflict and seeks instead to automatically resolve conflict, regardless of whether the conflict might serve a productive purpose. (pp. 156-57)

RJ as a form of governance particularly aligns with the ideas of social control and social engagement. Ensuring that RJ provides a transformative form of governance requires a critical assessment of RJ theories and practices. RJ cannot, Woolford writes, automatically tie its understanding of governance to the dictates of the state. RJ instead must assist individuals in governing themselves so that they are “capable of assessing their internalized habits and assumptions about the world, allowing them to disrupt patterns of domination that are embedded in their day-to-day worlds” (Woolford, 2009, p. 157). Similarly, RJ in schools “needs to be disruptive and unsettling: disruptive in the sense that it interrupts ineffective custom and practice and traditional ways of doing things that have outlived their usefulness” (McCluskey, 2013, p. 136).

As a third sense, Woolford (2009) writes, RJ needs to mobilize politics to realize broader social goals. If those advocating for transformative RJ do not do so, other political actors will appropriate RJ for their own purposes, using RJ to strengthen existing structures and practices rather than disrupt them. As RJ becomes more popular, Woolford (2009) believes it is more

likely that RJ will be used as a tool to accentuate its affirmative potential while the project of transformation drifts away.

For my research, as I explored how schools used RJ, I employed Woolford's (2009) conceptual framework of the politics of RJ. I focused on the first two ways in which he identifies RJ as being political: the political context in which RJ operates; and the ways in which RJ constitutes a form of governance. Within these two ways that RJ is political, I looked for how RJ operated in an affirmative sense, as a form of social control, and how RJ operated in a transformative sense, as a form of social engagement. The next chapter details the methodology I employed to undertake this exploration.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Design

In aligning my research design with the values and principles of RJ, I followed the practices of other restorative researchers (Umbreit & Armour, 2010; Vaandering, 2009; Zehr, 2005). Although RJ principles can be stated in a variety of ways, commonalities abound. In a 2006 conference presentation, Howard Zehr, often referred to as the grandfather of RJ, identified what he believed were the three most important values upon which to ground all RJ work: respect, humility and awe. Elaborating, he wrote that we need to profoundly *respect* the perspectives, needs and worth of all involved; embrace a *humility* that recognizes the limitations of what we know, reveals how our biographies shape our knowledge and biases, and calls us to a deep appreciation for and openness to others' realities; and to approach the world with *awe*, appreciating the beauty of mystery, ambiguity, paradox and contradictions within the lives of those we meet (Zehr, 2006, pp. 12-13). Although challenging, I attempted to hold these values as central in my approach as a researcher.

Since my focus was on the perspectives of students, those in schools upon whom RJ is most commonly focused, I shaped my methodology so as to respect the perspective of students, recognize my own limitations in understanding their realities and appreciate the ambiguities and paradoxes that exist in their lives. In short, I wanted to engage with students in such a way that they taught me about their experiences with RJ while at the same time facilitating student inquiry into their own familiar school experiences.

Based on restorative values, I conducted a qualitative case study that explored the student experiences at two schools, one in Canada and one in Scotland. RJ in these countries emerged from differing contexts and differing discourses. Case study researchers attempt to produce a

holistic understanding of the cultural and social contexts in which participants engage (Merriam, 1998; Orum, Feagin & Sjoberg, 1991; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). By situating the case being studied in context and thoroughly analyzing and describing its setting, researchers reach a deeper understanding of participants' multi-faceted realities (Creswell, 2007). Orum et al. (1991) discuss how case studies allow people to tell their stories, which is "simply to remain most authentic to the form in which people often experience their own lives" (p. 21). I explored the contexts, stories and discourses, as discovered in documents and individual and collective experiences, to present a rich understanding of the student experience of RJ.

I approached my research as a participant observer. Marshall and Rossman (1989) state that "participant-observation is a special form of observation and demands first-hand involvement in the social world chosen for study.... [T]he researcher spends a considerable amount of time in the setting, learning about daily life" (p. 79). Although historically associated with ethnography (Whyte, 1984), Johnson, Avenarius and Weatherford (2006) point out that many social scientists, including educational researchers, use a participant observation approach to study contemporary social groups, cultures and subcultures in a wide range of settings. Cotnam-Kappel (2014), for example, conducted participant observation in a grade 8 classroom in order to discover "the ethos of the group as well as youth's individual experiences" (p. 150). In my study, I immersed myself in the settings of the two schools in order to learn about the daily lives of the students, both the group ethos and particular experiences. Recognizing my limitations as an adult participant observer to be privy to student experiences, I also engaged students as my co-researchers, greatly enhancing my understanding of their daily lives. The role of student co-researchers will be explained in more detail later in this chapter.

Participants and Procedure

Scotland and Canada were chosen due to their different experiences with RJ. In Canada, RJ has been applied in schools for over 20 years (Drewery & Winslade, 2003; Morrison, 2007a). Elmira (a town in Ontario) is considered the site of the first victim-offender facilitation, in 1974. Many RJ practices and approaches in Canada are also tied to its indigenous people (Eagle, 2011; Elliot, 2011; Vaandering, 2009). There is wide recognition that RJ in Canada has deep roots.

Approximately ten years after Canada, Scotland introduced its first school RJ pilot project in 2004 (Hendry, 2009; McCluskey et al., 2008b). Scottish practitioners drew on the experience of other countries to create their own uniquely Scottish model (Hendry, 2009). Yet, a history of compatible traditions provided a context where the principles were already in place to embrace RJ (McCluskey et al., 2008b).

I focused on one school in Scotland and one in Canada. The schools were selected for similarities in the age of students and length of time the schools had been involved with RJ.

Scotland.

The school. In order to design and implement my study, I approached Dr. Gillean McCluskey from the University of Edinburgh, who researches and teaches in the areas of school discipline, exclusion and conflict resolution, and was part of the evaluation team for the Scottish schools RJ pilot project. At my request, Dr. McCluskey recommended schools that had been implementing RJ for at least five years, given that most innovations take three to five years to become embedded in a sustainable way (Bargen, 2010; Blood & Thorsborne, 2005, 2006; Cavanagh, 2011; Hall & Hord, 1987; McCluskey, 2013). She suggested three schools and, through further direct communication with the schools, the three were narrowed down to one that

was interested in being part of my study. I spent three and a half consecutive weeks in the school in February and March 2013.¹

The chosen school served slightly fewer than 600 pupils, ranging in age from 11-18, and employed approximately 60 full-time teachers. It is located in an economically-depressed area of Scotland: the number of pupils eligible for free school meals due to low income was more than double that of the national Scottish average of 15.4 per cent; in 2010/2011, 14 per cent of graduates from this school were going on to higher education, compared with the national average of 36 per cent (Education Scotland, 2011). The school was seen as a leader in helping pupils with additional support needs and, as such, attracted pupils with a wide range of accommodations. Additional support needs are described as falling into four overlapping themes: learning environment, family circumstances, disability or health need, and social and emotional factors (Education Scotland, n.d.). It is within this context, five years previous, that RJ was formally brought into the school.

Management. The school had a management team consisting of one headteacher (equivalent to a Canadian principal), a male who had been at the school for almost 10 years, and two male depute headteachers (equivalent to Canadian assistant principals). The depute headteacher with whom I worked most closely had served as depute at the school for 15 years –

¹ To maintain the anonymity of the participants in this study, the details of any potentially identifying documents have been obscured in the list of references. Identifying details are replaced by either: Alberta School, Alberta School Board, Scottish School, Scottish Local Authority, or, if necessary, xxxx.

part of that as the person responsible for pupil support. The depute headteacher was instrumental in ensuring that I had access to everything and everyone I needed at the school for my study; he gave me a school tour on my first day, introduced me to key staff, arranged for office space in which to conduct interviews, and involved me in meetings and school activities that he thought might enhance my understanding of RJ in the school. I conducted one 50-minute semi-structured interview with the headteacher and two semi-structured interviews, 40-minutes each, with the depute headteacher during my first two weeks at the school. All three interviews were conducted privately with the individuals, on school grounds, either in their own offices or in other available space. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, with the transcriptions being provided to the interviewees via email during my time at the school. Transcriptions were provided to open conversation on any thoughts the interviewees wished to clarify or discuss.

Staff. In order to gain an understanding of the broader use of RJ in the school and the beliefs and knowledge of staff in terms of RJ, I distributed a questionnaire to all staff. Although my initial planning had envisioned the questionnaire being personally handed out to staff at a meeting where I introduced both my study and myself, full staff meetings were not regular practice in the school. Therefore, the study was introduced via an all-staff email sent during my first week at the school. The school was quite large and although I would have informally met multiple staff members by that point, there were still many unaware of my reason for being in their school. Paper copies of the questionnaire were placed in staff mailboxes or, as they are referred to in Scotland, pigeonholes, located in the staff room. The pigeonholes were for all staff – including office and custodial staff – and thus all staff received the questionnaire. I was given a temporary pigeonhole where staff could deposit their completed forms; some also handed them to

me directly. I collected completed questionnaires throughout my time at the school, sending two reminder email messages.

Out of 85 forms put in staff pigeonholes, 27 were returned, a 32 per cent response rate. Two of the 27, however, were returned blank by office staff who felt unable to comment, bringing the rate of completed responses down to 29 per cent. Out of the respondents, 17 identified as classroom teachers.

Besides gaining an overview of RJ in the school, the questionnaire also served as a way for staff to indicate willingness to participate in learning circles. These circles were framed as confidential discussions in which staff would teach me about their experience with RJ. Sixteen members of staff (59 per cent of those who returned questionnaires) indicated they were interested in being part of a follow-up circle. Although all 16 were invited to be part of a circle, in the end, ten participated. The drop in numbers was due mostly to scheduling difficulties (the school manager attempted to schedule circles to coincide with staff free periods); one staff member did not participate because of illness and another due to miscommunication. Three circles were held, one with two participants and two each with four participants, lasting between 35 and 45 minutes so as to fit within the free period. The discussions were all recorded and transcribed, and transcriptions provided to the participants via email during my time at the school. The transcriptions were provided to allow educators the opportunity to clarify their thoughts if desired.

There were many informal opportunities to meet with staff. During the three and half weeks, I sat in on classes, ate lunch in the staff room, socialized during tea breaks, attended meetings, conversed in the corridors and even carpooled with two staff members.

Pupils. Although I informally interacted with all pupils at the school, I designed my study to concentrate on one grade level, so as to deepen my understanding of one group of students. Since many of the older grades were engaged in national preliminary examinations, the school recommended that I work with the first year pupils, most of who were 12 years old. There were several layers of data collection involved with the first year pupils: a questionnaire; learning circles with small groups; and the co-researcher stage.

There was concern among some of the members of the school management team, based on previous experiences, that the necessary parental consent forms would not be returned promptly or in sufficient numbers, and may not even be delivered to the parents by the pupils. Therefore, within the first week, an assembly was set up for all 90 of the first year pupils so I could explain why I was in the school and how important it was for me to hear their thoughts. Beyond the attempt to improve the consent form return ratio, it was an opportunity to set the tone for my research with the young people. Both I and the depute headteacher emphasized that they were the experts of their pupil experience and had much to teach adults. Several pupils stopped me in the hallway in the next few days, wondering why I would travel from Canada to learn from them. The assembly was a success both in terms of planting the idea of the pupil as expert in the pupils' minds and in terms of the consent forms. Slightly more than 50 per cent of the consent forms were returned, much higher than staff had predicted.

The first phase of the formal research activity was a pupil questionnaire focused on their broad schooling experience. To facilitate the completion of the questionnaire with as little disruption as possible to regular classes, I brought pupils into a private room in the library in groups of between five and ten. In all, 47 pupils completed the questionnaire in one day. The

questionnaires helped to set the broader context of the views and use of RJ in the schools. They were also used to identify pupils interested in the next research activity: the learning circles.

On the questionnaire, 31 pupils (66 per cent) indicated they were interested in being part of a learning circle and brought consent forms home. Of those, 18 returned their consent forms and participated in the learning circles. I ran four pupil learning circles, each with between four and six participants. The shortest was 19 minutes and the longest was 38 minutes. Each circle was focused on one of three themes: communication, rules or community. These themes were selected from the literature to represent a range of aspects connected to RJ in schools. These circle discussions were also recorded and transcribed, though the transcriptions were not shared with the pupils. More will be said on this in the *data collection* section.

At the end of the learning circles, we talked about what being a co-researcher meant, how to proceed and who wanted to participate. Out of the 18 learning circle participants, 13 wanted to act as co-researchers and were given permission from their parents. Two of the participants were absent during the observation period, so 11 pupils acted as co-researchers. Each participating pupil was given a notebook in which they wrote a pseudonym. They were asked to pay attention for three days to whatever theme (communication, rules, or community) was discussed in the circle, taking note of everything they saw or heard that had to do with that theme. After the three-day observation period was over, I met with the pupils individually. During that meeting, they explained what they had taken note of, what they thought it meant in terms of the atmosphere in their school in general, and talked about the experience of taking notes. These individual interviews lasted between five and 20 minutes. They were also recorded and transcribed. I retained the notebooks to analyze later.

Educational administrators and academics. In order to understand better the educational context within which this school and RJ were situated, I reached out to or was put in touch with a variety of relevant individuals in Scotland. I conducted semi-structured interviews with: Anthony Finn, Chief Executive of the General Teaching Council for Scotland; Drew Morrice, National Assistant Secretary in the Educational Institute of Scotland (Scotland's largest educational union); the Senior Education Manager for the Local Authority; the Local Authority's Education Officer responsible for the school; and a principal for an elementary school using RJ within the same Local Authority. With the exception of Anthony Finn, with whom I took handwritten notes, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. All interviews were between 40 and 50 minutes. Given their public status, both Anthony Finn and Drew Morrice agreed that their names be used.

In addition, longer-term connections were made with two individuals, Dr. Gillean McCluskey, and the educator and author, Richard Hendry. For one month, before entering the school, I was based in the Moray House School of Education at the University of Edinburgh with Dr. Gillean McCluskey as my host supervisor. During this month, under Dr. McCluskey's direction, I familiarized myself with the Scottish educational context, gathering and analyzing key documents, including those related to public policy, evaluations conducted in Scottish schools, and articles written by education leaders and managers. I met several times with Dr. McCluskey during this period to discuss the themes that were emerging in my readings and for her to point me toward other documents that either affirmed or argued against my initial interpretations.

Richard Hendry is the author of the 2009 book, *Building and restoring respectful relationships in schools: A guide to using restorative practice*, a book I read that convinced me Scotland would be an ideal site for my study. Richard Hendry was also part of the evaluation

team for the Scottish RJ school pilot project. I contacted Richard Hendry and spent a weekend with his family at his home on the Isle of Skye. This occurred after my time at the school and his insights were a valuable addition to my study. Although there were no direct interviews with Dr. McCluskey or Richard Hendry, I believe it important to acknowledge the impact of our informal conversations.

Alberta.

The school. In order to locate an appropriate school in Alberta, I contacted the Alberta Conflict Transformation Society (ACTS), an RJ agency that provides training and education across the province. As in Scotland, ACTS suggested a number of schools that fit the criteria for my study. Upon contacting these schools directly, there was one willing to participate in the study. I spent five consecutive weeks in this school in April and May 2013.

The chosen elementary school had slightly fewer than 350 students, between the ages of 3 and 12, and employed about 30 full-time staff. Located in an area of town where many new Canadians first arrive, the school was exceptionally multicultural: by one estimate, on the School Board website, students were identified as having almost 40 different home countries, with the predominant ethnic groups being Arabic, Somali and Aboriginal. One third of students were new Canadians, many attending school for the first time. The School Board estimated that English was a second language for approximately 80 per cent of the families. The neighborhood surrounding the school is multicultural, low-income and transient. According to neighborhood indicators published by the city in 2010, this neighborhood had three and a half times as many low-income households as the city average and three times as many food hamper users. Similar to the Scottish school, this school was also seen as a leader in working with children with high needs. Out of the 350 students, approximately 60 of them were in the early education program

which served students from outside the neighborhood with special educational needs and 25 of the students in grades one through six, also not necessarily drawn from the community, were in separate classes for children with “severe, chronic, extreme and pervasive behaviours” (Alberta School Board, n.d.-a). Within this context the school implemented RJ five years prior to the study.

Management. The school’s management team consisted of one female principal who had been at the school for the same amount of time that RJ had been implemented, approximately five years, and one female assistant principal who was new to the school. The principal was enthusiastic about my presence in the school and worked to ensure that I had everything necessary for my study. She gave me a tour of the school, introduced me to key people, gave me access to resources such as the photocopier, provided time for me to make presentations during staff meetings, organized substitute teachers to give staff time to meet with me, arranged for me to attend a board-wide training session and generally encouraged all members of the school community to participate freely in the study. I conducted a one hour and ten minute semi-structured interview with the principal and one 50-minute interview with the assistant principal. Both were conducted in the individual’s respective offices, both were recorded and transcribed, with the transcriptions shared with the interviewees via email during my time at the school. The transcriptions were provided to open conversation about thoughts participants wished to clarify.

Staff. My first formal interaction with staff was at a staff meeting a few days after I arrived at the school. I was given time to introduce my study and myself. I also suggested that since I would be part of the school for several weeks, any teacher who felt he/she needed extra assistance could call upon me.

As the school was much smaller than the Scottish school, I was able to personally deliver the staff questionnaire to most individuals within my first week at the school. The principal suggested that everyone bring the completed forms to the next all-staff meeting, the following week. I was absent due to illness that day, but a folder was created for staff to submit their forms. I continued to collect forms in that folder, located in the office, through my time at the school. Staff would also occasionally hand me their forms personally.

Out of 47 forms delivered to all staff members – including office staff, educational assistants, and others – 23 were completed and returned, a 49 per cent response rate. Out of the respondents, 12 identified as primarily working as classroom teachers.

As in Scotland, staff were given the opportunity to indicate on the questionnaire if they were interested in being part of a learning circle. Ten members of staff (44 per cent of those who responded) indicated an interest. Later the principal made it known to staff that she would provide substitute teachers for participating staff and the number of interested staff rose. In the end, 15 staff members participated in circles. Four circles were held, ranging from between two and five participants each. The shortest circle lasted 45 minutes and the longest was one and a half hours. The discussions were all recorded and transcribed, and transcriptions provided to the participants via email. The opportunity was offered for participants to clarify what they had said during the circles.

Since I was in the school for one and a half weeks longer than in Scotland, there were more opportunities for informal conversations with staff. I attended several evening school events and multiple staff meetings, volunteered in classrooms and on the playground, participated in a two-day board-wide training session with six staff members and occasionally rode the bus with one staff member.

Students. Although having many informal opportunities to interact with all students in the school, my focus here was on the grade 5 and 6 students, ranging between 10 and 12 years of age. The school recommended these grades since their age made them more appropriate for the co-researcher activities and many of them would be familiar with RJ, having been exposed to it for the majority of their time at the school. Working with two grade levels instead of one was recommended since two of the four classes – including the behavioural learning class – were split grade 5/6 classes. The age of the students matched well with those I had engaged in Scotland.

Similar to Scotland, there was concern amongst the Alberta staff that it would be difficult to convince students to bring back completed consent forms. Rather than hold a full assembly, I made presentations in the individual classes about what I wanted to learn from the students and why I considered it crucial that I hear from students directly. Since I had more opportunity to volunteer in classrooms and, thus, interact personally with students, I was also able to build more relationships before the consent forms were distributed. In all, out of 85 grade 5 and 6 students, 38 returned parental consent forms and completed the questionnaire (48 per cent). Of these 38, 12 were grade 5 (32 per cent of 38 grade 5 students) and 26 were grade 6 (55 per cent of 47 grade 6 students). I again administered the questionnaires to small groups that I brought into the library. The questionnaire was identical in content to the Scottish student questionnaire; the only changes

made were due to differences in the use of the English language (e.g., ‘check the box’ in Alberta; ‘tick the box’ in Scotland).

On the questionnaire, 31 students (82 per cent) indicated they were interested in being part of a learning circle and brought consent forms home. Of those, 20 returned their consent forms and participated in learning circles. I ran five student learning circles, each with between two and five participants. The shortest was 18 minutes and the longest was 42 minutes. Again the circles focused on one of three themes: communication, rules or community. The circle discussions were recorded and transcribed.

Out of the 20 learning circle participants, 18 wanted to act as co-researchers and were given permission from their parents. In addition, one student who had been absent during the learning circles also received permission from her parents to participate. Thus, 19 students acted as co-researchers for three days. Drawing on my experience in Scotland, a few changes were made to the actual process I asked students to engage in. These will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter. After the three days I met individually with each student so that he/she could explain the notebook and their observations to me and offer an analysis of their observation time. These individual interviews lasted between four and 30 minutes. They were recorded and transcribed. Although I tore out and kept the pages of the notebooks where students had written observations, they were offered the chance to keep the rest of their notebooks if they wished. All did.

Training Facilitators. In order to better understand the broad context surrounding RJ in the Alberta school, I also reached out to or was put in touch with a variety of individuals or experiences. Most significantly, I was able to attend a two-day board-wide training session put on by UNICEF on Rights Respecting Schools (RRS). RRS is an initiative that the school had undertaken and had linked closely with their implementation of RJ. By being trained in this initiative, I was privy to a deeper understanding of the goals and practices of RRS and, thus, the connections the school was making to RJ. Since this training was offered for schools within the whole board, I also gained insight into board-level conversations and discourses in which to situate the school.

In addition, I conducted one semi-structured interview with two of the main RJ training facilitators in the area. These facilitators offered insight into the philosophy grounding the RJ training received by members of the school, as well as a broader picture of RJ in schools in the region and province. This interview took place in a public coffee house and as such was not recorded.

Data Collection and Data Collection Instruments

As it is difficult to fully separate data collection from data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2007), it is important to state that both my data collection and analysis were conducted through a social constructionist lens. Consistent with this, all my research activities were undertaken in order to see how understandings and experiences of RJ are constructed, interpreted and made meaningful. And, although the student experience was held at the centre of these activities, the meaning students constructed cannot be fully understood without exploring the layers of meaning, the broader context, in which students are situated.

Data collection was extensive and multi-pronged: document analysis, participant observation, interviews with management team members and with key individuals outside of the schools, educator and student questionnaires, educator and student learning circles, student co-researcher notebooks and individual interviews with student co-researchers. Each research activity will be explained in detail below. Data that speak to the student experience, held at the centre, were gathered through the student questionnaires, student learning circles and student co-researcher activities. Data to illuminate the layers of the broad context in which the student experience is situated were gathered through document analysis, participant observation, interviews, educator questionnaires and educator learning circles. Taken as a whole, the research activities attempt to illuminate the complex dynamics of student experiences and, in so doing, to fully respond to the research questions.

Document analysis. Throughout the study, I gathered public documents that related to RJ, as well as regional and national educational discourses. Documents were analyzed for patterns, both internally and in relation to each other. More will be said on the analysis in the next section. Studying public documents reveals that which is officially stated to be occurring or to be desirable, against which what is actually occurring can be held.

In both Scotland and Alberta, I gathered documents in a similar fashion. In all, I spent three months in Scotland and two months in Alberta. Throughout these months, I was continually gathering documents to better understand the two contexts. My most systematic approach was through official websites. In Scotland these included government websites such as Education Scotland and Engage for Education, education union websites, the General Teaching Council for Scotland website, and those belonging to the local authority and the school itself; in Alberta these included the Alberta government's Education website, the Alberta Teacher's Association website

and those belonging to the school board and the school itself. I also paid particular attention to educational discourses found in the media – mostly in newspapers, online news and public radio. In Alberta these conversations centred on budget cuts to provincial and board-wide education funding; in Scotland conversations focused on the new Curriculum for Excellence and on the possibility of Scottish independence. I collected brochures, newsletters and informational documents from the schools, education organizations, partner organizations, government offices and most cultural sites that I visited.

Besides my own gathering of documents, I also asked the principal, assistant principal, headteacher and depute headteacher to provide any and all documents that they felt would assist me in comprehending the context in which they were operating. From these four individuals I received: previous study results on topics such as school atmosphere, student sense of belonging, and RRS readiness; past minutes of related meetings; notes taken during RJ and RRS training sessions; school policies; staff handbooks; powerpoints used to train staff on RJ; school improvement plans; brochures used to communicate with parents about RJ; among others. All documents – whether gathered by me or provided to me – offered insights into the political context in which the student and school experiences were situated.

Participant observation. Before embarking on my study, I suggested to the management team in each school that I would participate in the life of their schools however they felt best. Thus, my participation looked different in each locale. I wanted to be part of school life both in order to experience the school myself and to be able to, in a small way, thank the schools for their generosity in opening their doors to my study.

In Scotland, I spent three and a half weeks in the school. I was given free reign to wander, to sit in on lectures and classwork and to speak to anyone. As Johnson, Avenarius and

Weatherford (2006) point out, participant observation approaches vary as to whether the emphasis rests on either the participant or the observer side of the concept. My time as a participant observer in the Scottish school leaned more toward the observing side of the equation. As my time in the school was shorter than that spent in Alberta, many days were occupied with the actual administration of the questionnaires, interviews, learning circles and co-researcher activities. That said, I did occasionally work with pupils requiring extra assistance in the Pupil Support Centre and with pupils in the Inclusion Room, where pupils were placed who would otherwise be suspended or who were at risk of being suspended. I was also brought in to talk to pupils in individual classes, mostly to answer questions about Canada. Simply being present for three and a half weeks, I observed innumerable interactions between pupils, between staff members and between staff and pupils and was privy to many informal conversations in all parts of the school and with all members of the school community – from pupils smoking outside to custodial staff taking a break in the staff room, and from teachers in the corridor to management staff before a meeting.

In Alberta, I was present in the school for five consecutive weeks. The longer time there, as well as other factors, led to my time in the school being more participative. During the first all-staff meeting, I offered my services; I received several requests for help. Thus, most days I worked directly with students: running reading groups; helping students set up displays in the gymnasium; assisting with special events such as a pancake breakfast; filling in for absent staff members; providing extra assistance to individual students; among many other activities. Staff often asked me to sit in on class-wide restorative circles that they were running and I was usually asked for feedback both within the circle and privately. My presence and the research activities I was conducting in the school led to many conversations – informal and formal – and eventually

resulted in several staff members requesting that I facilitate an all-staff circle focused on the issue of communication. The principal supported this request and I ran the circle on my last day in the school. Again, the ability to be present in the school was invaluable as I learned much about the school's priorities, values and challenges from interactions and observations in the staff room, classrooms, playground and offices.

In order to document my experience in both schools, I kept a research journal. During the day I would often jot down observations, thoughts and critical incidents in a notebook that I kept with me, and at night I would enter long journal recordings into my computer, taking into account my activities of the day, as well as any thoughts and questions that arose. Although my journal writing became most focused during my days in the school, I also attempted to write entries through the duration of my time in Scotland and Alberta. As a result, I have 70 journal entries, most several pages long, to which to refer. I utilized this data to assist in describing the context of the region and the school, as can be seen the following two chapters.

To focus my entries during my time in the schools, I turned to Patton (2002) who emphasizes the importance of writing detailed field notes that describe not only settings and activities, but also social interactions. I first emulated Vaandering's (2009) method of dividing each page of her field notes into two columns: "watch" (what was happening) and "wonder" (thoughts, questions and ideas that arose). I found that the columns, while beneficial for structuring my initial thoughts, became too restrictive for my style of writing and thinking; after the first week in Scotland I began incorporating the ideas of watching and wondering back into my usual narrative style. What I did find effective, however, was my attempt to keep the values underpinning my research alive during my participant observation period. As previously mentioned, building on Zehr's (2006) expression, these values can be identified as awe, humility

and respect. At the end of each journal entry, I included a section where I explicitly addressed these three qualities. I took note of what I was observing in the schools that embodied awe, humility and respect and how my own actions and attitude might either be expressing or silencing those qualities. In this way, I used my journal entries as a way to both observe and be reflexive so as to nurture those qualities within my research.

My presence in the schools – as a participant observer – was a crucial part of my overall study. My experience, as documented in journal entries, was one additional layer of data collected, giving depth to the question of broader discourses of affirmation and transformation.

Interviews. The interviews I conducted with the four members of the school management teams and with identified individuals outside of the schools were semi-structured. The focus of the interview protocol for the school management teams (Appendix B) was on the goals these school leaders hoped to achieve through RJ. Woolford (2009) suggests that identifying these goals assists in understanding the political context in which RJ is operating. The focus of the interview protocol for other interviewees (Appendix C) was on the broad context and the state of RJ in the region/country.

The interview protocols were developed with reference to Vaandering's (2009) interviews with school administrators. Vaandering's focus on understanding administrators' perceptions and definitions of RJ, and their explanation of the use of RJ in their schools mirrored my own interest in identifying the goals, understandings and context as articulated by school leaders. The interview protocols were pilot tested with two individuals, one involved in the Scottish school system and one in the Alberta school board. They were selected through personal connections and received the protocols via email. They were asked to comment on the clarity and significance

of the questions and were aware that their feedback would be taken into consideration when revising the protocols. Participants suggested only minor changes in wording.

Although data gathered through interviews is indirect and filtered by the participants, Creswell (2003) suggested interviews allow for researchers to gather data more directly related to their research questions and permit historical information to be provided by participants. I chose to employ semi-structured interviews in order to both ask direct key questions of participants as well as leave the discussion open for insights and perspectives difficult to fit into set questions. Open-ended questions were used to encourage participants in recalling and sharing stories related to the research topic, their lives generally and what they identified as meaningful about the topic being studied (Ellis, Janjic-Watrich, Macris & Marynowski, 2011). Interviews with the management teams and other relevant individuals added a layer of data by which to understand the discourses of affirmation and transformation evident in the particular schools and regions.

Questionnaires. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003), questionnaires collect information from groups in order to “describe some aspects or characteristics (such as abilities, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and/or knowledge) of the population of which that group is part” (p. 396). An educator questionnaire (Appendix D) was developed to ascertain how RJ was understood and used by teachers, members of the management teams and other staff. The questionnaire built on an educator questionnaire that I utilized in my Master’s research (Reimer, 2009), developed from an adaptation of Woodbury and Gess-Newsome’s (2002) Teacher Centered Systemic Reform model of educational reform, emphasizing teachers’ practice, knowledge and beliefs. The 2009 questionnaire was divided into three sections: thoughts, use and beliefs. For the current questionnaire, I expanded on these sections and added in a fourth section – goals – in accordance with Woolford’s (2009) attention to the goals leaders have for RJ. Similar to the interview protocols, the questionnaire was tested through a pilot project using the same two participants who responded to the interview protocols. Again, feedback was positive and except for a few changes in wording, the questionnaires were not significantly revised.

The thoughts section of the questionnaire posed an open-ended question with adequate space left for a multi-paragraph answer. The question contained the instructions to reply “in as few or as many words as you would like.” In both countries, many respondents filled the whole page and two attached extra pages. The rest of the questionnaire contained only checkboxes, although occasionally respondents chose to clarify their answers or lack of response by writing in the margins. These comments were also recorded for analysis.

A student questionnaire (Appendix E) focused on student perceptions of school and direct and indirect indicators of RJ. The questionnaire was developed based on the literature on affirmative and transformative RJ. The questionnaire covered adult-student relationships (Blood

& Thorsborne, 2006; Cavanagh, 2011; Hendry, 2009; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012), peer relationships (Bargen, 2010; Cavanagh, 2011; Hopkins, 2011), how conflict is handled (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Hendry, 2009; Hopkins, 2011; London, 2011) and how decisions are made (Bargen, 2010; Cronin-Lampe & Cronin-Lampe, 2010; McCluskey, 2013). Although the questionnaire was not pilot-tested, prior to beginning the case studies I shared a draft version of the questionnaire via email with the administrative teams in each school as well as with other individuals familiar with the Scottish and Alberta school systems. Individuals from both sites suggested that wording be changed since most students would be unfamiliar with the term, RJ. Based on their feedback, the term *restorative* was only used once, to inquire about students' familiarity with the term; only one student respondent in each country checked that he/she had heard the term "restorative approaches" previously.

The educator and student questionnaires were used to set the broad context of the views and use of RJ in the schools. The student questionnaires helped to answer the first two research questions about the students' perspectives and what they reveal about the politics of RJ. The educator questionnaires added one more layer of information to answering the third question, evidence of discourses of transformation and affirmation.

Learning Circles. Learning circles are focus groups conducted like restorative classroom circles, using similar guidelines. As with focus groups, learning circles elicit stories and in-depth explanations of people's thoughts and experiences (Kitzinger 1994; Wilkinson 1998). Learning circles emphasize that participants are the ones with the knowledge and expertise, teaching others about their own reality. Learning circles acknowledge that the work of the circle is unique to its place and time, those present, the dynamics between them, and how they contribute through their words and silences. Learning circles mirror the relational process inherent in RJ.

All learning circles were conducted with individuals who self-selected on the questionnaire or who later asked to be involved. With the staff learning circle (Appendix F), I wanted to learn how teachers perceived RJ and its effect on their students and the school. What sorts of messages did they want to communicate to students through the use of RJ?

Circles often have a ritualistic aspect to them. In the staff circles, although I did not use a talking piece, I facilitated the circles by first reviewing basic restorative circle guidelines: respect for all; one person speaks at a time; you can pass; what is said in the circle, stays in the circle. It was especially crucial to have staff verbally agree to the confidentiality clause due to the potential for personal opinions to be verbalized within the learning circle. I began each round with a question (see Appendix F). One person would offer to answer first and then we would go around the circle so that everyone had a chance to answer. Then the discussion around that particular question was opened up to flow more naturally. The facilitated rounds were done, in keeping with restorative values, to ensure that everyone's voice was valued and heard equally.

The circles were allowed to go as long as time and interest allowed. In Alberta the circles lasted almost twice as long as in Scotland, in large part due to the fact that the Albertan staff were given half a day off to participate whereas the Scottish staff only had one 50 minute period. In both, an interesting phenomenon occurred in that the circles often became as much a tool for me to learn from the staff as for them to learn from each other. Several Scottish staff members remarked about how beneficial it was for them to hear what their colleagues were thinking and doing – a rare opportunity in their rushed work environments. In Alberta, this sentiment was even more pronounced. In two of the four circles, staff members began to devise plans on how to use staff learning circles more regularly to improve communication and educate one another.

The three student learning circle protocols (Appendices G, H, I) had three separate foci: communication, rules and community. These themes were selected from the literature to represent a range of aspects connected to RJ in schools. Communication is essential for building, maintaining and repairing relationships (Hendry, 2009; Hopkins, 2011); the importance of rules and how rule breaking is handled suggest where schools fall on a punitive to restorative continuum (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Hendry, 2009); and community represents a view of the classroom as constituted of individuals who are interconnected and accountable to one another as well as an understanding of RJ's connection to broader society (Hopkins, 2011; Elliot, 2011; Morrison, 2007a).

In the student case, a talking piece was used to focus the conversation and ensure that one person spoke at a time. Especially in Alberta, the students were very familiar with the use of talking pieces. The students created pseudonyms for themselves and referred to each other by that name. We also shared food around the table during our conversation, a practice that often occurs in restorative meetings as a way to reinforce a sense of community. Food was also shared in the staff circles.

Since most students were not familiar with the term RJ, the initial questions of each circle focused on the school in general. Students were asked three preliminary questions: 1) What do you like about your school? 2) What would you change about your school? 3) Tell me how people get along in your school. Then, depending on the circle theme (rules, communication or community), the questions differed. The use of ritual in terms of using rounds of questions applied to the student circles in the same way as with staff.

The learning circles provided an opportunity for students to talk together about their experiences at school. Again, I introduced the circle time as a chance not only for me to learn

from them, but also for the students to learn from each other. The conversation sometimes affirmed ideas that individuals put forward, and sometimes offered conflicting opinions; each statement reinforcing how complex and layered schooling can be. Again, both the process of the circle conversation and the content of that conversation were crucial. The students were given the floor as the experts, teaching me and their peers and, perhaps, themselves about their school experience. Their narratives both delved into abstract concepts and offered concrete examples. They were relating past experiences and, at the same time, analyzing them as they decided how to respond to my questions and how to reflect their own experiences as they interacted with their peers.

Co-Researchers. Even in the previous phase, the students could be termed co-researchers. This initiative was much more explicit, however, in the final phase of my research. The concept of co-researchers was built on Grant's (1993) idea of shadowing, in which teachers were asked to follow a student in his/her own school for a whole day in order to gain an understanding of the student experience. By engaging students to be co-researchers, I *shadowed* the student from afar, as they recorded their experiences from their own perspective. The concept also built on the practice of using diaries in social research to capture little experiences of everyday life (Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli, 2003; Creswell, 2007).

The idea of co-researchers highlighted two specific values often associated with RJ: the need to involve and give voice to those most affected; and the acknowledgement that process is as important – and sometimes more important – than end product (Cronin-Lampe & Cronin-Lampe, 2010; Hendry, 2009; Umbreit & Armour, 2011; Woolford, 2009). Engaging students as co-researchers embodied the first value as the student experience was prioritized; students were given voice and asked to offer their expertise. Secondly, the focus shifted to the process, rather

than product. Although the results of the students' inquiries were one significant part of the study, results were intertwined with the process in which they were achieved.

Rather than use the more vague term *co-researcher*, I talked about students as *detectives* or *reporters*. In Scotland, they were asked to pay attention for three days to whatever theme (communication, rules, or community) was discussed in the circle. Without using names or identifying factors, they took note of everything they saw or heard that had to do with that theme. *Taking note* entailed drawing pictures, writing words, writing quotations, whatever they were most comfortable with. I emphasized to them that they were to record that which they felt was significant; I wanted to know what they personally thought. We also discussed how to keep the notebooks safe (treating them as personal diaries that would not be shared with others) and how to record observations so as to not disrupt the class or their own learning (using breaks and time between classes to jot down ideas). At the end of each of the three days, they returned the notebooks to me so that they would not be lost and then picked them up in the morning before school began. This also allowed me the opportunity to see how the notebooks were progressing.

The first day when I retrieved the notebooks I was impressed by the variety of ways in which the students had approached their task: some had written pages of detailed notes; others had pictures and captions; some had a few point-form phrases; one had quotations from fellow students; and a few were blank. The second day, only a few of the students added anything to their initial notes. The third day, only one wrote additional observations. There was one that stayed blank throughout the whole process.

I was disappointed, wondering whether the task had been too onerous or too abstract, whether the students had simply gotten bored, or whether there had been anything of note for them to observe. I wondered whether this part of the research had failed, at least on two accounts

– failed to teach me about the student experience and failed to give students the experience of inquiring into their own realities.

It was not until I met with each student individually, as they explained their notebooks to me, that the meaning of the notebooks became evident. As there were 11 different personalities taking note, there were 11 different explanations and experiences. Common to all, however, was the idea that taking note was not confined to their notebooks. Some of the students with the least amount written down had the most to tell me about what they had seen, heard, observed and thought. It seemed that the act of intentionally asking students to take note caused students to pay increased attention to classroom dynamics and interactions, regardless of whether the notebooks were used. Most of the students began the interview by reading exactly what they had written or describing the pictures they had drawn. Once they relayed that aspect of their taking note, all elaborated on what they had seen: examples of behaviour, generalizations about their classroom, and thoughts about why things were the way they were. I was encouraged by how much more they had to report than what was actually recorded. The individual interviews were all recorded and transcribed. Both the transcriptions and the actual notebooks were used as data, contributing to the themes identified in the findings sections. The analysis process will be explained in the following section.

Meaning – for me as the researcher and for my co-researchers – was created in two ways: through the student explaining the notebook; and through the process of observing. The notebooks on their own meant very little to me as an outsider; each one needed to be given life through the voice of the student that had created it. The notebooks were used as a stepping stone in the interviews from which the student told me about his or her actual observations and what he or she felt they meant. This echoes the findings of Ellis, Hetherington, Lovell, McConaghy &

Viczko (2013) who looked at the use of pre-interview drawing activities and found that participants who referred to these drawings during interviews had greater observations, analyses, or reflective insights.

Secondly, meaning was created through the very process of observing. Most of the students took my request that they take note of their school very seriously. Even though some of them felt unable to write down their observations, they all had ideas and thoughts they wanted to share verbally. The act of asking them to take note of their school heightened their awareness of their everyday experience.

My initial sense that the notebooks had failed raised questions as to how to approach the idea of taking note in a different way in Alberta. Given that both the process of taking note and the process of explaining the notebooks to me elicited and validated the student perspective, I did not believe that the notebooks should be abandoned. I did, however, wish to make the experience more accessible to and satisfying for the student co-researchers.

I had hoped that by including the drawing of pictures under the rubric of note taking, the activity would be more inclusive of those students who, for whatever reason, did not have advanced writing skills. Indeed, one Scottish student who identified as having dyslexia chose to draw only pictures in his notebook. Yet, there were several individuals, regardless of writing ability, who found it difficult to take notes on what they were observing. One girl, Jemima², expressed a common sentiment: “I couldn’t put some stuff into words.” On the other hand, other students thrived during the activity of taking notes and observing their classes, mentioning how fun they found it.

² All the names used are the pseudonyms that the students invented for themselves.

My intention was to create the activity to be as open to interpretation as possible. Warren (2000), in an article on working with the students in his class as researchers, concluded that his students' experience would have benefited from a more open process where students decided what was important to include in their research activity. Dockrell, Lewis and Lindsay (2000) concurred, reminding us to use open-ended questions when interviewing students since questions that may seem neutral to adults can be interpreted as leading by children. Therefore, as much as possible, I wanted the students to decide what was important to include in their notebooks without my leading or intervention.

The fact that several students seemed unsure about what to include, however, caused me to wonder if the task was too abstract for some. Thus, in Alberta, I changed the activity slightly. In keeping with the idea of the student as expert, I brought the students together at the beginning of each observation day for a few minutes so that they could share different ideas for how to take note. I asked students to talk about how the previous day's observations had gone and to discuss any problems they had translating what they saw into their notebooks. Again, there was value in this strategy both as a product and a process. As product, the assumption was that students would be better equipped to record more of what they observed and share that with me. As process, the students were validated as having the answers within themselves. This practice also aligned with RJ's emphasis on collective problem solving.

Additionally, I altered the directions regarding the activity. In Scotland, I asked students to pay attention for three days to whatever theme was discussed in their learning circle – communication, rules or community. Therefore, the learning circle discussions potentially shaped what students thought of as appropriate for their notebooks. The learning circle discussions, while student focused, were still centred on questions that I, as an adult researcher, asked. In

Alberta, in an effort to lessen the effect that my own line of questioning might have had on the students' observations, as well as attempt to keep the activity fresh for the students, I asked all co-researchers, regardless of the learning circle in which they participated, to take note of all three themes: communication one day, rules the next, and community on the final day. This task was presented as their *mission of the day* during the short group morning meeting. Although I cannot attribute this directly to these changes, the majority of the notebooks in Alberta contained significantly more observations for all three days than in Scotland.

What emerged from among the students, in both Alberta and Scotland, was a dialogue between the abstract and the concrete. Student co-researchers engaged in a three-stage dialogic (Bakhtin, 1992) in which student insights were formed and then informed by the thoughts of others and their own observations. This dialogic process facilitated both student learning and the expression of the student experience. The process began in the learning circle, moved to the observations and continued with the student analysis of their experience.

The first stage occurred in the learning circles where, although concrete examples were given, the discussions often revolved around generalizations. Here are two examples: "People get along pretty good when they're not fighting. It's really peaceful and you just see friends being friends, and like, being funny. And you don't really see much big fights and people beating each other up here" (Alberta Community Group 2); The school is a community because "you've got a load of people that you ken and even if you're not pals with them, they're still there for you when you need them" (Scottish Community Group 1). Through these generalizations about the student experience and life at school, students put forward an initial analysis, one that had not yet been tested by observation and further thought.

In the second stage, the co-researcher observations and interviews took those generalizations and gave them texture by offering specific examples that either strengthened or dismissed the initial generalized analysis. For example, detailed illustrations were provided of how students treated one another: “Somebody asked for a pencil, right, and she went, ‘Nwa! You seen yourself, you’re not gettin’ my one!’ And then she just starts being mean and cheeky and it’s annoying...” (Georgia, Scotland). Other examples were given for how students worked to solve interpersonal issues: “The other boy that was, like, yelling at her and stuff started swearing at her, making fun of her parents, making fun of her. But then we helped her with the problem. We walked her away, we calmed her down, we made her laugh, we played with her, we gave her cookies, and some of us gave her gum. We talked to her and we talked to the boy, too” (Kitty Pie, Alberta).

The dialogic continued into the third stage as those concrete examples were then folded back into abstract generalizations and analysis during the final interview. I asked three questions at the end of each individual co-researcher interview: 1. From what you observed, what would you like to see more of in your school? 2. From what you observed, what would you like to see less of in your school? 3. If there were a new student arriving tomorrow, what would you tell him or her about your school? In answering these questions, students offered an analysis of what they had been observing over the three specific days combined with their general student experience in the school.

Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2000) declared that, “The reality experienced by children and young people in educational settings cannot be fully comprehended by inference and assumption” (61). Viewing students as experts of their own realities and providing opportunities for them to share that expertise and also to engage in an inquiry into these experiences, enriched both the

body of knowledge in my study and, hopefully, the individuals involved.

Data Analysis

As mentioned, data analysis is not one defined step that occurs after data collection but occurs at most stages of the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2007). I undertook the first systematic analysis of my data within weeks after finishing in each school. I quickly familiarized myself with the data so that I could provide individuals at the schools with reports of my findings in a timely manner. These reports were not focused on my own research interests but on the interests of the schools. I prepared several reports for each school including a two-page report on what I learned from the student learning circles and co-researcher activities, written in student-friendly language. Although this first level of analysis was conducted specifically to serve the interests of the schools, it allowed me to become quite familiar with the data.

Building on the familiarity with the data gained through generating the school reports, I then moved more fully into data analysis. Since I had collected multiple layers of data, analysis was also multi-pronged: I employed discourse analysis with the documents gathered and thematic analysis with the questionnaires, interviews, learning circles and co-researchers. They cannot nor should not, however, be viewed as separate endeavors; one level of analysis informs the other.

Moving deeper into the documents, in order to understand how Woolford's (2009) politics of RJ and discourses of affirmation and transformation operated within Scotland and Alberta, I utilized the lens of discourse analysis. Broadly put, discourse analysis approaches can be defined as either non-critical or critical. Lahlali (2007) describes non-critical approaches as descriptive, viewing language as a means of communication without reference to power; critical approaches, on the other hand, view language as a means for constructing and maintaining power

relations and subject positions. Gee (2011) characterizes critical discourse analysts as wanting to “speak to and, perhaps, intervene in, social or political issues, problems and controversies in the world” (p. 9). This point of view fits with Woolford’s (2009) concept of the politics of RJ and, therefore, I used a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach with the documents in my study.

Within CDA, there are numerous approaches from which to choose. Given the focus of this study on the politics of RJ, I turned to Foucault’s understanding of discourse and power – in particular disciplinary power (1979) and governmentality (1991). According to Jennings and Graham (1996), Foucault views discourse as sets of statements and practices, embedded in larger frameworks of social relationships, institutions, and power relations which, taken together, constitute “subjectivity”. Foucault views discourse as constructing and maintaining social norms which then help to shape individual identities. Utilizing this understanding of discourse assisted me in analyzing how RJ fit into larger institutional frameworks that served to affirm and strengthen the institution (and thus the status quo) as well as how RJ served to disrupt those larger frameworks. Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) allows analysts to explore conditions such as practices, policies, structures, and related discourses that maintain and strengthen the meaning of a particular discourse (Mosimakoko, 2011). FDA offers no prescribed technique, recognizing the complexity of discourses that are formed through history, culture, context and power relations. Instead, analysts are called upon to use a variety of techniques in order to attempt to unravel and understand discourse.

Besides a more general reading of documents to identify key themes and patterns, I also followed an FDA technique of interrogating *key words* to make visible opaque meanings. This technique builds on Williams’s (1976/1990) idea of key words as those terms that are not easy to define and yet are invoked as if the meaning is obvious. Kennelly and Llewellyn (2011) used this

technique to explore the idea of citizenship in Canadian curriculum documents, identifying descriptors, adjectives and the context surrounding concepts of citizenship in order to make visible the meanings underpinning citizenship. Likewise, in Scottish and Albertan documents, I explored the key terms often associated with RJ: relationships, behaviour, discipline and community. I pulled out all descriptors, adjectives, word couplings and the context surrounding these concepts so as to make visible the discourses within which RJ is set and through which it is framed. This analysis is discussed in the context chapters of this dissertation.

With the rest of the data, I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis (TA) approach. This approach pays attention to the choices the researcher makes throughout the analysis. As Taylor and Ussher (2001) write, "An account of themes 'emerging' or being 'discovered' is a passive account of the process of analysis, and it denies the active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers" (p. 80). To add rigour to TA – something that Braun and Clarke believe happens infrequently – this approach has the researcher consider several questions in order to make explicit the theoretical position of the analysis. These questions include: (a) Is the analysis inductive or deductive?; (b) Are themes explored at a semantic or latent level?; and (c) What epistemology guides your study?

To ground the TA for my study, I answered the questions backwards. My study was guided by a social constructionist epistemology and thus explored the sociocultural contexts and structural conditions within which individual accounts – student and staff – were situated. In order to explore these contexts, conditions and accounts, I analyzed data at a latent level. The latent level is where underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations, and ideologies are found that shape or inform the explicit utterances. According to Braun and Clarke (2006):

If we imagine our data three-dimensionally as an uneven blob of jelly, the semantic approach would seek to describe the surface of the jelly, its form and meaning, while the latent approach would seek to identify the features that gave it that particular form and meaning. Thus, for latent thematic analysis, the development of the themes themselves involves interpretative work, and the analysis that is produced is not just description, but is already theorized. (p. 84)

Finally, TA in my study was a mixture of deductive analysis, driven by my conceptual framework, as well as inductive analysis, driven by the data. Although it may sound contradictory to claim both an inductive and deductive analysis, I believe this is an accurate description of my data analysis. The large amount of data collected for this study afforded the two approaches. Data collected from adults in the study – educators, management teams, those outside the schools – were analyzed in a deductive fashion, attending to the affirmative-transformative continuum and to Woolford’s (2009) politics of RJ. I looked to this data to set the context for the student experience and coded the data through the lens of the discourses of affirmative and transformative RJ. Data collected from students, on the other hand, were analyzed inductively. Inductive analysis means that the identified themes are strongly linked to data (Patton, 1990), sometimes bearing little relation to the questions asked of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Students in neither school were familiar with RJ, thus I sought to understand their broad experiences of schooling without fitting those experiences into the affirmative-transformative RJ continuum. The data were coded based on repeating ideas that emerged, regardless of whether they fit within my conceptual framework. It is important to note, however, that my conceptual framework was present even if not used explicitly; data are never coded in an “epistemological vacuum” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

Grounded in these choices – social constructionism, latent analysis, deductive and inductive analysis – I followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases of TA: become familiar with the data; generate initial codes; search for themes; review themes; define and name themes; and produce the report. The results of this analysis can be found in the findings chapters of this study.

Strategies for Validating Findings

To ensure rigour within the conclusions I drew from the data, it was crucial that accepted strategies were employed to validate my findings. Creswell (2007) suggests that while any report of research is a representation by the author, validation strategies assist in documenting the accuracy of the study for the researcher, participants and readers. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend that the key to validating findings in TA is to be explicit about the process and ensure that what a researcher actually does matches up with what they purport to be doing. They provide a 15-point checklist of criteria for *good thematic analysis*. Simplifying this checklist yet still keeping with the theme of being explicit, Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) propose three criteria for determining what they referred to as the *justifiability* of a study’s procedure, analyses and findings: transparency, communicability and coherence. Transparency refers to the ease with which other researchers and readers are able to follow the steps taken by the researcher to arrive at his or her interpretation; communicability means that what the researcher proposes is understandable, especially to research participants themselves; and coherence refers to how the different parts of the study fit together to form clear and organized ideas.

The following outlines the steps I took in order to justify my study’s procedure and findings. In the interest of ensuring transparency, I positioned my role as the researcher throughout the study, recording my thoughts in a journal, naming my epistemological

assumptions, and making explicit the theoretical positioning of my analysis, rather than pretending that themes simply emerge. I was clear when I felt my own researcher bias was impinging upon the student inquiries and sought to make changes in the second phase in Alberta. In conjunction with clarifying researcher bias, I also sought to obtain transparency by clearly detailing the steps taken to arrive at the themes named in the findings and discussion section. As well, I was cognizant that I did not make claims inconsistent with my process and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, since I took a social constructionist view, I could not make any claims to understanding individual motivations or psychologies as revealed in interviews.

Communicability was obtained through the use of two validation strategies: providing the reader with a rich, detailed description of the cases and member checking. By setting the context through detailed description, the reader reaches a more nuanced understanding of the study and is better poised to determine whether specific findings are transferable to other cases (Creswell, 2007). I also engaged in member checking by initially sending reports to participants in the two schools; however, I received limited feedback.

To present a coherent interpretation of the data, I engaged in triangulation which involves making use of multiple and different sources and methods to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2007). I utilized six data collection techniques and two methods of data analysis. The findings were layered on top of one another, ensuring that themes generated were corroborated by multiple forms of evidence.

Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of the methodology I undertook for my study, detailing all aspects from design and data collection to analysis and validation strategies. The two

cases – Alberta and Scotland – were introduced in this chapter. The following two chapters describe the cases in depth.

Chapter Four: Scottish Context

Case Studies and Context

Case study researchers reach a deep understanding of their participants' multi-faceted reality by situating the case within its cultural and social context (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Orum, Feagin & Sjoberg, 1991; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). For my multi-site case study, in order to achieve a more holistic understanding of the student experience of RJ, I attempted to thoroughly analyze and describe the two settings in which my cases were situated.

As a social constructionist, I understand RJ not as a fixed entity, but as a concept that is fluid and contextual, recognizing the social origin of knowledge and meaning. Berger and Luckmann (1967) describe the *sociology of knowledge* as focusing on the processes by which any body of knowledge becomes socially established as reality. They argue that we live in an intersubjective world in which reality is socially constructed, interpreted and made meaningful. It is a world, they state, that originates in thoughts, language and actions and is maintained as real through the same. Social constructionism reveals a “radical interdependence” between ourselves and the world; we do not create meaning out of nothing, but construct it within relationship (Crotty, 1998, p. 45).

In my study of two schools, the student experiences were primary, nestled in the centre of the inquiry, yet engaged in a constant dialogic with other discourses that surrounded them. These discourses, evident in individual views and documents, both shaped and reflected how RJ was employed in schools in the different countries and formed the landscape within which to understand the student experience. It is this landscape that I describe in the following pages.

In order to describe the two sites, I analyzed national (or provincial), regional and school-specific documents and drew from interviews with individuals within the school itself as well as

the wider school system. I also wove into the analysis my own observations and experiences in Alberta and Scotland. Since this section presents information derived from data, it could conceivably be offered under the heading of findings. I have chosen to separate the context from the findings, however, as they serve two distinct purposes in this thesis. The context section allows the reader to enter into a rich understanding of the discourses that the students and staff were experiencing with RJ. Data were gathered from far-reaching sources to describe the context in as broad terms as possible. In the findings section, the focus narrows to the participants and their own understandings. Each chapter influences the other, a dialogic experience, and the data discussed in the two sections will merge again in the discussion chapter.

Scotland

National.

Broad discourses. Scotland is a semi-autonomous country; part of the United Kingdom but with its own parliament and government. Scotland covers nearly one third of the total land area of the UK, but contains just 12 per cent of its population (5.3 million) (United Kingdom Office for National Statistics, 2013; Scottish Government, 2013a). Based on Scotland's 2011 Census, 4 per cent of Scotland's population identified as part of a minority ethnic group with most (2.7 per cent of the population) identifying as Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British (National Records of Scotland, 2013). Despite historically being Western Europe's poorest nation (Herman, 2001), Scotland is no longer regarded as such, mostly due to the North Sea oil and gas reserves. Some estimates even place an independent Scotland as the sixth richest country in the world, 10 places above the UK as a whole (BBC News Scotland, 2011). The Gini coefficient, used to measure income inequality, shows that household income in Scotland was slightly more evenly distributed than in the UK as a whole (0.31 versus 0.34) in 2012/2013 (Communities

Analytical Services, 2014a). Still, in 2012/2013, 16 per cent of individuals in Scotland were living in relative poverty (Communities Analytical Services, 2014b).

In 1999, an act of the UK Parliament created the first Scottish Parliament since 1707, bestowing responsibility on Scotland for a range of issues known as devolved matters: education, civil and criminal justice, agriculture, environment, health, housing, local government, planning, police and fire services, social work, sports and the arts, and transportation (“How the Scottish Parliament Works,” 2012). The UK Parliament remains responsible for UK and international issues such as foreign affairs, defence, immigration and social security. The Scottish Government was also formed in 1999 and, since 2007, has been led by the Scottish National Party (SNP). The 2011 elections handed the SNP the first majority government in modern Scotland, with the SNP holding almost double the seats of the next largest party, the Scottish Labour Party. The SNP is “a social democratic political party committed to Scottish independence” (SNP, n.d., About Us section, para. 1). Following the 2011 win, then First Minister, Alex Salmond, announced that a national referendum on independence would be held within five years. For the SNP the devolution of power enacted in 1999 was only the first step to make Scotland into a “more ambitious and dynamic” independent country (SNP, n.d., The new Scotland section, para. 2). The independence referendum was scheduled for September 18, 2014 and dominated most conversations – political and otherwise – while I was in Scotland. Symbolic of its prominent presence in the minds of many Scots, the SNP website featured a countdown to the referendum in days, hours, minutes and seconds.

It was not only the Scots who were interested in the referendum; the world watched with rapt attention as the day of the vote approached (BBC News Scotland, 2014a). Although Scottish citizens eventually decided to remain part of the UK with 55 per cent of the vote (BBC News

Scotland, 2014b), the referendum had a huge impact in Scotland and beyond. In Scotland, the mere existence of the referendum spurred discussions and thought on what made Scotland unique and what the future of Scotland could entail. I witnessed these conversations taking place in Parliament, in the media, on the street, in schools and around the dinner table. It was an exceptional time to be present in Scotland, as its citizens debated the particulars of independence and imagined the ideal version of their country. Much was made of the growing chasm between the political direction being taken by the Conservative Party in Westminster (UK) and the more social democratic agenda being heralded by the SNP in Holyrood, Scottish Parliament. As Richards (2013) wrote in the *Guardian*, prior to the vote, even if the independence vote were to fail, the political and cultural separation between the two countries had already been solidified. Many Scots saw their vision of Scotland as a “better and fairer nation” (Yes Scotland, n.d., What Independent Scotland Can Mean section) running antithetical to the stated political priorities in England. Indeed, in recognition of this divide, Westminster promised to grant more devolved powers to Holyrood if Scotland voted ‘no’ (Black, 2014). Details of the new powers and what they will mean for Scotland will be finalized in 2015.

Scottish priorities were often identified in conversations and public documents in terms of the values that underpin actions, policies and beliefs. As an example, the Mace, originally a practical weapon intended to protect the king but now used in Parliament to symbolize the authority of the sovereign, repeatedly arose in conversation. Engraved on the head of the Scottish Mace in 1999 were the words: Wisdom, Justice, Compassion, and Integrity. These values seemed to represent the values of Scotland to many of the people with whom I spoke. In one interview the senior education manager in the Local Authority where I conducted my research described the Mace values as “a set of aspirations in the context of a Scottish culture which is in transition”

(personal communication, April 15, 2013). I attended a lecture by Sir Harry Burns, the chief medical officer for Scotland, who, at the end of a complex presentation on national health and wellbeing, suggested that the most important catalyst for societal change is one of the Mace values: compassion. He concluded, “Scotland has a tradition of this. We need to reignite that” (Burns, 2013).

My visit to the parliament to attend Question Time confirmed the central place of these values, at least as aspirations. The chamber itself was designed to “reflect the Parliament’s commitment to openness” (“What happens in the Debating Chamber?”, n.d.). Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) sit in a semi-circle, clustered according to their respective party affiliation. Although I cannot claim my experience to be representative, discussion was, for the most part, civil. The Minister for the Environment and Climate Change discussed a report revealing that Scotland had missed their first emissions reduction target and was on the road to miss the second. As The Minister was asked questions by opposition members, he frequently agreed with the person and often asked to meet later to collaborate on any suggestions. Everyone was in agreement that climate change was an important issue; the disagreement centred on how to go about addressing it. For example, a member of the Conservative and Unionist Party suggested giving tax breaks to people who put green technology into their homes. A later debate on the civil justice system was more combative, but only marginally. MSPs continually juggled Scottish needs with English demands/interests, in some ways portrayed as the common foe around which to unite disparate ideologies.

Scotland today is built firmly upon and around its history, both recent and distant. Living in Edinburgh for three months provided opportunity to visit cultural and historical sites and consider historical threads that continue to inform Scottish culture. Scotland of the 17th Century

was a nation shaped by an unforgiving Calvinist religious faith with frequent trials for witchcraft and blasphemy (Herman, 2001). Although there are traces of this history in modern Scotland, much more evident is the Scotland that came into being by the end of the 18th Century, that of the Scottish Enlightenment. Ironically, Herman (2001) asserts that this Scotland of innovation and change was made possible by the Act of the Union in 1707, joining Scotland and England into Great Britain. The very union that is today hotly debated, Herman suggests, provided Scots with peace and order within a strong administrative state that also largely ignored them. This union, he argues, allowed for rapid social and economic change. Although the intent of this section is not to explore the full complexities of Scottish history, the Scottish Enlightenment still influences society today and, as such, needs to be acknowledged. Considered by many to be the first modern nation and culture, Scotland has made crucial contributions to science, philosophy, literature, education, medicine, economics and politics (Herman, 2001). One of the great insights of the Scottish enlightenment was a sort of intellectual liberation that encouraged people to “free themselves from myths and to see the world as it really is” (Herman, 2001, p. 428). This ability to see the world as it really is, what we might today term *critical thinking*, was evident in many of my interactions with Scottish individuals and within organizations.

In more recent history, Scotland in the 20th Century was marred by poverty, unemployment, poor health, class conflict, political tribalism and religious sectarianism (BBC History, 2014). The Scottish economy was built mostly on heavy industry, bringing periods of great prosperity as well as scarcity. Once Margaret Thatcher came to power, these traditional industries – with coalmines being hit the hardest – no longer received government support and the power of the unions began to be eroded. In the first two years of the Thatcher administration, one fifth of Scotland’s workforce became unemployed (BBC History, 2014). Fifty years of

Scottish society were turned upside down. I happened to be visiting London the weekend Margaret Thatcher passed away in April 2013. The English press carried accolades and tributes; in Glasgow, 300 people gathered to celebrate her death (Daily Record, 2013). Although obviously still a sore spot for some Scots, Scotland has also moved beyond many of the ills that plagued it in recent past. “Confidence in both the economy and Scottish society at large increased through the 1990s and culminated in the re-opening of the Scottish Parliament” (BBC History, 20th Century Scotland – An Introduction section, para. 6). This confidence and guarded hope is represented in the poem written by the Scots Makar, Edwin Morgan, for the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 2004. “Open the Doors” reads, in part:

What do the people want of the place? They want it to be filled with thinking persons as open and adventurous as its architecture. A nest of fearies is what they do not want. A symposium of procrastinators is what they do not want. A phalanx of forelock-tuggers is what they do not want. And perhaps above all the droopy mantra of ‘it wizny me’ is what they do not want. Dear friends, dear lawgivers, dear parliamentarians, you are picking up a thread of pride and self-esteem that has been almost but not quite, oh no not quite, not ever broken or forgotten. (Morgan, 2004)

The past – both positive and negative – shapes Scotland of today.

Educational discourses. Education has long been seen as integral to forming the Scottish character and culture; a national education system was set up in 1696, well before that of other countries. The Scottish Parliament of the day passed an act establishing a school in every parish in Scotland, the intention being to equip all children of both genders with the skill to read the Bible (Herman, 2001). Scotland became Europe’s first modern literate society; some estimate

that male literacy stood at 75 per cent in 1750, compared with 53 per cent in England (Herman, 2001). In the 18th Century, this high literacy rate meant that most people were able to read the Bible and were exposed to books on a variety of subjects and ideas. The appreciation for literature continues: one of the main institutions of Scottish life is Burns night, the celebration of the national Bard, Robert Burns.

Education in Scotland today remains within a national system, distinct from the systems of England and Wales, delivered through 32 regional councils, called Local Authorities. The delivery of curriculum is the responsibility of these Local Authorities and local schools, under the guidance of the Scottish Government and a public body called Education Scotland, established in 2011 by the Scottish Government. This national system is often contrasted to that of England and Wales where there are a number of means of providing education, including a strong tradition of independent schools not funded by the state (D. Morrice, personal communication, March 26, 2013). In 2013, there were about 2600 state-funded schools in Scotland, including 370 state-funded faith schools – 366 Catholic, one Jewish and three Episcopalian (Scottish Government, 2013c). Scotland has two routes for teacher preparation: either through a four-year bachelor's of education or a one-year postgraduate program. In 2002, a Teacher Induction Scheme was introduced that gave all new teachers a paid yearlong placement in a mainstream school, complete with school-based mentoring, support and continuing professional development (CPD) (Donaldson, 2010). Statistics from 2012 show that the teaching profession is not fully representative of the demographics of the Scottish population: there is an overall gender imbalance among teachers (77 per cent women to 23 per cent men) which is reversed with secondary school headteachers (33 per cent are female); ethnic minorities are also under-

represented (2 per cent of teachers compared to 5.5 per cent of pupils) (Scottish National Statistics, 2012).

My research period in Scotland coincided with renewed discussion about the direction of education. In an interview with Anthony Finn, the Chief Executive Officer for the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), the independent professional body that promotes and regulates the teaching profession in Scotland, he characterized the present as a moment of “systemic coherence” in which both policies and people – teachers, unions, government – had aligned (A. Finn, personal communication, March 18, 2013). The main symbol of this alignment is the national curriculum framework, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), which began to be implemented in 2010.

CfE aims to achieve a “transformation in education” (Scottish Government, n.d., Curriculum for Excellence section, para. 1). The reform emerged out of a 2002 national debate on education which highlighted a variety of needs including: make learning more active, challenging and enjoyable; reduce overcrowding in the curriculum; and offer more choices to meet the needs of individual young people (Kidner, 2010). CfE is a broad curriculum framework for pupils between the ages of three and 18. It aims to develop four capacities: successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. There are three areas to be covered by all teachers (literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing) and three themes running across the curriculum (creativity, enterprise and global citizenship) (National Parent Forum of Scotland, Scottish Qualifications Authority, Education Scotland & Smarter Scotland, 2011). The curriculum recognizes four contexts for learning: the ethos and life of the school and community; curriculum areas and subjects; interdisciplinary learning; and opportunities for personal achievement (Association of Directors of Education Scotland [ADES], 2012). CfE is referred to

as a lifelong learning strategy or a broad framework since the government states it does not seek to “micromanage what goes on in individual schools” but wants schools to take responsibility for how CfE is interpreted and implemented (Scottish Government, n.d., Curriculum section).

The Management Board, the body responsible for overseeing how CfE is implemented, consists of seventeen different organizations. Included in this list are: the Scottish Government, various unions, GTCS, associations such as School Leaders Scotland, National Parent Forum Scotland, and Deans of Universities’ Faculties of Education. The inclusion of this vast array of organizations seems to have resulted in widespread support for CfE. Although there were specific suggestions – delaying implementation for a year, providing more CPD, increasing funding to local authorities – I found very little substantive criticism of CfE from these sectors. Another outcome of this network of organizations is a vast number of documents commenting on or explaining CfE, written by an array of sources for multiple audiences. Although the messaging is consistent across documents, emphasis differs. Communication aimed at parents often highlights how CfE is meant to increase standards of teaching and learning, whereas more general documents stress bringing learning to life. Sometimes the economy is highlighted; other times citizenship.

The systemic coherence as articulated by Finn and embodied in CfE has two main threads: the professional autonomy of teachers and pupil-centred education. On the first point, significantly different from the approach used previously in Scotland, CfE explicitly moves away from prescriptive implementation and allows teachers more professional autonomy. As Donaldson (2010), in a frequently referenced review of teacher education in Scotland, writes, CfE “sees schools and teachers as co-creators of the curriculum” (p. 4). This same point, however, received the most criticism from teachers who sometimes critiqued CfE as overly

confusing and vague. One study conducted by researchers at the University of Stirling found that although teachers welcomed the principles of CfE and voiced appreciation for more autonomy, they had difficulty implementing it; teachers also identified tensions between the big ideas articulated in CfE and the continuing emphasis on accountability, attainment and inspections (Priestley & Minty, 2013). Informal conversations with teachers confirmed some of this critical sentiment. One secondary teacher told me that CfE effectively dumbed down the curriculum, providing breadth but not depth, and did little but put new packaging on old ideas. Teachers, he said, have always worked to assist pupils in becoming successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens; they simply did not refer to them as the *four capacities*.

Yet it is also this focus on professional autonomy for teachers which constitutes part of what Anthony Finn of GTCS called systemic coherence. There are a number of policies and documents that combine to support this focus. The 2010 Donaldson Report on teacher education recognizes teaching as complex and challenging and calls for the strengthening of both the quality of teaching and the quality of leadership. In addition, new Professional Standards from GTCS were announced while I was in Scotland, and came into effect in August 2013, highlighting teachers' professionalism and the need for them to take ownership of their own learning. The Standards focus on three key themes: professional values and personal commitment; learning for sustainability; and leadership (GTCS, 2013). These ideas seemed to build upon a concept that I learned of during my interview with Drew Morrice, Assistant Secretary for Employment Relations for the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), the largest teaching union in Scotland and the oldest teaching union in the world. In this interview I learned about the Chartered Teacher program that was set up in 2001 to provide incentive to teachers to

improve their practice through Masters level learning while remaining in the classroom. Morrice referred to the program working on the principle of the “reflective practitioner,” a principle that produces a “greater willingness of teachers to look at their own practice and their own solutions rather than what I would have thought was a technocratic model that was prevalent in the 90s where teachers would be recipients of some received wisdom” (personal communication, March 26, 2013). The program has since been cancelled due to budget cuts. One of the new Professional Standards, however, claims to maintain the focus of the Chartered Teachers and there has been some funding allocated for teachers to otherwise attain Master’s degrees. Perhaps, as the teacher referenced earlier alluded, there is nothing new about Scottish teachers being reflective and professional practitioners; it is simply the packaging and wording that has become more coherent.

The other thread comprising systemic coherence has to do with making education more pupil centred. Again, in the interview with Anthony Finn, he suggested that a cultural shift was occurring: the school system no longer pivots around teacher needs but around pupil needs (personal communication, March 18, 2013). Central to this shift is Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), an approach that focuses on the well-being of children and young people and is threaded into all policy, practice, strategy and legislation affecting youth and their families. The Scottish government website detailing GIRFEC lists a wide range of policies and strategies that have helped to shape and reflect GIRFEC, including: CfE, the Scottish Children’s Charter and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. GIRFEC encourages individuals and agencies to work together to meet the needs of children and takes a whole child approach, putting the child at the centre of all decisions that affect them (Scottish Government, n.d., What is GIRFEC? section). Aligning with GIRFEC, the Additional Support for Learning Act, introduced in 2004 and amended in 2009, “places duties on local authorities, and other agencies, to provide

additional support where needed to enable any child or young person to benefit from education” (Education Scotland, n.d.-b, About Additional Support Needs section, para. 1). There is a broad understanding of additional support needs (ASN), with factors that may lead to children needing additional support falling into four overlapping categories: learning environment, family circumstances, disability or health need, and social and emotional factors. In 2012, 17.6 per cent of all pupils were identified as requiring additional support (Scottish Government, 2013b). Thus, the two concepts combining to create Anthony Finn’s “systemic coherence” are greater professional autonomy for teachers and pupil-centred education. It is within this context that RJ must be understood.

Restorative discourses. Scotland introduced its school RJ pilot project in 2004 (Hendry, 2009; McCluskey et al., 2008b). Scottish practitioners drew on the experience of other countries to glean information, apply previously developed ideas and build their own model specific to Scotland (Hendry, 2009). A tradition of involving pupils and families in decision-making, inter-professional meetings to deal with serious difficulties provided a context where the principles were in place to embrace RJ (McCluskey et al., 2008b). Interestingly, McCluskey et al. (2008b) write, the distinctly Scottish approach largely “rejects the theoretical framework of restorative justice and draws instead on a more humanistic, person-centred perspective accompanied by a strong sociological understanding of the complexities of schooling” (p. 209).

Although formally introduced in 2004, some principles and practices of RJ – such as this person-centred perspective – had been previously evident in Scottish schools. Finn, who worked as a head teacher before moving into his role at GTCS, recalls RJ being discussed and used 20 years ago, albeit without the restorative title. One impetus for RJ, according to Finn, was the high rate of exclusions – what are called suspensions in North America. The goal was not simply to

bring the rate down, but for schools to substantially address the needs of pupils that led to exclusions and to help them feel included in the school community (A. Finn, personal communication, March 18, 2013).

Not every inclination in Scottish schools, however, was a natural fit with RJ. In their interviews, both the senior education manager for the Local Authority I studied and one of the region's education officers recalled the challenging educational environment into which RJ was introduced. Corporal punishment had only been banned in the late 1990s and most teachers, according to my interviewees, were filling the vacuum with what are termed *punishment exercises*, the writing of lines (Education Officer, personal communication, April 15, 2013; Senior Education Manager, personal communication, April 15, 2013). Despite the intentions and practices of some individual educators and schools, the overall priority in Scotland was to ensure discipline, not to meet the underlying needs of pupils. It is into this environment that the newly devolved government stepped. The Education Minister, Peter Peacock, began a personal crusade to bring RJ into the education sector (Education Officer, personal communication, March 11, 2013). In the words of the senior education manager, Peacock was merely "opening up the idea that there might be more in the toolbox than simply punishment exercises which were being deployed pretty heavily" (personal communication, April 15, 2013).

The connection between RJ, discipline and exclusion rates was clearly evident in the initial presentation and framing of the concept. In 2003, the Scottish Executive (called the Scottish Government after 2007) formally introduced the idea of RJ in a document on school exclusion (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey, Riddell, Stead & Weedon, 2007). In this document RJ was suggested as a way to re-integrate pupils after exclusions and encourage positive school atmospheres (Scottish Executive, 2003). There was a sense in the late 1990s – confirmed by the

Discipline Task Group convened in 2000 – that discipline was a growing issue in schools (Scottish Executive, 2001). In 2004, as part of their *Better Behaviour, Better Learning* initiative, funding was provided by the Scottish Executive for a two-year pilot project on RJ in 18 schools (including ten secondary schools) in three local authorities. This funding was later extended by a further two years (Kane et al., 2007). The aim of the pilot project was to learn more about the impact of RJ on school culture, to change schools for the better and to identify a distinctively Scottish approach that both complemented existing practice and offered more (Kane et al., 2007; McCluskey, Kane, Lloyd, Riddell, Stead & Weedon, 2013). At the launch of the pilot project, an evaluation team consisting of researchers from the University of Edinburgh and the University of Glasgow was created. The two-year evaluation (Kane et al., 2007) and its follow up (Lloyd & McCluskey, 2009) comprise the largest evaluation of RJ undertaken in the UK to date (McCluskey et al., 2013).

The evaluation team attempted to design and conduct research in a manner congruent with restorative aims. The methods were negotiated throughout the research period with a range of stakeholders, including funders, local authorities and school personnel (McCluskey et al., 2013). The evaluation was mixed-method and both formative and summative, encouraging participants to learn more about RJ as a result of their participation. The active involvement of the schools and local authorities allowed “different definitions and criteria for success to be developed, acknowledged and applied” (McCluskey et al., 2013, p. 145) so that schools were judged according to their own aims.

Although there were diverse approaches across these schools, initial development in secondary schools was strongly linked to dealing with discipline, which is consistent with the broad impetus of using RJ to lower exclusion rates (Kane et al., 2007). This initial focus,

however, morphed throughout the pilot project. At the start, many school managers envisioned RJ mainly taking the form of isolated formal conferences to deal with serious issues; in reality this use was limited. As the evaluation revealed,

In the early days there was an emphasis that this [RJ] was just one more tool in the tool-box; another strategy for schools to use when necessary. However there was a move within the two years to the wider view that RP [restorative practices] could become a broad framework of values, strategies, practices and skills and that some other initiatives would fit successfully into this framework but that others might not. (Kane et al., 2007, p. 97)

For all schools, the development of a comprehensive restorative ethos was the touchstone of success. A restorative ethos was defined in the report as including: an understanding of the importance of preventing harm to others and of resolving harm and conflict in helpful, supportive ways; respect between staff and pupils and among pupils; a feeling among pupils and staff that they are included and treated equitably; a sense that school processes are carried out with fairness and justice; and that staff and pupils reported feeling safe and happy. Greatest success was identified in schools that had as their overall aim, improving school ethos through positive relationships throughout the school community (Kane et al., 2007).

The follow-up report in 2009 found schools continued to develop RJ successfully in a way that suited their own local needs and circumstances and RJ was identified as becoming *embedded* in school culture (Lloyd & McCluskey, 2009). Acknowledging the difficulty in studying such factors, the report points out that among schools that felt they had been most successful at embedding RJ, it was also more difficult to “isolate it as a distinctive practice and as the identifying characteristic of success in developing a positive ethos” (Lloyd & McCluskey,

2009, p. 4). Despite the move to a broad restorative ethos, the report also found that schools were divided as to whether RJ was the main response to disciplinary issues or worked alongside other more punitive responses. This outcome highlights some of the inherent tensions between values that underpin RJ and those that underpin more common approaches based on behavioural theories (Hendry, 2009; McCluskey et al., 2008a; Morrison, 2007a; Reimer, 2009).

In terms of what constitutes a distinctively Scottish approach to RJ, Kane et al. (2007) stress several aspects. They found that RJ in these Scottish schools derived more from humanistic/person-centred psychology, social models and sociological perspectives on education – all which underpin other social and educational interventions with children in Scotland – than from the theoretical underpinnings of RJ in the criminal justice field. RJ, they found, was compatible with the view of schools as complex institutions with competing ideas, tensions and personal disagreements. As opposed to the approach taken in many countries, Scotland utilized few external facilitators and instead focused on developing school staff and pupils in line with individual contexts and complexities. The Scottish model attends to these complexities by being “broadly focused, encompassing prevention, response and intervention and, sometimes, reparation” (Kane et al., 2007, p. 98). A headteacher was quoted in the 2009 report commenting on how well RJ fit with “Curriculum for Excellence and the new direction I hope Scottish education is going to take” (Lloyd & McCluskey, 2009, p. 9).

While being broadly focused in practice, there continued to be a tendency to link RJ not with ethos or relationships, but with behaviour and disciplinary matters. Toward the end of the first evaluation, in response to a 2006 national discipline survey, the Scottish Executive, teaching unions, GTCS and others put forward a joint plan including an expectation that every local authority and headteacher use a mix of approaches including RJ to respond to discipline issues, or

indiscipline as it is termed in Scotland (Kane et al., 2007). At the same time, the Scottish Executive established a Positive Behaviour Team to support local authorities in embedding such positive behaviour approaches in schools.

Linking RJ to behaviour and exclusion was confirmed in my interview with Drew Morrice of the teaching union, EIS. Indeed, the two EIS documents that Morrice chose to provide me with as background testify to this connection: *Summary of EIS Policies on Violence, Challenging Behaviour and Physical Restraint* (2010); and the *Education Committee's Resources to Reduce Exclusion* (2013). Overall, the impression given in the interview was that EIS was supportive of initiatives such as RJ, provided that teachers maintained the freedom to use their professional judgment in dealing with behaviour issues. Morrice's one caution was when RJ is "used almost politically" to reduce exclusion rates. As he put it: "If you reduce the exclusion rates, does that mean you're finding more effective solutions? Or are you just internalizing difficulties? And are schools becoming more difficult to work in? A lot of our evidence is that teachers are being expected to put up with more indiscipline" (D. Morrice, personal communication, March 26, 2013).

In this instance, Morrice was suggesting that RJ might lead to more discipline issues, by keeping disruptive children in school. The exclusion rate had indeed gone down in recent years, from 60.4 pupils per 1000 in 2005/2006 to 40.0 in 2010/2011 with RJ – along with a list of other strategies and changes such as CfE – deemed responsible for the reduction (EIS, 2013). Over half of the local authorities that responded to a call from EIS listed RJ as one of the approaches they have used to reduce exclusion rates.

In most other instances, the link between RJ and discipline is framed as a response, one undertaken to reduce the need for exclusion. The most recent national survey on behaviour

suggested positive overall changes to discipline issues. Within secondary schools, the survey showed that 99 per cent of headteachers, 88 per cent of teachers and 61 per cent of support staff felt that all or most pupils were generally well behaved (Black, Chamberlain, Murray, Sewel & Skelton, 2012). In the report, 88 per cent of secondary schools listed using RJ to encourage positive behaviour, up from 75 per cent in 2009. Among the large number of other approaches used, the most common listed was the promotion of positive behaviour through whole school ethos and values. Thus, although situated around behaviour and discipline issues, this framing paints too simple a picture of how RJ is intended. The narrow emphasis on RJ as a way to improve behaviour seemed to expand each year. The 2012 report concluded that “staff were far more inclined to refer to ‘relationships’, rather than ‘behaviour management’ or ‘indiscipline’ when talking about the ways in which they deal with negative behaviour” (Black et al., 2012, p. iv). A leaflet distributed in 2010 to examine how to further improve relationships and behaviour with CfE also identified the ethos and culture of a school as the foundation on which to build a supportive, inclusive and peaceful learning environment and that RJ was one way to develop this ethos (Education Scotland, 2010). Even the mandate of the Positive Behaviour Team, despite its rather narrow title, supported local authorities to “promote positive relationships, social and emotional wellbeing, and positive behaviour” (Education Scotland, n.d.-a, About Positive Relationships and Behaviour section). In recognition of this mandate, in 2013, after I left Scotland, the name for the team was changed to the Rights, Support and Wellbeing Team.

The messages surrounding RJ in a national context appear mixed, focusing either on positive behaviour or on developing good relationships and a positive ethos. To move beyond these general themes and patterns, I turned to the Education Scotland website and the page that explains RJ. The page itself sits under the title Positive Relationships and Behaviour. I used

Williams's (1976/1990) technique of interrogating *key words* to make visible opaque meanings. I pulled out all descriptors, adjectives, word couplings and the context surrounding the concepts of relationships, behaviour and ethos to make visible the discourses within which RJ is set and through which it is framed. Relationships were described as *positive, social* and *harmonious*. Both respecting others and mutual engagement emerged as key RJ principles connected to relationships. Behaviour was paired with words such as *positive, management* and *responsible*. There was also the sense that people need to understand the impact of their actions, engage in opportunities for reflective change and not to pathologise behaviour. Ethos was connected with words and phrases such as *positive, restorative climate, fair, equitable, whole school, safe, structured, supportive* and *peaceful*. Ethos was discussed as something that needed to be developed as well as a necessary precursor for the development of relationships and positive behaviour. In the text, the main emphasis was on positive and harmonious relationships, created within a supportive and fair ethos. Somewhat in contrast, however, were two videos provided on the Website for viewers to "see restorative approaches in action in secondary schools" (Education Scotland, n.d.-c, Restorative Approaches section). These videos were framed as introducing "one of the latest behaviour management tools available to teachers" with the first one involving "bad behaviour" and showing how to avoid "instant punishment". This video profiles a restorative conversation that transforms into a lecture, ending with the teacher making the ultimate decision on what consequences the pupils would receive. The webpage as a whole reflects the broader Scottish discourse around RJ – aspirations are focused on relationships and ethos, but, in reality, the practice falls back upon behaviour.

Regional.

Broad discourses. The region where my study was conducted has a population of over 300,000 and is a mix of urban, suburban, fishing and rural communities (Lloyd et al., 2007). The area has a long industrial and agricultural history. The motto of one of the Burghs within the region refers to coal and sail, an indication of the two interdependent industries which, at the time, brought with them development and prosperity (XXXX, 1994). For centuries, the sea provided a living for many people in the towns, with one of villages boasting one of the largest fishing fleets in Scotland (Scottish Local Authority Heritage Centre pamphlet, n.d.). Coal mining replaced fishing as the heart of life in the area from at least the 17th century up until the 1980s (Scottish Local Authority Heritage Centre, n.d.). Beyond the production in the mines, coal also drove many other industries, particularly shipping. By 1905 more coal was being shipped through the region's ports than in any other port in Scotland (XXXX, 1994). The growth in the economy was reflected in the growth in the population. One Burgh grew from 2700 people in 1900 to 20,000 in 1951³(XXXX, 1994). Housing was often provided by the coal and railway companies, making the region an attractive place for prospective workers (XXXX, 1994). Through most of the 19th and early 20th centuries, unemployment was not an issue and the number of poor people was low (XXXX, 2012). Images and personal recollections displayed at the local history museum reveal bustling, prosperous towns full of optimism, modern conveniences and even international style thanks to the many foreign ships docking in the ports.

A series of events constituted a quick downturn in the region's prospects. A general strike by miners in the 1920s to highlight poor working conditions and low pay rallied the community

³ A slight change in boundaries also accounted for some of this growth (XXXX, 1994).

around the workers; it did not, however, improve relations with the mine owners (XXXX, 1994). After the Second World War, the use of the docks began to decline, with dismantling and demolition taking place in the 1970s. This decline coincided with a fatal fire and the closing of several coalmines (XXXX, 1994). A man visiting the local history museum at the same time as me described how the town in which the museum is located had once been a boomtown. But, he said, the strike, then the fire, then Thatcher, killed it all. In the 1980s, a local historian described the area as “derelict” and “deprived” and, giving the economic situation precedence over other aspects of community, surmised bleakly that it “would be looked upon more as an area where houses rather than industry can be found” (XXXX, 1987).

Today the region is mixed, with some areas of significant economic deprivation and other areas where the economy is organized around new ventures. Between 2002 and 2008, poverty rates in the region were only slightly higher than the Scottish average (Scottish Government, 2010). The town in which the school I studied was located, however, was not faring as well as other parts of the region. School staff often referred to children in the area as being third-generation unemployed, meaning that their parents had never known sustainable employment and their grandparents had likely been the ones to lose jobs in the mines and docks. In fact, a 1990s document claimed that well over three quarters of the pupils in the catchment area fit this category (XXXX, 199X). Most of the homes in the area were either owned by the council, a form of subsidized housing, or were council homes bought by private citizens, a controversial plan implemented during Thatcher rule (XXXX, 1987). Walking back to the school from the local history museum, I was struck by the stark contrast between the booming company town displayed in the museum and the worn-down council town of the present.

Educational discourses. The Local Authority is well aware of how the region's history and current situation impact pupils and their educational experience. In an interview with the senior education manager in the Local Authority, I was told that there was a "strong political commitment in [the region] to trying to break the cycle of disadvantage" that was seen to affect the 20 per cent of pupils who are the least successful in school (personal communication, April 15, 2013). Although this manager associated the cycle of disadvantage with families that had been involved with mining and heavy industry, he was quick to point out that contrary to the usual framing of the issue as an economic one, it was in fact a cultural, psychological, and social phenomenon. Thus, the Local Authority saw the greatest hope for breaking the cycle of disadvantage within the context of education, rather than primarily in economic solutions. Specifically, the senior education manager mentioned quality engagement and relationships as key. Discourses of engagement, relationships and disadvantage framed education in the region.

The region is currently home to almost two dozen secondary, over 100 primary and several special schools. Special schools provide enhanced provision for pupils requiring support beyond what is offered in mainstream schools. As in the rest of Scotland, the history of education in the region is mixed, revealing values and principles that both align with and contradict the discourses of engagement and relationships. On the one hand, the region was an early adaptor in prioritizing the needs of pupils; it was one of the first to set up pupil support centres in schools, where learning and behavioural support were undertaken as an integrated endeavor (A. Finn, personal communication, March 18, 2013). On the other hand, the long religious tradition of seeing punishment as the route to redemption led to the leather strap being designed in the late 1800s by a saddler in a nearby region and manufactured for over 100 years. Teachers apparently liked the design of this particular strap because it was easier to wield and had no sharp edges to

cause serious damage. After a booming market in the 70s, corporal punishment was banned in state schools in 1987 and in fee-paying schools in 1998. The straps are still being made today, though as commemorative items. Thus a history of innovation and attention to pupil needs is tempered by a culture that sought order and obedience in schools through the use of force.

That tension between pupil needs and school order was present in other less extreme ways, as well. The local education officer told me that much of the 80s and 90s were characterized by behavioural psychological approaches to managing discipline and behaviour issues within schools (personal communication, March 11, 2013). Educational psychologists, of which the educational officer was one for 20 years, have played a key role in Scottish schools since the 70s, influencing the various approaches that are taken to meet pupils' needs and deal with school issues. Thus the reliance on behavioural approaches is not surprising as it mirrors the general popularity at the time of behaviourism (Graham, 2010). Although feedback from teachers to these approaches was positive, the education officer eventually realized that behavioural approaches were "making teachers very, very good at controlling and managing children, but weren't making children very good at controlling and managing themselves" (personal communication, March 11, 2013).

The local senior education manager suggested to me that there had been a recent move from the concept of behaviour management to discussions about relationships and nurture (personal communication, April 15, 2013). As the local education officer pointed out, the move was not a radical one since most behaviour problems in schools are really relationship problems (personal communication, April 15, 2013). This shift is reflected most visibly in a name change for the regional integrated strategy for school improvement planning, policy development, staff development, staff support and pupil and parental involvement. Previously entitled the Behaviour

and Discipline Strategy, it was renamed the Strategy for Relationships and Behaviour in 2012. The name change, according to a preamble in a report on the Strategy, reflected an evolving understanding of the critical nature of relationships in shaping behaviour within organizations, and the importance of developing in youth the capacity to manage their own behaviour. The report goes on to name this shift as a national trend, one in which the region is a recognized leader. Indeed, in connecting local and national trends, the regional Strategy suggests that the four capacities laid out in the national Curriculum for Excellence are best developed in schools where relationships are nurtured within a positive ethos (Scottish Local Authority, 2011). To do this, the senior education manager suggested, requires an organizational development approach to behaviour and relationships in which the capacity of staff is built to understand how best to respond to the needs of young people (personal communication, April 15, 2013).

From most accounts, this approach appears to be working. The Strategy for Relationships and Behaviour (Scottish Local Authority, 2011) reported that recent surveys and inspections all indicated that both the quality of relationships in local schools and the overall behaviour of pupils are good and improving. In a regional pupil survey conducted in 2012, 81 per cent of pupils felt that their school helped them feel safe and cared for; 81 per cent felt their school helped everyone to feel included; and, 77 per cent agreed that their school helped them understand how to make friends and build relationships (Pupil Survey, 2012). Interestingly, 68 per cent (and, broken down further, only 42 per cent of secondary students) felt their school was good at helping pupils behave well. The staff survey on relationships and behaviour in regional schools shows an increase in staff who identify having access to effective strategies for dealing with challenging behaviour, from 68 per cent in 2005 to 88 per cent in 2012. Despite these strategies, however, 79 per cent of teachers felt that managing challenging behaviour seriously detracted from their

teaching time or duties. An analysis in the report suggests that the response to this statement is an indicator of the importance of “good order” to effective learning and teaching (Education and Learning Directorate, 2012). This stress on *good order*, as well as the fact that most staff survey questions focused on behaviour and not relationships, suggest that the practice and even priorities lag behind name changes and aspirations.

Yet the way forward, according to many documents and my interviews, appears to be through relationship-focused approaches. In the survey, teachers were asked about the extent to which various initiatives were helpful in addressing relationship and behavioural issues. Both primary teachers (89 per cent) and secondary teachers (69 per cent) rated RJ as the most effective. Other approaches that were highly ranked were Nurturing Approaches and Rights Respecting Schools. Nurturing Approaches are based on theories of attachment and resilience and involve adults providing pupils with consistent and reliable responses to their social, emotional and physical needs thus developing trusting relationships (Scottish Local Authority, 2011). Nurturing Approaches were seen to be most effective for the 20 per cent of pupils identified as the most disadvantaged and was often used in conjunction with RJ and self-regulation techniques (Education Officer, personal communication, March 11, 2013). Rights Respecting Schools work to develop a positive ethos in which students are aware of their own rights and respect the rights of others. Attesting to the presence of this approach, 87 per cent of pupils in the survey agreed that their school ensures that they know about their rights and responsibilities (Pupil Survey, 2012).

As we have seen, acclaimed approaches seem mostly relationship-focused; intentional choices have been made to re-name policies to reflect this focus. Yet, the survey questions provided to teachers reflect a different reality – one where behaviour, order and discipline are

fore-fronted. Even when relationships are emphasized, they are sometimes framed as a vehicle for good behaviour. It is within this context that we can begin to understand the role of RJ in the region.

Restorative discourses. This region was amongst those chosen to be part of the restorative pilot project in 2004. Six schools within the region – both primary and secondary – were selected to participate. According to the local education officer, there was a confluence of interests as the local authority was questioning its approach to behaviour at the same time that the government launched the initiative into restorative practices, as it was called then (personal communication, March 11, 2013). The conversations that were taking place around relationships and behaviour shaped the restorative pilot project in a number of ways unique to this local authority.

For one, rather than utilizing the government's term, restorative practices, the local authority made an intentional choice after the first year of the project to use the term, restorative approaches (RA). As the local education officer explained, "What we came to realize, collectively, as an education community ... was that, actually, the practice bit of it was quite secondary to the values bit of it. It was actually what you thought and what you believed that made the difference" (personal communication, March 11, 2013). Using the term RA signaled recognition that the concept was broader than simply learning steps and technique. This vision was reflected in the description of RA on the local authority's Website during the pilot project: "Caring, mutually supportive, empathetic, engaging, collegiate, non-threatening but challenging – and within a framework where responsibility and accountability is made clear and confidentiality respected" (as found in Kane et al., 2007). In acknowledgement of this intentional word choice, I will use the term RA for the remainder of this chapter and in the Scottish findings chapter.

According to the final report of the first two years of the pilot project, there were other unique features of implementation in this particular local authority: schools were encouraged to develop their own approaches and to visit, share and teach each other; schools developed individual action plans that were supported by the local authority; although some schools chose to focus on high-level incidents and formal restorative conferencing, many saw low-level interventions (informally enacted in the classroom and hallway) as the most effective way to create positive change; and, many educational initiatives – such as those outlined in the previous section – were seen as supportive of RA, helping in its development but also making it difficult to gauge its impact (Kane et al., 2007). Each school had the chance to identify their own training needs and a mix of internal and external training sessions occurred. External trainers included SACRO (a Scottish community justice organization); Bob Costello from International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP, an international not-for-profit organization); and Margaret Thorsborne and Peta Blood (two Australian trainers in restorative practice, circle time, and healthy relationships) (Kane et al., 2007). Evidenced in this list are a range of approaches influenced by three different countries, diverse sites of practice (justice system, schools, workplace, community) and different underpinning philosophies (from a narrow focus on promoting social order – see Vaandering, 2013 for a critique of IIRP – to a broad focus on healthy relationships). Although all influenced the development of RA in the region, it is difficult to say the extent of the influence of each individual person or organization.

Looking at the secondary schools in the pilot project, Kane et al.'s (2007) report identified several strengths and challenges in terms of RA implementation and use. Among the strengths: key members of staff were committed to and modeled RA; some staff were incorporating restorative language into informal conversations; restorative meetings were being used to address

conflict both between pupils and between staff and pupils; and disciplinary policies and procedures were being revised to be more restorative (Kane et al., 2007). Among the challenges: a need to work on a broader understanding of RA; RA was not always seen as equitable and just by all; and the role and use of punishment and sanctions needed to be examined more thoroughly (Kane et al., 2007). Attending to this last point, the report challenges the region's secondary schools to "be aware that renaming punishment exercises as, for example, 'a consequence' may not make it more restorative" (Kane et al., 2007, p. 39). This is a point that I will return to in my own analysis of RA in the researched school.

Although the focus of my study was on a secondary school, to expand my understanding of RA in the region, I visited one of the primary schools that had been part of the pilot project. I interviewed the headteacher and also was given a tour of the school. According to both the headteacher and the local education officer, the school had had a serious reputation for indiscipline amongst the pupils and dysfunction amongst the staff. The headteacher told how, before she arrived, the teaching union had provided staff members with noise meters to prove that working conditions were hazardous (personal communication, April 15, 2013). The headteacher was hired and immediately declared that there would be no more exclusions, a move viewed as foolhardy by most staff and one that caused some staff to leave. The headteacher's direction, however, was backed up by the broader restorative philosophy when the school was selected the following year to be part of the pilot project. I was told many stories that illustrated how the school had been transformed in the past decade, largely attributed to what the education officer called the school's "holistic restorative model" (personal communication, April 15, 2013). Although identified as one of the most economically deprived schools in the region, the last pupil survey revealed that almost 100 per cent of the pupils enjoyed learning, felt safe and supported

by their teachers; as well, every morning the staff *huddle* for 15 minutes in a voluntary meeting to share any information that might assist them with supporting their pupils (Primary Headteacher, personal communication, April 15, 2013). Indeed, walking around the school I was struck by the openness of staff and the focused chatter of the children. I also witnessed staff members dealing with a boy who was, as the headteacher put it, “obviously struggling today.” He had been on the roof at lunchtime and I heard him yell, “Go fuck yourself!” to a teacher. Staff were speaking calmly to him, asking him questions and providing him space to respond away from other pupils. It was a real-time example of both the challenges the school faces and their approach. The education officer and the headteacher remarked that RA works in this school because the leadership already embodied restorative values which made the school ready to embark on the project. Indeed the headteacher expressed frustration that other schools in the immediate area did not operate restoratively, leaving the pupils with inconsistent messaging once they moved into secondary school.

There have been a number of changes in terms of RA in the region – steps forward and steps backwards – since the pilot project ended. For one, during the time of the project, there was money available for speakers, trainers, site visits, and dedicated staff to promote and develop RA; the global recession has had a significant impact on this and schools are now asked to network and train internally and at low- to no-cost. Yet, as evidenced in the primary school visit, some schools continued to embrace RA wholeheartedly. The education officer estimated that although almost every school in the region would claim to be restorative, only about 25 per cent would “pass a fairly high threshold and the rest would be spread out along the continuum” (personal communication, March 11, 2013). He told a story of a secondary school planning to hang a banner announcing themselves as a restorative school, which they intended to be – in every

situation except for when pupils swear at teachers. He saw this as an example of a school only partially committed to restorative philosophy, when it allowed the authority of the staff to remain intact. The challenge, as the education officer articulated, was to move away from simply using restorative language to actually enacting the principles and values. This challenge was made greater by the lack of funds available.

One unique initiative to meet the challenge of enacting restorative principles emerged during the pilot project and continues to be used today. The local authority developed their own tool to gauge the values, understandings and practices as expressed by school staff (Education Officer, personal communication, March 11, 2013). The rationale for this approach was to delay the introduction of RA into schools where RA would most likely not be sustained or would only be implemented in a narrow form. It also allowed the local authority to identify how to support schools to a position themselves to be ready to adopt RA (Senior Education Manager, personal communication, April 15, 2013).

To attempt a more rigorous exploration of the discourses surrounding RA in the region, I again turned to Williams's (1976/1990) technique of interrogating *key words* to make visible opaque meanings surrounding the RA concepts of *relationships*, *behaviour* and *ethos*. For this analysis, I examined four documents: the tool devised by the region to test the appropriateness of introducing RA; the section in the region's Strategy for Relationships and Behaviour on RA; one PowerPoint presentation explaining how RA fits in with the Strategy for Relationships and Behaviour; and one PowerPoint presentation used to introduce RA to new teachers in the region. Interestingly, what I discovered was a much more nuanced picture of RA than that which was expressed in national documents. Although, as in the national documents, relationships were described broadly as *positive* and *social*, there was more of a specific focus on *mutual respect*

and the need to support young people who are “struggling to participate in social groups”. Again, behaviour was paired with such words as *positive*, *manage* and *inappropriate* but these rather opaque terms were given meaning through a focus on the social consequences that *inappropriate behaviour* can bring as well as the potential “motivations/intentions behind the behaviour.” Most of the documents articulated the belief that *good behaviour* needs to be taught and that young people can change the way they behave. Ethos was connected to terms such as *positive*, *climate of respect and trust*, *receptive culture* and *social responsibility*. In one document, ethos was identified as “broad commonly held values” and three of the documents urged participants to honestly evaluate their school’s ethos. With all three key words, values were frequently discussed, including, for the first time in my experience, asking what values are being taught through behaviour management policies. In addition, although there was still a primary focus on the pupils in terms of changing behaviour and building relationship skills, these documents all emphasized the importance for adults to be modeling and teaching the skills and attitudes they wished to foster. While the national documents seemed split between a focus on relationships and behaviour, the regional documents merged the two seamlessly, by both focusing on the underlying values and bringing the responsibility of adults into the picture.

School. To gain a sense of the school, both past and present, I analyzed a wide variety of documents, either produced by the school or about the school. In the interest of maintaining the anonymity of the participants in this study, however, it is not possible to provide names and identifying information about the documents. Thus, the documents I used to describe the context of the Scottish school will be identified as Document A. Each document will be given a number and the year the document was published, if available, will be provided (e.g., Document A, 5,

2012). In this way, I hope to maintain confidentiality while at the same time documenting the basis for my assertions.

General discourses. The school was built in the early 1960s when it served over 1000 pupils. By the late 1980s, the number of registered pupils dropped by a few hundred; the Scottish government website shows just over 500 pupils registered in 2012 (Education Scotland, 2012). It is a non-denominational, six-year comprehensive school, where all pupils are accepted regardless of academic achievement or aptitude. It is located in a community which has experienced large scale unemployment and social deprivation (Document A, 5, 2012). Indeed, the Scottish government calculates the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals in 2012/2013 as more than double the national average (Education Scotland, 2013). Several staff members, including those who had attended the school when they themselves were pupils, told me that the school had been economically mixed in the past; the catchment area used to include middle-class neighbourhoods, until those families progressively decided to send their children to schools seen as more upper class. Eventually the catchment area was changed to reflect where families were sending their children, ensuring that the school's reputation as a lower-income school was reflected in reality. The deputy headteacher confirmed this evolution, adding that the school was simultaneously becoming known for high-quality pupil support, resulting in more pupils with high needs registering in the school, and thus even more middle-class families withdrawing. Currently, with falling numbers and aging infrastructure, the school is in limbo, with proposals put forth to possibly close the school in the near future.

The school was homogeneous in more ways than socio-economic status. In all of Scotland, in 2012, 5.5 per cent of pupils indicated being from a minority ethnic group (Scottish National Statistics, 2012). Although no statistics were readily available for the school, my own

observations as well as conversations with staff suggested that almost all, if not all of the pupils in the school were White Scottish. As one teacher explained, immigrants are not drawn to places where there are no opportunities for employment. The same teacher declared that, given the homogeneity of the population, there were no issues of racism or sectarianism within the school. That did not, of course, mean that other issues were absent.

One issue frequently referred to was the disconnection between the culture surrounding the school and that which the school hoped to foster within their walls. According to the deputy headteacher, "... out there it's dog-eat-dog, and they hit each other and fight with each other and so on and so forth. It's reasonably violent, which we don't get in the school. It bubbles over sometimes but we don't pick up much of it" (personal communication, February 22, 2013). Several members of the senior management team called the school an "oasis of calm" within the chaotic, violent atmosphere in which the pupils spent the rest of their time. They lamented the fact that the oasis which they experienced did not feature prominently in public perception: "There is a perception out there that young people about [the school] run amok and are loud and cause bother and are riotous and there's no teaching takes place. And when you're in here, it's relatively calm" (Depute Headteacher, personal communication, February 22, 2013).

Part of this perception seems based not on the school's current situation, but its recent past. The headteacher, who joined the school in 2005, recalled a very aggressive environment. He illustrated this environment by describing his first day on the job: he walked in the door of the school to find two prefects, the pupil leaders of the school, physically fighting and the two deputy headteachers holding them back. For his first two years at the school, there was not a week that went by without the police being called in to deal with an incident. The conflicted relationships, according to the headteacher, extended to parents and staff, as well. Parents did not trust the

school and phoned the local councilors with issues rather than speaking directly with the school, teaching unions were involved in regards to pupil discipline issues, and relationships between many members of the school community were tenuous.

As a first step, with the intention of sending a message to the community and staff that the school was serious about getting pupil behaviour under control, senior management began excluding (suspending) pupils at a much higher rate than previously:

Indeed, at one point [our exclusion rates] were the highest in Scotland. And I make no apologies for that. Other than I don't believe in exclusion. I generally don't believe in exclusion. It doesn't work. But in order to support the staff where they were, and how they felt – because they felt quite low, in terms of their morale. They needed to be supported. (Headteacher, personal communication, February 26, 2013)

To corroborate the headteacher's account of the school's recent past, I turned to the archives maintained by the school librarian. He produces a binder for each year, filled with columns he writes on school life for the local newspaper, and other articles that mention the school or any pupil, present and past, ranging from notes about graduating to getting arrested. After poring through the 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 binders, the overall impression I received was one of a school in transition, firmly on the move from a *bad school* to a *rising star*. The headteacher is portrayed as competent and levelheaded, never giving what might be termed a *soft* response (he responds with zero tolerance when a weapon is brought to school) but assuring the community that despite isolated incidents, the majority of pupils respect each other and the school property. Several articles which mention the school's rising reputation refer to School of Ambition funding that the school had received. This government funding, discontinued in 2010, was meant to raise aspirations of pupils by introducing new initiatives in schools. At this school,

it translated into a renewed focus on drama and the performing arts, resulting in new programs and new facilities. As evidenced in the school archives, it also sent a message to the community that they should raise their expectations of the school.

From 2006 until the period I spent in the school, that message continued to be sent, mostly reflecting the reality on the ground. A School Improvement Plan (Document A, 5, 2012) demonstrated that all of the Quality Indicators used to evaluate progress had either stayed constant or increased between 2007 and 2012. A 2008 school inspection (Document A, 1, 2008) identified the following key strengths in the school: pupils' wide achievement; support for vulnerable pupils; well-considered curricular innovation; improving behaviour and attendance; and staff involvement in improving the school under the leadership of the headteacher. The inspection highlighted how the school, although still struggling to help pupils attain appropriate national levels in reading, writing and mathematics, was becoming increasingly successful at helping pupils achieve and pupils were beginning to have higher expectations of themselves. The school's motto, focused on lifelong learning, was mentioned by the headteacher as the long-term goal to which they aspired.

It was not only official inspectors that noticed that the school was improving: the headteacher talked about a recent visit from a retired colleague who commented on how much less violent the school had become; the Report on the School Improvement Plan mentioned how parents regularly commented on the productive, supportive and inclusive atmosphere they experienced when entering the school (Document A, 5, 2012); and a teacher survey cited one teacher's observation that the school was starting to feel more cohesive (Document A, 4, 2010). Indeed, my first day in the school left me with similar impressions. From the moment I walked in people were friendly and open; I noted that pupils entered the school doors seemingly laden with

issues and that adults greeted them sincerely, ready to walk with them. As I waited in the reception area to meet the deputy headteacher, I examined a shiny mock-up of a potential new school. A first year pupil approached and asked me what I was looking at. I replied, “I think it’s a new school.” I pointed out how nice the stained glass was, and he sighed and said, “Yeah, but I want to stay here. I like this school.”

Of course, first impressions are only that. My future experiences, as well as my data and other documents, reveal a much more complex situation. The 2010 teacher survey showed, among other indicators, that while over 50 per cent of the teaching staff agreed that staff and pupils respect each other, no one strongly agreed, 30 per cent disagreed and less than 10 per cent strongly disagreed (Document A, 4, 2010). This perception is reflected in the large number of times that I heard the school referred to as a *challenging* one. Sometimes challenging was defined as aggression and disrespect on the part of the pupils; other times it was defined as refreshing honesty. As three teachers, in informal conversation, told me early on, “There’s no culture like this school’s. In most schools, classrooms are silent, teachers are addressed as Miss or Sir. Not here. We have kids who want to have a voice.”

It is precisely these challenging pupils who informed the culture of school. Document A, 5 (2012) named the pupils who were “hardest to reach” as the ones the school most focused on. The deputy headteacher confirmed this, stating emphatically, “We never give up on young people, no matter what they’ve done, no matter how difficult it is, we’ll always keep trying and trying and trying” (personal communication, February 22, 2013). This insistence on working with all pupils garnered both praise and criticism from staff. Many staff pointed out to me that the school was inclusive. Several followed that statement with the refrain: Sometimes too much so.

Despite whether they found the inclusivity positive or negative, all staff agreed that it added to the challenge.

One of the ways that the school addressed the wide variety of challenges faced by and from their pupils was by establishing links with external organizations. These included colleges, social workers, businesses, and local elected members among other agencies and individuals (Document A, 1, 2008; Document A, 5, 2012). In a recent survey undertaken by the school, 87 per cent of staff agreed or strongly agreed that the school establishes good relationships with other agencies (Document A, 2, n.d.). One of those relationships brought about School of Football, which many male pupils raved about. According to the football association website:

The Scottish FA Schools of Football are about more than just playing ability, they aim to mould better citizens and develop social and academic abilities through the vehicle of football. As part of the programme pupils follow an enhanced timetable which includes a period of football activity every day. Football is used as a tool to motivate the pupils, enhance their social skills such as communication, listening and behaviour with the programme's success being evaluated through factors such as school attendance and academic improvement. (Scottish Football Association, 2015, School of Football section, para. 2)

Three male pupils, part of School of Football, were selected, they told me, not because of their football skills, but because their teachers reported that they had both good and bad traits and recommended that they needed this program. The pupils agreed.

The Pupil Support Faculty, an internal mechanism, was widely cited by both staff and pupils as key to dealing with the challenges faced by the school. Pupil Support represents an integration of three areas formerly seen as separate entities: behaviour support, guidance and

learning support services. Pupil Support staff work with pupils who find it difficult to cope with aspects of school life due to social, emotional or behavioural issues; they also work with teaching staff to promote positive behaviour and good relationships (Document A, 7, n.d.). According to one document, approximately one quarter of the pupils have access to Pupil Support (Document A, 3, n.d.). Some pupils have periods in the Pupil Support Centre regularly scheduled into their timetable; others are sent there by teachers when they are having difficulties. I spent an hour in the Centre my first day, speaking with pupils and staff. When I walked into the Centre, one member of staff was talking to a male pupil who had an interview the following week at the local College. He was attempting to prepare the pupil for all possibilities, discussing the bus timetable and other logistics. He later explained how such logistics are sometimes the biggest hurdles: neither pupils nor their families often leave town so any sort of arrangements can flummox them and sabotage the best laid plans. Pupil Support had just started a new program to send high-needs pupils once a week to a course offered in a college so as to normalize the experience and help pupils see it as a possible part of their future. Pupil Support staff were lauded in several reports for being skillful, sensitive and rigorous in meeting pupils' emotional, physical and social needs (Document A, 1, 2008; Document A, 5, 2012). The depute headteacher called Pupil Support "a victim of their own success, because they are constantly really, really busy. I feel that the young people trust them enough to go in there and deal with it" (personal communication, February 22, 2013).

For those pupils who required more intensive support, a new initiative, the Inclusion Room, existed. The Inclusion Room was an in-school room for pupils who were excluded or who were at risk of exclusion, introducing them to a range of learning techniques and coping strategies. The staff member was not a teacher, but a community educator employed by a

company contracted to work in the school. She ran a number of groups (such as anger management, girls group, first year group) to work on specific issues with the pupils. The staff member described her room as a safe place for pupils to honestly say what they were thinking and feeling. Amongst staff, reviews were mixed. Some staff appreciated the work being done in the Inclusion Room; others were unsure what the Room was actually accomplishing. As testimony to the confusion about the Room felt by some in the school community, I once overheard the headteacher, while escorting a pupil to the Room, respond to the pupil, “No, it’s called the *Inclusion* not the *Exclusion* Room.”

Another initiative undertaken by the school to address the challenging environment was Unicef’s Rights Respecting Schools (RRS). The school had recently achieved Level 1 status as a RRS and prominently displayed this title on many of their publications. According to the Unicef United Kingdom website, The RRS Award:

Recognises achievement in putting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) at the heart of a school’s planning, policies, practice and ethos. A rights-respecting school not only teaches about children’s rights but also models rights and respect in all its relationships: between teachers/adults and pupils, between adults and between pupils. (Unicef, n.d.)

Achieving this award was a joint effort between staff and pupils, especially the Pupil Union (what we call Student Council in Canada), as part of a RRS committee. The headteacher emphasized the rigour involved in the evaluation process to be named a RRS:

They come in here for days, Unicef, and they question staff, they watch behaviours, how people role model. They looked at our programs of work in the school to see where rights were being highlighted, and responsibilities. They looked at how the community reacted

towards the school. They spoke to members of the community about how the youngsters behaved in the community at lunchtime and at interval, how they respected themselves.

(personal communication, February 26, 2013)

Being identified as deserving of this award seemed to validate how far the school had evolved, in their own eyes. The school was working toward Level 2 status while I was visiting, the highest level available through Unicef, which is a recognition that the values and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are fully embedded in the school ethos. In light of the endeavor to achieve this level, the school had recently compiled a report, shared with me, in which each department identified how RRS values and principles were evidenced through both curricular and non-curricular examples (Document A, 8, 2013). Perusing the examples sheds light on a number of aspects: similarities and differences amongst departments, what is happening both in classrooms and behind the scenes, and how staff interpret Rights Respecting values. The main themes that emerged were: mutual respect, pupil input (particularly in the creation of rules), citizenship, positive relationships, and inclusion. Interestingly, RA was often mentioned as an indication of Rights Respecting ethos.

Seen as crucial to the implementation of these programs and, indeed, to the overall culture of the school, was the leadership provided by the senior management team. This team consisted of one headteacher, two deputy headteachers and a business manager. Their leadership was uniformly praised, in official reports and by all staff members with whom I spoke. The team was described as being collegiate and consulting staff on important issues (Document A, 5, 2012) and the 2008 school inspection suggested that the headteacher was one of the main reasons for the school's revival. According to that report, the headteacher and his vision had won the respect of pupils, parents and staff (Document A, 1, 2008). The headteacher attempted to visit each

classroom every day, creating a sense of familiarity and connection. Although I did not have experience in any other secondary school, I was assured by staff members that the team's collegial, open-door approach was not typical of management teams in Scotland.

The praise the team received was consistent with what I observed. During interviews, the two members of the management team with whom I had the most contact – the headteacher and the deputy headteacher responsible for pupil support – both highlighted collaboration and inclusivity, in the pursuit of meeting the pupils' needs, as part of their broader visions. The deputy headteacher described his philosophy of education as wanting to “make a difference in the life chances and life expectancy for young people, and make Scotland a better place. It seems pretty grand, but that's what it's all about” (personal communication, February 22, 2013). As an example of the systemic coherence referenced earlier, the deputy headteacher saw his goals affirmed by the Curriculum for Excellence's focus on developing the whole person. The headteacher expressed similar ideas, as well as a desire for continual reflection in the pursuit of making a difference in pupils' lives. Throughout my time in the school, I was impressed by how the headteacher and deputy headteacher interacted with the pupils: they knew each pupil's name as we walked about the school and often used a personal question, joke or anecdote to relate to that pupil.

Of course, leadership within the management team is only one component. The teaching staff contributes significantly to the culture of a school. In this school, as is to be expected with a staff of about 60 teachers, this contribution and its interpretation, although mostly positive, was mixed. Two of the words used most frequently to describe the staff were *supportive* and *reflective* (Deputy Headteacher, personal communication, February 28, 2013; Document A, 5, 2012). Several staff members lauded the level of support they receive from colleagues and described it

as being crucial to surviving in a challenging school environment. The statistics show a slightly less consistent sense of support: the 2010 teacher survey indicates that three quarters of staff agree that staff communicate effectively with each other (Document A, 4, 2010). This number drops to about two thirds in a more recent survey (Document A, 2, n.d.) when asked if an ethos of mutual support and collaboration exists across staff. Staff also often highlighted feeling involved in many aspects of school life and their strong commitment to the pupils. The headteacher, while describing the staff as cohesive, collegial and forward-thinking, admitted that there were members of staff who were dubious about the direction the school was taking, thus detracting from staff cohesiveness.

As in most schools, the staff room was a microcosm of everything else happening in the school. I witnessed honest grappling as teachers struggled to do their best and support one another, embodying the reflective nature and critical thinking that I had come to identify with Scottish culture. I also witnessed teachers putting up barriers whether due to insecurities, ideologies, fatigue or other reasons. The staff room was a large, open room with couches, a kitchen, and a whole variety of posters and information. On the first day I was shocked to note that the room was split between men and women: men sat on the couches; women sat at the table. Only one time in over three weeks did I witness any mingling: one man sat at the table once. I asked some teachers about this separation, yet, no one I asked had noticed. My question morphed into a discussion about how they actually use the staff room, as opposed to most other schools where staff rooms sit empty. The teachers I spoke with felt that the staff room was representative of the close and collegial nature of the staff. As an example of this, every day the pupil-run café set big kettles of tea and coffee, and snacks, for the staff at break/tea time. The staff contributed

money each month to support this and most participated. When I remarked on this wonderful practice, I was rather pointedly told by one of the teachers, “we are a cooperative staff.”

As an outsider, I often felt awkward at lunch and the conversation seemed forced. One day, however, when only females were in the staff room (the men all went to the pupil-run café on that particular day of the week), the talk focused on specific pupils and the teachers’ struggles with them. A few teachers wondered if they had done the right thing as they relayed various examples. The conversation felt extremely supportive and reflective, exactly as the staff had been continually described. Yet, the next day, one of those same teachers confided as to how she found the staff room demoralizing. She said when she arrived it took six weeks before anyone spoke to her.

Although the findings section will focus on the pupil experience in-depth, I do want to highlight a few points that emerged within the documents and my related observations. The depute headteacher, elaborating on the idea of the school as oasis, described the pupil experience within the school as one where they feel safe, listened to and supported (personal communication, February 22, 2013). To illustrate, on my first day in the school, while talking with the depute headteacher in his office, a pupil arrived late and without his uniform. He was given a waiver and I was later informed of his situation, a devastatingly tragic one. The depute headteacher knew of his situation and welcomed him into the school for the day, as a bit of a respite.

A focus group conducted with S1 (first year) pupils for an unrelated study was helpful in understanding some of the nuances within the pupil experience (Document A, 2, n.d.). According to the focus group results, pupils felt they could speak with staff if there was a need; and they felt that they would be able to access help if they were being bullied. However, the results also showed that pupils felt punished unfairly sometimes and were not confident about getting help

from teachers for their learning. Most staff concurred with this latter point. In the same study, only 43 per cent of staff agreed that pupils felt confident to ask questions and take risks with their learning.

Despite – or perhaps because of – this identified lack of confidence in asking questions and getting academic help, the school emphasized encouraging pupil voice. This interest was often connected to the RRS program. In the School Improvement Plan, pupils’ active contribution to the corporate life of the school was one of the priorities (Document A, 5, 2012) with such examples as the Pupil Union and pupil evaluations. The 2008 school inspection report also highlighted these examples (among others), suggesting that they were only utilized, however, by a “significant minority” (Document A, 1, 2008).

I witnessed both the prioritizing and the exercising of pupil voice. One day, while in the library, I met a very confident upper-year pupil. She was campaigning for a seat in the Scottish Youth Parliament. According to the Website, this Parliament is:

the democratically elected voice of Scotland’s young people. We are a young people’s parliament, designed by young people and led by young people for the benefit of young people. We are committed to ensuring young people are heard by the decision makers of Scotland and we are determined to campaign on the issues which matter most to Scotland’s youth. (Scottish Youth Parliament, 2015, home page, para. 1)

Pupils from all over the region elect one person to represent them in the Parliament. This particular pupil also discussed the Pupil Union in the school and felt quite positive about what they had been able to achieve. She felt that the senior management team listened closely to pupils but some teachers were not as open. As illustration of the multidimensional lives experienced by

pupils at the school, about a week after this conversation, this pupil was in a rough brawl at the school with another girl.

Pupils also had voice in more informal ways, at least in some classrooms. When I went up to the drama room to locate some pupils for one of the learning circles, they were already sitting in a circle. In preparation for their next acting assignment, they were sharing examples of police interviews. All but two or three of about 15 pupils had had police interviews before. These were first year pupils, most of them 12 or 13 years old. They went around the circle telling their stories: one girl had smashed someone's window because she was bored; another had been extremely drunk; a boy had been in a fight. As the teacher told me later, "The thing is, they're absolutely honest. They're not devious." The specific pupil experience in the school will be teased out further in the findings chapter.

The pupil experience was situated within a school context that prioritized both healthy relationships and positive behaviour, similar to the national and regional discourses. While obviously not mutually exclusive, it is important to point out the varied messages pupils were receiving and when those messages might conflict. In personal conversation, interviews and some documents, building healthy relationships was seen as key to creating an effective learning environment. This was especially true in interviews with the senior management team. The depute headteacher identified the building of relationships as the most important aspect of education. The headteacher concurred, praising the strong relationships between staff and pupils and referring to the school as one big family. As he said, "For some of the youngsters in this area, school is the most stable part of their lives. And it's very important to them that they have relationships with the teachers and the teachers here know that" (personal communication, February 26, 2013). In a recent analysis of school needs (Document A, 3, n.d.) staff both

acknowledged how important relationships were for the pupils and indicated that they saw building relationships as part of their job. A recent survey (Document A, 2, n.d.) recommended focusing even more attention on building relationships – between the school, parents and wider community – and considered ways to obtain pupils’ views on school issues as part of a more regular occurrence.

Other documents present a more interrelated view of relationships and behaviour. The report on department ethos (Document A, 8, 2013), found that most departments list positive behaviour as an indication of rights respecting. Positive behaviour, however, is only one indicator among many that also include mutual respect, pupil involvement, restorative language and positive relationships. Another staff document on RRS emphasizes that same interrelation (Document A, 9, n.d.). It states that a positive learning environment is characterized by good order, courtesy and mutual respect, all built upon relationships between staff and pupils. Relationships, in this instance, seem to be useful for their ability to promote good order. Good order arises again in a parental information booklet (Document A, 7, n.d.) in which positive behaviour is equated with good order. The end goal, however, the booklet continues, is not order in and of itself, but a safe and respectful learning environment for pupils to realize their full potential.

How this focus on relationships and behaviour translates into the pupil experience suggests a bit of confusion. One reason that the move to relationships was increasingly emphasized to deal with discipline issues was, as the depute headteacher suggested, due to the fact that other more mainstream methods did not work. “If you shout at a young person here, they will shout back at you, twice as hard and you will lose, so there’s no point” (personal communication, February 22, 2013). He admitted that some departments still focus on

disciplinary measures such as detentions but that most have moved away from such practices. Yet, in the teacher survey (Document A, 4, 2010), many staff members did not seem satisfied with the current approach, wishing for more emphasis on behaviour. Just over half of staff felt that the promotion of good behaviour had appropriate emphasis within the school and many comments referred to the minority of pupils who chose not to behave and were given, as some wrote, “far too many chances” (Document A, 4, 2010). A current code of behaviour brochure distributed to pupils (Document A, 6, n.d.) did not refer to mutual respect or relationships, except in terms of being polite to others and not challenging the authority of teachers. The brochure stated that the pupil commitment to the school was to, among other points, follow the school rules and follow the teacher’s instructions in class (Document A, 6, n.d.). Thus, although relationships may be seen to be at the root of many practices, what seems to be most readily communicated by staff and to pupils is a need for order and good behaviour.

What I saw on the ground reflected much of this. I witnessed numerous examples of healthy relationships between pupils and staff, particularly with pupils that were less engaged in school and were identified as having difficult lives outside of school. Within the Inclusion Room, for instance, relationships were being built that kept pupils returning day after day, even if voicing their desire to be elsewhere. When given the option, one young man begged to be allowed to continue in the program. Yet these same pupils were required daily to carry with them yellow behaviour slips. Each period, the class teacher would write a comment about the pupil’s behaviour and sign the slip; the pupil would then ensure that his/her parents/carers signed the slip each evening and returned the slip in the morning. I wondered how it felt to carry this slip around and whether it had the desired effect. According to the custodial staff I spoke with, more of this practice was what was needed. They felt that there had been a steady increase in indiscipline.

Pupils, they thought, got cheekier and cheekier with no respect for anyone. They blamed it on the *soft* teaching occurring in the school. Some teachers might agree with them but the official direction the school was moving in was decidedly toward the *soft* teaching and relationships and away from the *hard* methods and a focus on only behaviour. Currently, however, it was teetering in between the two. This is the context into which RA was introduced.

Restorative discourses. Although the region was selected to be part of the restorative pilot project in 2004, the school did not fully participate at that time. The school still benefitted, however, from the focus on RA, attending some training sessions and being part of the broader conversation. Once the pilot project finished in 2008, momentum for the initiative carried several other schools, including the studied school, forward. The school was deemed “ready” according to the region’s school assessment tool and a few key staff members were invited for a two-day course offered by an external facilitator.

Drawing inspiration from that course, the school started work on integrating RA organically, rather than embark on a structured implementation phase. As the deputy headteacher told me, “We’ve kind of almost fallen into it by being part way along the road and then identifying, here, we do some of that, and then kind of building that” (personal communication, February 28, 2013). Members of the senior management team, along with a small steering committee, were the first to embrace RA and show explicit support for the approach. They felt RA was a good fit both with their existing school code of conduct as well as RRS work. They wanted, however, to also connect it to the good practice already occurring in the school. The deputy headteacher analyzed figures coming out of different departments and found that some departments had low exclusion rates and high levels of pupil engagement, where other departments were excluding those same pupils and were unable to engage them. They wanted to

know what some departments were doing that others were not. They discovered that “some members of staff were actually very good at getting sworn at because of their interactions with young people” (personal communication, February 22, 2013). So their journey with RA actually began with a focus on interpersonal interactions.

The school brought the external facilitator back to teach a larger number of staff about the benefits of RA, in particular using restorative language to encourage positive interactions and positive responses. A group of volunteer teachers, roughly 10-15, committed to using restorative language in their classes and working towards positive interactions. They took notes of the experience and met regularly to discuss successes and challenges. Once the senior management team was convinced of the success of this initial foray, they started putting more information out to staff. All five of the school’s in-service days were dedicated to RA in 2008. There was a lot of interest in RA and 1/3 of the staff were trained as facilitators that year by regional educational psychologists.

The first year also saw a great deal of outreach in order to educate pupils and parents. The school produced a parent leaflet, a pupil leaflet, assemblies for pupils and offered a half-day of training for S1 pupils focused on RA and emotional intelligence. Both the headteacher and the depute headteacher mentioned how well the pupil training went, due to many having been exposed to RA in their primary schools. The headteacher admitted, “actually, they were better prepared for it then we were, in many respects” (personal communication, February 26, 2013). Some parents were unsure, wanting to see punishment for incidents. The depute headteacher, however, thought they were won over quite quickly, in large part due to the tradition of involving pupils and parents in planning meetings which were already fairly restorative.

In that first year, there were just over 100 requests for restorative meetings. Although the staff were encouraged to consider using a restorative meeting, the depute headteacher emphasized that they were voluntary. Although the school continued to exclude pupils, exclusions went down considerably, as did referrals to the office and the need for exclusions and referrals. It was not an easy transition, however. The depute headteacher thought that “the staff found it quite hard at the start because, you know, they were having to give a bit of themselves” (personal communication, February 22, 2013). There were issues they needed to figure out, too: some staff felt the timing was not right for some incidents; some pupils felt that teachers were using restorative meetings to punish them. The steering committee used this information to continually tweak the approach. In the following year, the number of staff asking for a restorative meeting dropped considerably. Two potential reasons for this drop emerged: most staff felt able to deal with issues themselves in a restorative manner rather than ask someone else to facilitate; some simply did not believe it was the right approach. The senior management had no illusions that the staff were unanimously supportive of RA; but they did believe the majority was. The support, however, they felt needed to be continually encouraged: “It’s a constant drip feed that you need to keep going and going and going” (Depute Headteacher, personal communication, February 22, 2013).

There were several reasons why the senior management team felt it important to keep the drip feed going, goals that they identified for RA. A main aim in the beginning had been to bring down not the number of exclusions, but the need for exclusions. This goal was actually, in some ways, tied more to staff than to pupils. According to both the headteacher and the depute headteacher an attitude had existed among staff that discipline problems were the domain of senior management. The team, however, wanted teachers to be able to deal with behaviour issues and classroom management issues on their own, within the classroom. RA was seen as a way to

fully empower and support staff to do so. The goal was to help staff see dealing with behaviour issues as part of the process of teaching and learning and also to view it as a way to build a trusting relationship with pupils (Headteacher, personal communication, February 26, 2013). Both members of the senior management team felt that staff were much more empowered now than previously, even if some staff found this approach more difficult. Prior to RA, the deputy headteacher would be called into classes to ask pupils to remove their jackets or to put their phones away. Staff grew more confident and improved relationships with pupils. As such, the need for exclusions had dropped drastically.

In terms of the importance of RA for pupils, the headteacher described RA as a solution-focused approach that worked to restore relationships so that everyone could work together within the school. The ultimate goal of RA, he said, was a “more ordered society in the school” (personal communication, February 26, 2013). Elaborating, that ordered society would include: greater respect, less violence, more engaged pupils, and a safe environment where learning for life was promoted. The deputy headteacher was equally as ambitious in his view. He hoped that RA would provide pupils with the “best learning experiences, to build their confidence, build their resilience, to give them hope that there’s things better than they’re suffering outside” (personal communication, February 22, 2013). They felt that most pupils responded well to RA and preferred being actively involved in a solution rather than receiving punishment. The deputy headteacher noted a greater degree of trust and honesty from pupils: “Pupils are much more likely to admit to doing something wrong because they know that they’re not going to get a row or shouted at and they know they’re going to get an opportunity to sort it out” (personal communication, February 28, 2013). He also mentioned evidence of improved relationships and behaviour, backed up by a staff survey (Document A, 2, n.d.). Staff also felt relationships with

pupils and pupil behaviour had been impacted by RA. It is interesting to note that as ambitious as the visions for RA were, the biggest indicators of its impact again returned to relationships and behaviour. Though, admittedly, improvements in those two realms are much easier to identify than resilience and hope.

A quotation from the deputy headteacher summed up the current state of RA in the school: “There is a fine line between it being embedded and it being lost” (personal communication, February 22, 2013). He noted this during an explanation for why RA was not as visible as a few years ago. Gone were the pupil and parent pamphlets, the pupil assemblies and the half-day pupil training. On the one hand, he said, this pointed to RA being so embedded in practice that there was not the need for it to be explicit; on the other hand, it could have been that people had forgotten the message and were ceasing to implement it. There was evidence that pointed to both scenarios.

In the embedded scenario, there had been a cultural shift, moving away from facilitated restorative meetings for isolated incidents back to the origins of RA in the school: restorative interactions. The deputy headteacher defined this as “restorative, interactive classrooms involving the young people and their learning; making the learning interesting, interactive, making communication purposeful and positive” (personal communication, February 28, 2013). The cultural shift had been initiated and modeled from the top down, with the senior management team applying the same restorative expectations on themselves as on staff and pupils. The deputy headteacher felt that the longer pupils were in the school, the more embedded RA was in their own interactions, i.e., S4 pupils were much more restorative than S1 pupils.

RA also fit well with other initiatives within the school, suggesting that RA was embedded in the greater aims of the school. The headteacher described RA as a *catalyst* bringing

together a diversity of approaches: building capacity amongst staff; encouraging inclusion; reducing the number of exclusions from school; improving the learning experience for pupils; becoming a nurturing school; and achieving the RRS award (personal communication, February 26, 2013). Indeed, embedding RA throughout the school was identified as one of the main priorities for the 2012/2013 school year (Document A, 5, 2012). Yet, as mentioned in the national pilot project study, the cohesiveness with other initiatives also made it more difficult to isolate RA as a distinctive characteristic of success (Lloyd & McCluskey, 2009).

On the other hand, as evidence of RA being lost, one survey suggested inconsistency in the use of RA across the school (Document A, 2, n.d.). The depute headteacher identified a minority of staff as wanting someone else to deal with issues and as desiring more punishment. Interestingly, he thought the least restorative staff were those who had recently graduated from teacher education programmes. The headteacher, too, felt that RA was not for everyone and not for every situation. He saw RA as “part of our menu of approaches that we can use to work with and manage pupil and, indeed, staff behaviour. It’s part of a menu; it’s not the only thing that’s in there” (personal communication, February 26, 2013). Realistic, for certain; but *part of a menu* could also lead to the identified inconsistencies and the potential for RA to be lost.

During my period at the school I observed several incidents attesting to the embedded nature of RA. On my first day, during a tour of the school, one teacher was facilitating an impromptu restorative meeting in the hallway, between two girls. This was one specific example of many where I saw staff members actively engaging pupils in finding solutions to issues. I also attended a meeting of the restorative steering committee. Any interested teachers were welcomed to be part of it; the whole senior management team was also on the committee, showing high-level commitment. There was a spirited discussion about how to move forward with RA. On the

other hand I also observed indications that RA was not as embraced as the senior management team had hoped. In informal conversations, several teachers admitted either misgivings about RA or lack of awareness. During the school tour on the first day I met one of the staff members who had been trained as a facilitator. She had worked at a different school for a few years and had recently returned to this school. The other school, she said, had, unfortunately, gone “the other way.” I said, a bit naively, “Oh, more punitive?” She responded in a shocked tone, “No totally restorative, nothing punitive at all!” This was one example of the mixed messages circulating in the school. Was the school fully restorative, focused more on punishment, or a mixture?

A main metaphor used to describe RA in the school by both the headteacher and the depute headteacher was that of a journey. “We’ll just keep going and going. I don’t think anyone ever gets there, but you can keep going” (Depute Headteacher, personal communication, February 28, 2013). This was reinforced in the recommendations that came out of a recent study (Document A, 2, n.d.) as well as the School Improvement Plan (Document A, 5, 2012). Both suggested continuing to develop RA, reinforce the skills held by the school community and embed the practices. There were also several mentions of what the school hoped to gain from my research study: the School Improvement Plan discussed taking into account my findings for the school’s future steps; the depute headteacher wanted to use my study as a “springboard to hopefully keep moving forward” (personal communication, February 28, 2013); and the headteacher hoped to find out “what could we be doing next. Where now? You know, because we don’t want to be complacent about it. What other things could we be doing that could make an even bigger difference?” (personal communication, February 26, 2013). The school wanted to know how embedded RA was and then decide how best to move forward on their RA journey.

As with the national and regional documents, I again turned to Williams's (1976/1990) technique of interrogating *key words* to make visible opaque meanings surrounding the RA concepts of *relationships*, *behaviour* and *ethos*. In selecting school documents to examine, it was difficult to find documents with sufficient mentions of RA. Three that I thought would yield interesting results had either no mention or only one mention: the parental information booklet (Document A, 7, n.d.), one mention; the school inspection report (Document A, 1, 2010), no mention; and the pupil code of behaviour (Document A, 6, n.d.), no mention. Thus, for this analysis, I examined one 12-page document, located within the staff handbook (Document A, 9, n.d.). The document focuses on how a RRS can promote positive behaviour. The document gives a fair amount of space to RA, identifying it, along with RRS, as promoting positive behaviour and as an approach to learning and teaching. *Relationships* are rarely mentioned in this document. When they are, they are again described mostly as *positive* or *quality*. The document, though, spends much more space than other ones in providing examples of what those positive relationships might entail: positive comments, listening to pupils' perspectives, allowing pupils a fresh start, and helping resolve difficulties. *Behaviour*, too, has a different flair in this document. Unlike the national, though similar to the regional, documents, although the focus is still mainly on pupils, behaviour here also refers to staff behaviour, sometimes interrelated with pupil behaviour. Restorative teachers, for example, are encouraged to model the behaviours they expect from their pupils. Behaviour is often paired with such words as *effective*, *improved* and *satisfactory*. Often in the vicinity of behaviour is the term *good order*. Good order is not defined but is described as a prerequisite to meaningful learning and accomplished through consistency. *Ethos* rarely is mentioned, unlike in other documents, but the term *positive learning environment* seems to have taken its place. Again, ethos is closely connected to the idea of good order.

The document presented a mixed picture of RA. Although RA is infused throughout the document and even listed as the first choice for the options available to the senior management team and principal teachers, there seems to be a disconnect between its rather expansive definition and the role it plays. In the section dedicated to RA, there is a 13-point checklist for teachers to review following a restorative intervention. Teachers are to ask themselves such questions as: “Did I truly listen and hear them without interrupting?” “Did I explain the school values around the issue?” “Did I take responsibility for any part I might have had for what went wrong and did I acknowledge that? Did I apologise?” This checklist suggests a holistic, transformative vision of RA and its objectives. Yet the section following this indicates that if restorative interventions do not produce improved behaviour, then a range of *formal sanctions* may be deployed. These sanctions are then described in detail. Thus, although the section on RA suggests mutual responsibility for moving forward, the following sections focus narrowly on behaviour and whether or not it has improved according to the staff member. RA is indeed seen as *part of the menu* and to be backed up by a large selection of punitive measures.

In the nation, the region and the school, I was impressed by the layers of complexity embraced at each level and around each issue. This is not a nation nor a people who are satisfied with sound bites and pat answers. Building on the challenges both past and present, with aspirations of much greater things, the people and documents illustrate the reality of both/and. This reality will be explored in greater depth in the findings section.

Chapter Five: Alberta Context

I have chosen to set the context of the Canadian school by first focusing on the province, Alberta. Significant for this study, in contrast to Scotland, education in Canada is a provincial responsibility. Given Canada's size and the differences that exist among provinces in terms of geography, economy, history, culture, politics and, sometimes, language, it seemed unwieldy and counterproductive to begin the discussion with Canada as a whole. As well, as demonstrated in the preceding chapter, Scotland, although an autonomous nation, has a relationship with the UK that is in some ways analogous to Alberta's relationship to Canada: devolved responsibilities alongside ones that remain either the responsibility of the UK or of Canada. Thus, I contend that an understanding of the school studied in Canada is best achieved by situating it within the provincial context and that a Canadian province is, in some ways, comparable to the nation of Scotland within the UK.

Alberta

Provincial.

Broad discourses. The population of Alberta is just over four million (11 per cent of Canada's population), making it the fourth most populated province (Statistics Canada, 2014a) and slightly less populated than Scotland (5.3 million). It is also the fourth largest province, sixth when including the territories, with a total area of 661, 848km², more than eight times the size of Scotland (Natural Resources Canada, 2005). In 2006, the most recent statistics available, just over 80 per cent of the population in Alberta identified as White, with approximately 14 per cent identifying as a Visible Minority (Chinese and South Asian being the most common) (Statistics Canada, 2009) and almost 6 per cent identifying as Aboriginal (Statistics Canada, 2008). These demographics are similar to the rest of Canada, with the exception of the Aboriginal population,

which is higher in Alberta than the national average, reported in 2006 to be 3.9 per cent (Statistics Canada, 2013).

Alberta, relying economically on its varied natural resources, has long been a boom and bust province. Recently, the province has been in a boom phase, buoyed by the jobs and income provided by the tar/oil sands. Alberta's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2012 ranked third in the country, behind Ontario and Quebec, accounting for 17 per cent of the national GDP. Expressed differently, the average worker in Alberta earns \$1100.00 per week, \$200 above the national average (Statistics Canada, 2014b). Despite the rosy economic picture, income inequality in the province persists. In 2009, Alberta had a Gini coefficient of 0.429, far greater than the national average of 0.32 and the majority of European countries, including Scotland, where it generally ranges between 0.25 and 0.35 (Tencer, 2011; The Conference Board of Canada, 2013).

Alberta is a relatively new province, having joined confederation in 1905. Yet, the history of the region extends back thousands of years. The First Nations peoples who lived in the area "were as various and complex as the landscape itself, and are as various and complex today" (van Herk, 2001, p. 72). When White Europeans, Americans and those from central Canada first ventured into the region, there were ten tribes and four broad language groups firmly established (van Herk, 2001). Interactions between indigenous peoples and newcomers were, for the most part, mutually beneficial and respectful during the days of first contact, when relationships were essential, from the newcomer perspective, for survival and such activities as the fur trade (Ralston Saul, 2008). Once central Canada declared its ambition to create a nation that stretched from sea to sea, however, the First Nations peoples became obstacles, managed in a way that best suited White Canada. The disastrous results of this new engagement have been well documented. Between diseases, the devastation of the buffalo within two decades, the onslaught of

missionaries and whisky traders, and settlers encroaching on traditional territory, indigenous people met with a continuous threat to their very existence: “Facing famine and privation, they had no choice but to capitulate to the promises held out by the white man’s treaties” (van Herk, 2001, p. 78). The differing understanding of what these treaties meant – the ceding of all land to the government or peace treaties that allowed newcomers access to the land – continue to resonate in Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships today (Alberta Government, 2013; van Herk, 2001). The Indian Act of 1876 laid the foundation for Indian agents to rule over the lives of First Nations people in Alberta – as go-betweens, censors, bankers, moral and social arbiters – until 1969 (Alberta Government, 2013; van Herk, 2001). It was not until 1960 that First Nations peoples were granted the right to vote in federal elections without losing their treaty status; the Alberta franchise followed in 1964 (Alberta Government, 2013).

Today Alberta is home to more than 220,000 people descended from First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, with the two largest groups being the Cree and the Blackfoot Confederacy (Alberta Government, 2013). Forty-three per cent of Alberta’s Aboriginal peoples lived in either Edmonton or Calgary in 2011 (Alberta Government, 2013). Reserves today comprise one per cent of Alberta’s total area, with Métis settlements occupying less than one per cent (van Herk, 2001). Alberta is also the only province to grant the Métis a land base, local autonomy and self-sufficiency (Alberta Government, 2013). Since the 1970s, First Nation communities have had the power to make decisions on such issues as education, public health, band administration and reserve roads (Alberta Government, 2013). The legacy of structural violence and paternalism, however, has been difficult to overcome, and there are tremendous inequities on and between reserves, with some struggling to provide basic necessities to their members. Others, particularly those located near the tar/oil sands, run multi-million-dollar businesses and use their economic

power to bolster their social and political voice (Alberta Government, 2013; van Herk, 2001). As one of the fastest-growing segments of Alberta's population (Alberta Government, 2013; Alberta Government, 2014; van Herk, 2001), Aboriginal people influence the past, present and future of the province.

Although foundational and essential, the Aboriginal story is but one layer of Albertan culture. The other layers include – but are not limited to – cowboys, ranchers, feminists, oil executives, memorable politicians and the staunchly religious. With all of these layers and contradictions, Albertans defy definition and description. Van Herk (2001), in writing a history of Alberta, selected the word *maverick* as the best description, defining it this way:

Traditionally, a range calf without a brand and consequently without an owner. If cowboys couldn't poach them, they'd butcher them – fresh meat for the chuckwagon.

Also a term applicable to Albertans, especially appropriate for a collective resistance to being caught, owned, herded, taxed, or identified. (p. 394)

She writes elsewhere that Alberta has “through time and experience become a sophisticated outlaw, a place where pedigree is unimportant and where migrants are encouraged to reinvent themselves, attracting a *mélange* of characters” (van Herk, 2001, p. 3). The acceptance of this *mélange* of characters – whether located at one extreme or the other – is part of what makes Alberta unique.

This uniqueness is particularly apparent in Albertan politics. Since the first election in 1905, Alberta has been primarily a one-party province, tending to punish and reward political parties in totality. As van Herk (2001) writes:

Albertans have always hated government, its sticky fingers, its interfering ways. They hate politicians almost as much, although they practice a wild combination of adulation

and revolt that swings politicians into power and then just as suddenly flings them out of power and onto the streets again. (p. 230)

The province started as a Liberal stronghold, with the party winning 23 out of 25 seats in 1905, and ruling for 16 years. The next political dynasty was the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA), working to promote the political position of farmers. The UFA, advocating for a new societal order in which government favours were no longer distributed to the rich and well educated, ruled for 14 years (van Herk, 2001). Alberta experienced severe economic and social challenges in the 1930s; per capita income fell from \$548 in 1929 to \$212 in 1933 (Palmer & Palmer, 1990). In response to the economic hardships and scandals within the UFA, Albertans began to look for new answers, finding hope in one of Alberta's more colourful characters, evangelical radio preacher, William "Bible Bill" Aberhart (CBC, 2001; van Herk, 2001). Aberhart formed the Social Credit Party, based on social and economic reforms, representing a populist protest against capitalism. Promising each citizen \$25 a month in social credit, the Party completely eradicated the UFA in the 1935 election. Initial *social credit* ideas mostly failed, however, due to a lack of ideological coherence and practical planning. Oil revenues soon eased the province's economic woes and the Social Credit Party ruled the province for 36 years (CBC, 2001). Alberta of the 1970s, however, was secular and booming, a far cry from the Alberta that first elected Bible Bill; the Social Credit Party was thrown aside in the 1971 election in favour of the new Progressive Conservatives, the party still in power 44 years later. This party, too, has been led by memorable characters: Peter Lougheed, Ralph Klein, Ed Stelmach and, until 2014, Alberta's first female Premier, Alison Redford. The reign, however, has been anything but monolithic, ranging from Lougheed's massive spending on industry and an expanded welfare state to Klein's pursuit of government austerity through waves of privatization and outsourcing and back to Redford's Red

Tory views (Cosh, 2012). The Party's rule has also weathered significant challenges from more socially conservative populist groups, such as the Reform Party, which later became the Canadian Alliance (of which current Prime Minister Stephen Harper was elected leader), and the more recent Wildrose Party. Far from being a uniformly right-wing province, as it is often characterized by the rest of Canada, both the political history and present of Alberta reveal a province that embraces the spectrum of policies and values, depending on the context and the draw of the leader. One need only look at Calgary's Mayor Naheed Nenshi, North America's first Muslim mayor, and his broad appeal to those on both sides of the political spectrum to appreciate the complexity and contradictions present in Alberta's unique political scene.

This complexity extends to the role of women in Alberta. From Alberta's male-dominated frontier society, Canada's first feminists emerged (van Herk, 2001). Alberta passed the suffrage bill in 1916, the third Canadian province to do so, giving women the right to vote in provincial elections (Parliament of Canada, 2014). Alberta was also the first province to set a minimum wage for women - \$9 a week in 1917, raised to \$14 in 1923 (van Herk, 2001). Louise McKinney was elected to the Alberta Legislature in 1917, becoming the first woman to sit in any Legislative Assembly in the British Empire (Famous Five Foundation, 2012; van Herk, 2001). McKinney, along with four other Alberta women who championed the rights of women and children – Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, Henrietta Muir Edwards and Irene Parlby –, became known as the Famous Five. Together, they brought forward the Persons Case, a challenge to the interpretation of the British North America Act that only men could be considered *qualified persons* and thus appointed to the Canadian senate. In 1929, the Privy Council of England ruled that women were indeed persons and could become Senators (Famous Five Foundation, 2012). Interestingly, no Albertan woman was appointed to the Senate until 1979, leading van Herk (2001) to suggest that

Ottawa was rightfully afraid of the strength of Albertan women. The legacy of strong Albertan females continued with Alison Redford as the first female Premier of Alberta and Danielle Smith as the head of the opposition, Wildrose Party (until Smith's 2014 defection to the Progressive Conservative party). The complexity has also continued, with some suggesting sexism as one reason that Redford stepped down as Premier in 2014 (The Canadian Press, 2014). Van Herk (2001) warns against becoming complacent amidst the historical legacy of female equality: "... the hum of Alberta's boomeranging conservatism still pervades the province, and women here know that they better keep checking over their shoulders, twirling their lassos, and never take anything for granted" (p. 381).

The image of checking over one's shoulder could also be used to illustrate the uneasy relationship between Alberta and Ottawa; a sense of western alienation that pervades today. Although Albertans had felt separate from central Canada since before Confederation, this sense was most vivid during the 1980s when Prime Minister Trudeau unveiled the National Energy Program (NEP) as part of the federal budget. Seen as a battle over control of resources and money, Premier Lougheed retaliated by cutting oil production, accompanied by the infamous quote by then Calgary mayor, Ralph Klein: "Let the eastern bastards freeze in the dark" (Finch, Varella & Deephouse, 2012). Foreign companies began selling off energy assets and the Albertan economy crashed (CBC, 2015). Defenders of the NEP pointed to the influence of global markets and predicted an inevitable collapse in oil prices, regardless of domestic policy (CBC, 2015). Whether myth or reality, many Albertans were outraged at Ottawa and talk of separation exploded (van Herk, 2001). Although the outrage has long since been diluted, I found echoes of the NEP specifically and alienation in general surfacing in everyday conversation in Alberta.

Drawing from this complex history, van Herk (2001) portrays Albertans as enigmatic people who are full of contradictions and love breaking rules. I experienced the reality of this portrayal first hand while in Alberta. The quintessential example was found in Jordan (not his real name), a bus driver in the city in which I did my research. After mistakenly boarding a bus that finished its route well before the school, Jordan offered to deliver me to that stop, anyway. Once everyone exited the bus at the official final stop, Jordan put on the Out of Service sign and drove me another 15 minutes to the school. We had a great chat about his job, my research and Alberta in general. I had assumed that this would be an isolated incident; Jordan, however, upon seeing me waiting for the bus the next day, insisted that I board the bus. Jordan became my personal bus driver for the rest of my time in the city.

It was in those conversations, after everyone else exited the bus at the final stop, that I was schooled on life in Alberta. According to Jordan, Trudeau cheated Alberta with the National Energy Plan and made life even worse when Lougheed would not cooperate. On another day, Jordan delved into the topic of climate change as a hoax dreamed up by Al Gore and David Suzuki. According to Jordan, the hoax was created to make them a profit, giving an example of Gore's supposed 300-room house and private jet. A few days later, Jordan revealed decidedly liberal views on sexual politics and identity. Jordan epitomized Alberta for me, eluding all stereotypes. He did not respect bureaucracy (he decided to give me bus rides); he held very conservative beliefs (anti-Trudeau; climate change as hoax); and he held very liberal beliefs (sexual politics).

Educational discourses. Responsibility for education in Canada rests almost entirely with provincial legislation. Thus, while there surely exists a certain “common countenance of Canadian education” (Tomkins, 1986), and the Canadian Council of Ministers of Education

works to achieve a level of congruence across the provinces and territories, there nevertheless exists a degree of differentiation (MacDonald, 2013). Educational discourses in Alberta – built on its history and context – are unique to the province.

Education in Alberta was shaped when it was still a territory and in negotiation to become a Canadian province. Schools were a particularly contentious issue in these negotiations as the territorial leadership at the time (the territory was eventually split into present-day Alberta and Saskatchewan) advocated for uniform, non-sectarian schools, fearing that different interests of the newcomers who spoke German, Ukrainian, Finnish and French, among others, would splinter the West (van Herk, 2001). One-quarter of the territorial population in 1891 was French, however, and Prime Minister Laurier was under pressure from Quebec Catholic bishops to establish separate French-speaking Catholic schools (van Herk, 2001). In the end, separate schools run by Catholic boards were established, with French as the language of instruction in French-speaking communities, and with teachers and curricula certified by the provincial government (van Herk, 2001). This same system exists today: Anglophone and Francophone publicly funded Catholic schools operate as part of the dual system of public education in Alberta (Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, 2010). In 2011, 69.1 per cent of students in Alberta attended public schools, 22.3 per cent Catholic, 1 per cent Francophone and 1.2 per cent charter, all publicly funded. The remaining 6.4 per cent of students attended private schools or received home education (Alberta Education, 2012b).

Educational choice has always been valued in Alberta. Von Heyking (2013) details how Alberta, unlike other provinces, has expanded rather than restricted opportunities for faith-based education within the public system. She claims that this acceptance was shaped by two Christian premiers – Aberhart (1935-1943) and Manning (1943-1968) – who gave school boards the

responsibility to ensure public schools reflected and accommodated local religious views and diversity. Thus today there are publicly funded schools teaching Alberta's curricula but grounded, for example, in Christianity, Islam or Aboriginal spirituality (von Heyking, 2013).

Charter schools are another example of Alberta's emphasis on choice. According to Alberta Education (2012b), charter schools are "autonomous public schools" providing "education in ways that are measurably different or enhanced" (p. 4). Designed to provide innovative education programs while still following Alberta's curriculum, charter schools receive the same per student funding as public schools. Instead of school boards, charter schools are run by private organizations with particular educational agendas (Wagner, 1999). They cannot have a religious affiliation and must accept all students provided there is sufficient space and resources (Alberta Government, 2011). Alberta is the only province in Canada to integrate charter schools into the public system, introducing them in 1994. Although criticized at the time by some as a radical step toward the privatization of education in Alberta, Wagner (1999) contends that the introduction of charter schools was merely an extension of the Progressive Conservative government's longstanding policy of promoting educational choice.

When Alberta first became a province, in 1905, there were about 560 schools containing 34000 students, staffed by 1200 teachers, two-thirds of whom were women (van Herk, 2001). In 1905, Alberta adopted the existing Ontario school curriculum. Although this was slightly revised in 1912, it did not embody a particular Alberta sensibility. As with other English-speaking parts of Canada, schools and their curricula reflected an Anglo-centric view and consisted mostly of British content (Tomkins, 1986; von Heyking, 2006). In a study of the evolution of the Alberta curriculum, von Heyking (2006) demonstrates how the late 1930s curriculum represented the first evidence of a strong provincial consciousness. Politicians called for a curriculum appropriate for

life in the West, free from Ontario prejudice. These calls coincided with education officials' interest in new approaches to education and, in 1942, resulted in a progressive curriculum that embodied a provincial identity (von Heyking, 2006). The progressive approach was unique within Canada, and thus made-in-Alberta textbooks were produced. Texts emphasized such topics as: cooperative organizations; the rise of alternative political parties such as the Progressive Conservatives and Social Credit; and the important contribution of Alberta's natural resources to the economy of the entire British Empire (von Heyking, 2006). The 1980s, with increased tension between Alberta and Ottawa due, in large part, to the National Energy Program, saw a renewed focus on curriculum imbued with a strong sense of Alberta's identity and place within Canada. Political and economic grievances were highlighted within the curriculum, as were the values of freedom, individualism, persistence and initiative, and their importance in the success of the province (von Heyking, 2006).

In many ways, the curriculum has continued to evolve to reflect current understandings of Albertan identity. Alberta Education (2012a) set as its goals for 2012-2015: success for every student; high quality education through collaboration and innovation; and success for First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students. The third goal is significant, given the history and legacy of education in relation to Alberta's indigenous people. In 1894, the territorial government began forcing FNMI children to attend residential schools, often directed by missionaries of various Christian faiths, in an attempt to assimilate Alberta's aboriginal peoples (van Herk, 2001). Beyond the devastating loss of language, culture and family ties, the schools often exposed the children to communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, with many dying as a result (van Herk, 2001). There were 25 residential schools in Alberta, more than any other province (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, n.d.). The Truth and Reconciliation

Commission estimates there are currently about 12000 survivors of residential schools living in Alberta (Cotter, 2014). Although not possible to undo the poisonous effects of residential schools through policies alone, the Alberta Government Education websites and documents indicate a clear intention to engage with FNMI students and communities and prioritize their educational success. The development of culturally relevant learning resources and program supports for FNMI students, as well as increasing all Albertans' knowledge and understanding of FNMI cultures, worldviews, histories, treaties and rights are highlighted within the documents (Alberta Education, 2013). The province recently announced that new curriculum would include content on the significance of residential schools and First Nations treaties for kindergarten through Grade 12 students (Cotter, 2014).

Alberta Education's (2013) current mission is to ensure "inclusive learning opportunities that enable students to achieve success as engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit" (p. 3). The Guide to Education clarifies each of the traits mentioned in the mission statement. For instance, an *engaged thinker*, among other skills, "knows how to think critically and creatively and make discoveries through inquiry, reflection, exploration, experimentation and trial and error" (p. 3), and an *ethical citizen* "understands that it is not all about them, has learned about and is appreciative of the effort and sacrifice that built this province and country and sees beyond self-interests to the needs of the community" (p. 4). Most in line with the Alberta history described previously, an individual with an *entrepreneurial spirit*: is motivated, resourceful, self-reliant and tenacious; ... ; is competitive and ready to challenge the status quo; ... ; develops opportunities where others only see adversity; has the confidence to take risks and make bold decisions in the face of adversity, recognizing that to hold back is to be held back; and has the courage to dream. (p. 4)

It seems that the evolution of a curriculum that embodies the provincial spirit continues.

These traits might also apply to the teachers Alberta aspires to employ. The Winter 2012 edition of the Alberta Teachers' Association Magazine featured teachers – both past and present – described as building Alberta “through politics, advocacy, activism and philanthropy” (Thomas, 2012, p. 2). Calling upon teachers to both be and inspire engaged thinkers, the current Guide to Education offers several considerations for program delivery, including a focus on utilizing controversial issues in the classroom. Although some school boards across Canada produce their own guides to dealing with controversial issues (see Toronto District School Board, 2003), a provincial focus, such as that in Alberta, is unique in Canada. Through interviews with Alberta teachers, MacDonald (2013) found that the majority viewed the teaching of controversial issues as part of their professional responsibility. Teaching controversial issues is framed in the Guide to Education as preparing students to participate responsibly in a democratic and pluralistic society. Although this focus on controversy aligns with Alberta's history of challenging the status quo, it also bumps up against the idea of educational choice. Thus, in 2009, Alberta legislators passed Bill 44, including an amendment to the Alberta Human Rights Act, requiring teachers to provide parents with written notice when lessons on sexuality, religion or sexual orientation are to be taught, and granting parents the right to exclude their children from those discussions (CBC, 2009; MacDonald, 2013). Interestingly, within the Guide to Education (Alberta Education, 2013), half a page is devoted to teaching controversial issues; almost three pages are devoted to when and how to notify parents. In this instance at least, choice appears to trump challenging the status quo.

The curriculum continues to evolve. Based on province-wide consultations called the Inspiring Education dialogues, the Alberta Government plans to implement a revised curriculum

in 2016 or later. Many of the designated changes match those of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: student-focused, focus on competencies rather than content, and less prescriptive curriculum to enable teachers to meet unique student and community needs (Alberta Education, n.d.-b). Yet, while in Alberta I heard no discussion about this proposed curriculum and its inspiring vision. Rather, the dominant conversation among school staff and in the media focused on education budget cuts and a bleak vision of the future.

The budget, delivered in March 2013, reduced operational funding for school boards by a total of \$14.5 million for the 2013/14 school year and cut some programs immediately, including a \$41 million program which funded school authorities to develop and implement innovative educational projects (Alberta Teaching Association Staff, 2013). The Education Minister was quoted as saying, "The fiscal reality is that many school boards will see fewer operating dollars this year compared to last year, and we will all need to work together to make sure kids aren't impacted in a negative way" (Salz, 2013). The threat of job losses and larger class sizes was already beginning to permeate and impact the atmosphere of schools in Alberta while I was there, even if the reality had yet to be realized.

Restorative discourses. Canada has incorporated RJ into the formal justice system for over 30 years (Tompsonski, Buck, Barga & Binder, 2011). Worldwide, the first site of victim-offender facilitation is considered to be Elmira, Ontario, in 1974. Many RJ approaches in Canada are strongly tied to its indigenous people (Eagle, 2011; Elliot, 2011; Vaandering, 2009). Although some argue this indigenous connection is either dismissed without due respect (Eagle as cited in Enns & Myers, 2009; Vaandering, 2009) or artificially enhanced to lend credibility to restorative justice (Cunneen, 2012; Daly, 2002; London, 2011; Woolford, 2009), there is wide recognition that RJ in Canada has deep roots.

RJ has been applied in Canadian schools for about 20 years (Drewery & Winslade, 2003; Morrison, 2007) and the popularity of the approach appears to be growing (Tompsonowski et al., 2011). In Alberta, it is difficult to find information on how and when RJ was first introduced to schools. There was no pilot project to introduce RJ to schools across the province as in Scotland; most likely the introduction happened on an individual staff member or school basis, with much regional differentiation. The earliest mention of RJ in schools in Alberta was found on the Alberta Government's Education website: between 2003 and 2008 two school boards discussed introducing RJ as part of their Initiative for School Improvement projects (the program which had its funding cut in 2013).

Besides these two school boards, there are very few references to RJ on the official provincial education website. RJ is identified as a best practice in a guide to effective collaboration between school administrators and police (Alberta Education – Cross-Ministry Services Branch, 2013); RJ is mentioned as a way to respond to bullying, though specifics are not explained, once in an almost 300-page document on character and citizenship education (Alberta Education, 2005a); and RJ receives one mention each in a progress report on FNMI education (Alberta Education, 2008) and in a document on how to better serve the needs of Aboriginal students (Alberta Education, 2005b). Clearly it is not through official education ministry channels that RJ is being accessed by schools in Alberta.

Most schools are accessing training and resources from sources outside the government. During my study, there were two RJ organizations, both located in Edmonton, working with schools province-wide: Alberta Conflict Transformation Society (ACTS), and the Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities (SACSC). ACTS began in 1998 as the Community Conferencing Association of Edmonton, changing its name in 2003. ACTS partnered with

Alberta Justice, Public School Boards, Police Services and the Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security to promote RJ and provide restorative services. ACTS provided most of the training for Alberta educators and students. In 2012, ACTS trained 450 people in Alberta, including educators, community members and police officers (ACTS, 2012). As part of these training sessions, ACTS conducted 14 workshops entitled *Creating a Restorative Culture* for six different school boards in Alberta (ACTS, 2012). According to their website, ACTS took a broad view of RJ, focusing on relationships rather than behaviour. In their school workshops, ACTS asked: “What is it we want students to learn through our discipline practices? How do we encourage students to do the right thing because it is the right thing to do? How do we encourage students to take responsibility and be accountable for their words and actions?” Interestingly, the board of directors for ACTS voted in November 2013 to dissolve the agency by the following June (personal communication, May 27, 2014). One of the staff members has since set up a consultancy to promote, teach and support the use of RJ.

The other organization influencing RJ in Alberta schools was SACSC. Building on earlier efforts by the Alberta Teacher’s Association to develop safe and caring schools initiatives, SACSC was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 2004 (Alberta Education, n.d.-a). SACSC “builds community capacity to prevent bullying, violence and exploitation of children and youth through the promotion of healthy relationships” (SACSC, n.d. About Us section). SACSC provides free resources, workshops and webinars on a wide range of topics related to safe and caring schools, including RJ. In one document, SACSC credits ACTS in the development of their RJ programming, suggesting a confluence of understanding of RJ between organizations (Pakan & SACSC, 2007).

Given the lack of attention in the Ministry of Education's websites, it is not surprising that there are few readily accessible documents on RJ to be found within the province, even on the websites of ACTS and SACSC. The only document I located was a guide for teachers and parents published by SACSC in 2007, supported by a grant from the Alberta Solicitor General and Ministry for Public Safety. The document provides insight into SACSC's understanding of RJ, as well as into the messages that teachers presumably would be receiving. According to the document, RJ focuses on:

improving the safety and well-being of all students by emphasizing reconciliation and interpersonal healing after incidents involving violence and other anti-social behaviours.

The process will help students learn to behave appropriately and to take into consideration the impact of their actions on those affected by their behaviour. (Pakan & SACSC, 2007, p. 1)

Not surprisingly, given the grantor, SACSC frames RA through its roots in the justice system, emphasizing community/classroom conferencing as the "most appropriate restorative justice strategy to use in schools" (p. 3). In great detail the document outlines how to engage in this formal process, and provides several case studies. There is recognition that schools need to determine their own criteria for using the process. Little space is devoted to proactive approaches; RJ is clearly to be used to address incidents of harm.

In line with my approach to the Scottish documents, I used Williams's (1976/1990) technique of interrogating *key words* to make visible opaque meanings with the SACSC document. However, while with the Scottish documents I interrogated the concepts of *relationships*, *behaviour* and *ethos* to make visible the discourses within which RJ is set and through which it is framed, *ethos* was not mentioned once in the Alberta document. Rather, I

interrogated the words: *relationship*, *behaviour* and *community*. Despite the statement that RJ focuses on *relationships*, the actual word came up only six times within the 29-page document. Twice relationships were used to define bullying as “an ongoing relationship issue” and twice to suggest that RJ helped to restore power imbalances in relationships. The other mentions paired relationships with *respect* and *dignity*. *Behaviour*, on the other hand, surfaced 32 times. Behaviour was modified by such words as *negative*, *inappropriate*, *anti-social*, and *harmful*, when describing why RJ would be utilized in schools; the outcome of the use of RJ also focused on behaviour, this time described as *positive*, *appropriate*, *social* and suggesting that RJ would provide “lasting behavioural change.” The document always focused on student behaviour (as opposed to adult) and implied that by helping students learn “better ways to behave” they would experience an increased sense of self-worth and would work and play more cooperatively. The word *community* arose many times, though mostly through the term community/classroom conferencing. When it was otherwise mentioned, there was no modification given; i.e., community was defined as neither positive nor negative. Community referred sometimes to the school community and sometimes to the broader neighbourhood. Mainly community was seen as a victim of harmful behaviour and was also the place where those who misbehaved needed to be reintegrated. The message of this document – that RJ primarily changes student behaviour – seems inconsistent with ACTS emphasis on a critical approach focused on relationships. Since there are so few Alberta documents focused on RJ, it is impossible to ascertain which of these messages is the predominant one being received by Alberta educators.

Regional.

Broad discourses. The region where my study was conducted is located in a growing urban centre. As with many Alberta towns, it was established in the early 1800s on First Nations land, as a Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) fur trade post (van Herk, 2001). HBC, an entity established by the British monarchy, was given monopoly of almost a million and a half square miles of western and northern Canada, without regard to those already inhabiting the land, including this region (Manitoba Government, n.d.; Goldi Productions, 2007). The first languages in the area were French, Cree, Blackfoot, Gaelic and very little English (van Herk, 2001); in 2011, about 75 per cent of the region's citizens indicated that English was their mother tongue, 2 per cent French, and just over 20 per cent a non-official language (Statistics Canada, 2011). The three most common non-official language mother tongues were listed in 2011 as Tagalog, Panjabi and Chinese. Befitting a frontier town, the area saw a population boom in the early 1900s, with the population soaring from 4000 in 1901 to 54000 in 1916 (van Herk, 2001). After a series of agricultural and energy booms and busts through the decades, the region is again booming, largely due to the energy industry.

The neighbourhood where the school is located has a population of almost 6000 (Alberta City, 2012). Situated in an area of town where many new Canadians first arrive, the neighbourhood surrounding the school is multicultural, low-income and transient. In 2010, according to neighbourhood indicators published by the city, this neighbourhood had three and a half times as many low-income households as the city average and three times as many food hamper users. Just over 10 per cent of the neighbourhood population indicated that they were non-Canadian citizens, compared to 8 per cent in the rest of the region (Alberta City, 2012).

In many ways, the region as a whole reflected the complexity of Alberta. The following vignettes of my personal experience from two consecutive days highlight the contradictory mix.

Day One: While checking out the downtown YMCA, I asked an employee where I could find a business to print a 40-page document. The YMCA employee insisted he had time and would print it for me on their printer, no charge. Then I went to a café to work. The women's bathroom was covered in graffiti, 90 per cent of which was both positive and intelligent. For example there was a back and forth conversation between a 'conservative girl' and a 'leftie girl', each saying what they wished the other would know about them. Later, walking home on a main avenue, there was a protest outside of a tattoo and body-piercing shop. The workers were asking for it to be boycotted because of an unjust boss.

Day Two: I attended a performance of *Ballethulah*, a ballet based on the music and life of k.d. lang. The story followed a prairie girl who falls in love with another prairie girl. After a stint in Los Angeles and an affair, the protagonist comes back to Alberta and falls in love again. The prairie landscape was omnipresent: in the costumes, the background setting, and the music. *Hallelujah* was the last song, with electric dancing symbolizing birth, life, and suicide. It left me weeping. This region is more than the stereotypes; yet, it is also absolutely those stereotypes. After the ballet, as I walked along the main avenue, the testosterone was palpable. Every oil-money-bought truck, motorcycle and sports car was revving; every screen in every bar tuned into either hockey or mixed martial arts; drunks loudly pushing one another; vomit in the street; and police tape marking off a gang-related shooting from the night before. But then, over on the other side of the road, walked/lurched 50 people dressed as zombies. And ten minutes later, after smiling directly at me, I saw a young woman passionately hug a tree.

Educational discourses. More than half of the students within the region attend public schools; just over 20 per cent attend Catholic schools; and under 20 per cent gave no response in the most recent census (Alberta City, 2012). As it is the board affecting the most students, as well as the board within which the school I studied is situated, this section attends to educational discourses as found within the public system.

In 2012/2013 there were over 200 public schools – elementary (kindergarten to grade six), junior high school (grades seven to nine) and senior high school (grades ten to twelve) – serving over 80,000 students of the region, employing about 8000 staff and located in neighbourhoods with varying socioeconomic statuses (Alberta School Board, 2013a). As in the rest of Alberta, the regional school board emphasizes choice as foundational to their approach to education (Alberta School Board, 2013b). Open boundaries allow parents and students to choose their preferred school. Students are guaranteed entry to their geographically designated school, but also have the option to attend any other school within the region, provided the school has room and the student meets entry requirements. As such, the region's schools offer numerous specialized programs ranging from Arabic to Dance to Waldorf that attract students from across the area. Students choose between schools that offer regular programming, alternative programming with a focus on arts, athletics, language and culture, faith or teaching philosophy, or special education programming with specialized supports based on needs and abilities.

Since the school in which I conducted my research offered two special education programs, I will briefly highlight those programs. The first was the Early Education Program, designed to meet the needs of children with severe special educational needs between the ages of two and a half and six. The five half-days per week program including transportation from anywhere within the region, was offered free of charge to families, and provided speech and

language instruction, physical therapy and occupational therapy. There were ten schools within the region that provided this programming (Alberta School Board, n.d.-b).

The second, the Behaviour Learning Assistance (BLA) program, assists students whose “severe, chronic, extreme and pervasive behaviours significantly interfere with learning at school” (Alberta School Board, n.d.-a, How do I know BLA is Right? section). Classes have a reduced number of students with close and constant adult supervision. All senior high schools provide this programming; 45 elementary and junior high schools also offer BLA programs. More will be said on this program in the section focusing on the school.

I was also afforded the opportunity to visit one of the three local schools that deliver academic programming within an Aboriginal context. According to the Website, the school attempts to bring together the uniqueness of Aboriginal cultures, knowledge and languages in a school setting, drawing upon the support of Elders within the Aboriginal community. The presence and vision of this school is in sharp contrast to recent history; the last residential school for aboriginal students closed in the region in the 1970s (Equity in Alberta School Board, 2004).

The Aboriginal school has about 200 students. The day started with a morning circle: boys drum, girls play the rattle and all sing creator songs. The day I attended, there were not many in the circle. Quite a few of the students were on the powwow trail; others were absent in order to attend a funeral of one of the students killed the week before in a car accident. One of the Elders gave me a tour of the school at break. Their sweat lodge, a gorgeous wooden facility, was located symbolically in the centre of the building. The Elder also showed me a room where he ran circles. The floor was covered in animal skins, eagle feathers were visible, pillows were set in a circle, and the room was full of drums and art. He said they do several circles at the beginning

of the year and then only if needed. Some of the circles were to deal with issues and some were to learn traditions. They had zero expulsions the year before, largely, the principal suggested, due to the circles.

According to the provincial Accountability Pillar, used by Alberta Education to monitor school jurisdictions, the district's high school completion rates for FNMI learners had increased steadily since 2008 at the same time that dropout rate had decreased (Alberta School Board, 2013a). That said, in 2012/2013, the completion rate for FNMI students was only 30 per cent, compared to 70 per cent in the district as a whole; the dropout rate for FNMI students was almost three times the overall rate (Alberta School Board, 2014). The school board, while applauding its improvements in this area, admits that new strategies need to be engaged to support student retention in school and enhance the literacy skills of FNMI students.

Besides the continued challenges in meeting the needs of FNMI students, an annual Education Results Report Summary for 2012/2013 presents a positive picture of the state of education in the region. Again referencing the provincial Accountability Pillar, the board received a rating of *excellent* in the areas of safe and caring schools; student learning opportunities; and continuous improvement. A *good* rating was granted for student learning achievement; preparation for lifelong learning, world of work and citizenship; and parental involvement (Alberta School Board, 2014). The summary reported that over 90 per cent of teachers, parents and students were satisfied with the overall quality of education.

One of the main goals for 2012/2013 was listed as success for every student, closely connected to diversity, equity and inclusion. According to the report, over 30 per cent of students in the district self-identified as "outside of the traditional mainstream" which includes: FNMI; English Language Learners; Refugee and Newcomers; students in need of specialized supports

and services; and sexual and gender minorities (Alberta School Board, 2014). Those outside the mainstream would also include, according to the report, the more than 30,000 children affected by poverty in the region. The school in which my study was situated reflected the diversity presented in the report.

The regional Board of Trustees consisted of individuals elected, among other responsibilities, to assure that these goals became reality, by representing the interests of the community in their decision making and serving as advocates and stewards of public education (Alberta School Board, n.d.-c). The Trustees in this region were mostly under 40 and were described to me as progressive thinkers. I met on several occasions with the Trustee responsible for the ward in which the school was located, engaging in informal conversation. The Trustee made a concerted effort to attend events at the school as well as district-wide training events and celebrations. After one such occasion, the Trustee sat for an hour with a group of teachers, hearing their thoughts and fears regarding the impending budget cuts. For this particular ward, there seemed to be a direct link between those on the ground (teachers and other staff) and those in decision-making roles (trustees).

As in the rest of the province, it was the budget that dominated educational discourse in the region. The province announced its budget cuts in March 2013, a month before I arrived at the school. The school board subsequently reported that it would need to drastically cut its budget, while at the same time welcoming more students. Conversations of which I was a part, in the school and throughout the district, ranged from anger to fear to acceptance. Some were angry that an oil rich province would not be able to properly fund its schools; others feared for their own jobs; some hated the uncertainty; and a few accepted the situation as the new reality and braced for larger class sizes. In the end, hundreds of full-time staff positions were cut, as were a

variety of programs. Despite the official school board goals and accomplishments, the main discussion around education in the region centred not on vision, but on damage control.

Restorative discourses. RJ was first introduced to the district as an alternative to suspension and expulsion (XXXX, 2013). In 2002, the school board established a pilot project implementing the use of community/classroom conferences as an option in their school disciplinary procedures (XXXX, 2007). Students were referred to conferences if there was a risk of expulsion or if their behaviour was a chronic issue not successfully resolved by traditional means (XXXX, 2007). There was no information available as to how long the pilot project lasted, nor how widespread it was within the region. An ACTS trainer, however, discussed the evolution of the project from a focus on using community conferencing to lower suspension rates to the current focus on proactive measures to prevent the need for such conferences.

During the pilot project, ACTS was contracted to facilitate community conferences. At the time ACTS employed the Real Justice process (XXXX, 2007). The Real Justice approach, developed by Australian police officer Terry O'Connell, uses a simple written script to guide facilitations (Wachtel, 2013). Some, such as the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), an influential international not-for-profit organization, based in the United States, endorse the Real Justice model and have adopted O'Connell's script (Wachtel, 2013); others find such models restrictive and decontextualized (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming). O'Connell, himself, focuses increasingly on relationships as the core of RJ (T. O'Connell, personal communication, May 16, 2013).

ACTS continued to facilitate conferences in the Board, as it did for school boards across Alberta. In 2011, ACTS facilitated 16 school conferences in the region; in 2012, six were facilitated (ACTS, 2012). It is unclear why the number dropped so significantly in 2012, though

the report alludes to “fiscal realities” and “structural changes.” ACTS also trained educators in the board on how to create a restorative culture in the classroom. ACTS more recently was recommending a several step engagement for schools looking to bring RJ into their school in a more comprehensive manner: a one-day workshop for staff focused on creating a restorative culture; a follow-up session on circles and mini-conferences; a presentation to parents; and, one or two staff attending a three-day facilitator training to build capacity within the school.

To gain an understanding of what messages educators in the region are receiving about RJ, I watched a 50-minute webinar offered by ACTS trainers on the SACSC Website (Hopgood & Missal, 2013). Despite the initial focus on Real Justice and IIRP material, there has been a significant shift away from scripted, decontextualized material. In fact, the trainers state that RJ is an approach, rather than a canned or scripted process, and the resource list provided along with the webinar did not list any IIRP or Real Justice materials. The main message focuses on the importance of relationships. RJ, or RP (restorative practices) as it is called in the webinar, is framed as a developmental practice in which the philosophy needs to be embedded in everyday approaches. There is very little mention of utilizing RJ to change student behaviour; rather, the focus is on building relationships, living out the philosophy in non-conflict situations and engaging students’ affect. Adults, too, are encouraged to reflect on their relationships and are called to model all aspects of RJ. If this is the main training that educators in the region are receiving, they are being introduced to RJ as a proactive, all-encompassing philosophy that focuses on building relationships and holds adults to the same account as students.

To corroborate these messages with others that regional educators might be receiving, I also examined the training materials provided to one of the teachers at the school who had attended a Board-wide training. ACTS provided this training and, not surprisingly, many of the

messages within the material resonated with that which I identified in the webinar. Specifically, I explored the following documents within the training package: PowerPoint presentation on Building a Restorative Culture in Your Classroom/School; a comparison of punitive and restorative responses in schools; two policy exemplars from other schools; and an information piece on community conferencing in schools. As indicated previously, I interrogated the documents for the three words/concepts: *relationships*, *behaviour* and, since *ethos* was again absent, *community/culture/environment*. Relationships were the dominant concept through all documents. Relationship was often paired with *management*, as in, a need to move from *behaviour management* to *relationship management*. Other connections to relationships referred to their importance; building, maintaining and restoring them; attending to them; fostering positive ones; and, promoting wholesome relationships. One document elaborated on what relationships need to be built on: “mutual respect, cooperation and collaboration that is focused on others, while valuing and celebrating individuality.” Behaviour as a concept was mentioned, but not with the same frequency as in other documents examined. Behaviour was modified by such words as *positive*, *mis-*, *management*, *appropriate*, *respectful and courteous*, *harmful* and *planned or spontaneous*. Attention was given to the needs and purposes behind misbehaviour. Misbehaviour was defined as harm done to another person or group. Community / culture / environment were not referenced often, but when they were, they were described as *restorative*, *based on trust*, and *proactive*. There was deference to the “wisdom of the community” and the need to foster an environment where all are “treated with kindness, dignity, courtesy and respect.” These training materials suggest a relational understanding of RJ in which positive behaviour is one by-product, not the primary goal.

Although the webinar and training material present a holistic understanding of RJ, it is still difficult to ascertain whether this understanding was widespread within the region. As was the case in the province as a whole, there was very little official attention paid to RJ within the board. Searching the school board's website for the word *restorative* turned up one result: the name of my own research project as having been approved. If RJ had been a priority of the board in the past (e.g., with the pilot project), it evidently no longer was.

School. As with the Scottish school, I analyzed a wide variety of documents, either produced by or about the Alberta school. Again, in the interest of maintaining the anonymity of the participants in this study, the documents I used to describe the context of the Alberta school will be identified as Document B. Each document will be given a number and the year the document was published will be provided (e.g., Document B, 4, 2013).

General discourses. The school was built in the early 1970s. In 2012/2013, the school served over 300 students, up almost 20 per cent from 2008 (Document B, 1, 2012), and employed about 30 full-time (or equivalent) staff responsible for three separate programs: regular classes for grades one to six; half-day Early Education programming for students with special educational needs; and Behaviour and Learning Assistance (BLA) programming for grades one to six (Document B, 3, 2013). During the research period, out of the total student population, approximately 250 were in regular programming, 60 were in Early Education, and 25 were in BLA classes (Document B, 1, 2012).

A profile found on the school board website provides a description of the student population as coming from diverse cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. While some families are affluent, many struggle with low income, and the school is recognized as working with students with high needs (Document B, 3, 2013). The profile identifies students as having

almost 40 different home countries, with the predominant ethnic groups being Arabic, Somalian and Aboriginal. One third of students are new Canadians, many attending school for the first time. English is a second language for approximately 80 per cent of the families.

Both the principal and the assistant principal, in their interviews, frequently referenced the backgrounds of students and families when explaining the school's procedures, vision and struggles. Many students grew up in refugee camps and were fleeing various forms of social upheaval. Students at times arrived traumatized and trust needed to be built with both them and their families before learning could occur (Assistant Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013; Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). Poverty was also an issue experienced by students at the school. The school did its best to alleviate some of the effects of low income by providing daily snacks to students and maintaining both a food and clothing bank.

The multicultural nature of the school was celebrated through events such as multicultural week, the inclusion of families and their traditions in school activities, and intentional class projects that highlighted cultural diversity (Document B, 5, 2012). The principal praised the families of the students for their support and attitude toward education. She found that many placed hope in education to better the lives of their children, as opposed to experiences she had had with parents in other more typically inner-city schools where cyclical poverty had erased that hope. The principal discussed the ongoing transition of the surrounding neighbourhood from a high-needs "rough, tough, rotten area" to a "nice, mixed little community" where, although dominated by public, often transient, housing, some ethnic groups were becoming more established (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013).

There were also challenges brought about by the mix of cultures and newcomer status of many students. The assistant principal discussed the difficulty in translating societal expectations

that the school aspired to embody – particularly gender equality and how to handle conflicts – to families from cultures or social situations where violence was the norm and gender roles clearly defined (Assistant Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). The principal mentioned this challenge as well, though placing more of the onus on staff to bridge the gap and be culturally sensitive. She gave an example of a previous practice, where recess supervisors would ask misbehaving students to stand against an outside wall, which “really upset parents because standing against the wall has certain connotations in a refugee camp or in war situations; it means you could, well, be shot quite literally” (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013).

Beyond these cultural disconnects, the school’s low academic performance was also partly attributed to the large number of newcomer students. The 2012 provincial achievement tests saw only half of students in the school gain an acceptable rating compared to the provincial average of 79 per cent (Document B, 3, 2013). The principal explained the low achievement rates to parents this way: “We had ten children come into our school, three of them are in grade 3 and two of them are in grade 6 [the grades included in the provincial exams]. And guess what? They speak no English whatsoever and they will be writing the provincial achievement tests. What is going to happen to our mark?” (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). The mix of cultures and backgrounds resulted in challenges both in terms of common everyday understandings and such public indicators of school success as test scores.

Yet many staff members I spoke with, including those in leadership, pointed out the often-overlooked indicators of school success. Also part of the provincial Accountability Pillar is a student, teacher and parent survey to assess if “students are safe at school, are learning the importance of caring for others, are learning respect for others and are treated fairly at school” (Alberta Education, 2015, How the Accountability Pillar Works section, para. 3). In this measure,

almost 80 per cent of respondents from the school agreed in 2012 that the school is safe and caring (Document B, 3, 2013). Although still lower than the provincial 89 per cent average, the gap is much diminished, as compared to academic measures. Anecdotally the assistant principal reported that in 2013 she believed students increasingly felt safe in school and felt that adults were there to help them (Assistant Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). The principal agreed that the ethos in the school was continuing to improve and thought that working with such high-needs students was requiring more emotional investment from staff. The effort that staff were making to connect with students reverberated within the whole school community (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013).

My own first impressions echoed this sense of the school as a safe and welcoming one – for students, staff and visitors. Inclusivity was evidenced in the patient manner in which many members of staff spoke with the students, in the programs and activities offered in school, in the way students were greeted by name in the front office, and in the impromptu circles that occurred in hallways and on the playground. As illustration of the staff investment in their students, the staff handbook contained words and images highlighting the school's desire to dig deep in all that they do for and with the students (Document B, 5, 2012).

Seen as crucial to encouraging the school to dig deep was the leadership team, consisting of one female principal who had been at the school for several years and one female assistant principal who had recently arrived. For the assistant principal, education was primarily about developing good citizens, and she viewed her role in the school as setting the right tone to encourage both staff and students in this development. She felt she best accomplished this tone setting by being visible within the school, modeling behaviour and attitudes, and supporting others in their roles (Assistant Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013).

The principal acknowledged that her own brand of leadership was different from most. When she arrived, she did not push hard deadlines and directions; rather she wanted to work with staff to discover the school's next steps. Her own educational philosophy was that "until you're fed, until you're accepted, until you're safe, you aren't going to learn very much" and she worked to put student safety and inclusion at the heart of the school, as necessary precursors to other directions the school might take (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). The principal admitted that some staff members left the school after her first year, not connecting with her style of leadership or the direction in which she was moving. She felt that she started to win over other members of staff once they realized that she was supporting them in the transition. The principal gave the example of bringing in various support staff – the Aboriginal liaison, the school board social worker and others – to meet monthly with teachers to conference on how to proceed with individual students. The fact that teachers were receiving such practical support gave the principal the traction she needed to continue implementing her ideas (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013).

The principal's desire to support and work collaboratively with staff members continued during my study. She related how she abhorred micromanaging but also wanted to ensure that staff members met fair deadlines (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). A difficult balance to achieve, staff members informally discussed how they sometimes felt imbued with too much freedom and sometimes with too little. With significant issues, however, I witnessed several examples where the principal worked to elicit and consider the input of others. The upcoming budget cuts, for example, were a point of deliberation and the cause of much fear. In the monthly newsletter, parents were asked to contact the leadership of the school with what they considered the most important student needs, so that those needs could be factored into budget

decisions. Likewise, during a staff meeting that I attended, the principal put forward various budget scenarios and possibilities for class organization to best meet those scenarios (Document B, 4, 2013). She requested input from staff as to which possibilities they preferred. Although the meeting was short and the discussion abbreviated, the act of requesting input invited further staff involvement. As a final example of the principal's leadership, at a staff meeting prior to my arrival, the staff spent time in groups revising parts of the Staff Handbook to better meet the ethos of the school. Although the revisions had yet to be made, I was shown a copy, full of handwritten edits and Post-it notes (Document B, 6, 2013). The principal was pleased with the collaborative effort undertaken to make the document consistent with the school's vision, increasing ownership by all members of staff (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013).

Collaborative, in fact, was a word often used to describe the staff at the school. This collaborative spirit grew out of, the principal thought, a focus on how to best meet the needs of all students. Whereas staff previously felt responsible only for their immediate students, over the past few years, staff members had been working with the intention of connecting with all students within the school, regardless of which class they belonged to. One concrete manner in which this collaboration was facilitated was through the implementation of cross-grade reading groups to improve literacy, where students were grouped according to reading ability regardless of age or grade. In a practical manner teachers needed to collaborate on how to create the groups, who would facilitate each group and what report card marks would represent. Besides improved literacy, another result was, according to the principal, building "the notion that we're working together, we're doing this thing together. Everybody's kids belong to everybody" (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). Another example of staff collaboration was the Wellbeing program. Soon after the principal arrived, she asked staff what they really needed

students to do for the wellbeing of all. Together staff created the program that utilizes an acronym and is posted throughout the school; the acronym is referred to frequently by students. The program encourages students to show pride, use gentle words, keep hands to themselves, listen actively, and be leaders in school (Document B, 5, 2012).

The practice of collaboration reflected a general sense of wellbeing among staff in the school. In a survey conducted in 2012, almost 100 per cent of staff felt that the school was a good place to work (Document B, 2, 2012). Staff were described as having good relationships and being devoted to the students, evidenced by the running of clubs and after-school activities (Assistant Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). Beyond the teaching staff, many others were applauded for their commitment and attitudes: front office staff, lunchtime supervisors, the school success coach, the family therapist and social workers, among others.

One staff issue that did emerge was a lack of adequate communication. In the 2012 survey, staff satisfaction with information on school happenings had dropped by close to 10 per cent from the previous year (Document B, 2, 2012). Staff circles to discuss issues and information had been used with some regularity when the principal first arrived. They were discontinued, however, due to staff complaints that circles were “uncomfortable” and “not dignified” (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). The principal admitted, however, that staff had started to ask for them again, to strengthen communication.

In my own observations, I witnessed a collaborative and dynamic staff, albeit with the same frequency of personality clashes and issues as any group. In the various staff circles that I ran, however, I heard a different story about staff dynamics. There seemed to be less communication amongst them than I had thought. Some went as far as to call the staff

dysfunctional. Many people said they longed for discussion and would appreciate more staff learning and discussion circles.

Part of the issue with communication seemed to be caused by the vast number of programs and groups operating within the school. Despite the principal's insistence that the school operate as a cohesive whole, there were still many divides. I do not believe that members of staff begrudged the presence of the various programs; they simply wished for better communication about and between these groups. Staff saw the programs as crucial for engaging the student population. Among the various partners offering services and programs in the school were: child and family services; social work support; English language learning support; an Aboriginal liaison; an art gallery; a peace centre; Unicef; before and after school care services; lunchtime supervisors; the school success coach; the family therapist; and a centre for newcomers; among others (Document B, 2, 2012; Document B, 3, 2013; Document B, 5, 2012).

One of the main events for the school, organized by staff, students, community members and school partners, was a multicultural festival. The festival began about a decade ago when refugee families started to arrive at the school in large numbers. According to one teacher, the families were often headed by single mothers dealing with trauma and culture shock. The school had a difficult time gaining the mothers' trust. At that time, this teacher told me, the school also saw an increase in bullying, especially between various socioeconomic classes within African cultures and between different Arabic groups. The school culture at the time – due largely to the previous principal – was quite punitive and this did not improve matters. One teacher started a multicultural festival as a way to help mothers feel more connected to the school, reaching out to them through a focus on food and clothes. The event has grown ever since.

My first day in the school featured the community multicultural night. The school was packed with students and family members, an incredible array of ethnicities and languages. Families all brought food to share and a line to sample the dishes snaked through the school. The evening's program consisted of a First Nations family drumming and dancing, a 7-year-old Punjabi girl dancing, and Arabic boys drumming and dancing. The whole week featured a variety of special guests and events. I attended an event with a Tanzanian storyteller with grades 4, 5 and 6. They listened attentively, called out answers spontaneously, and asked multiple questions. The next day I saw a drumming workshop led by a young African man. The highlight was the performance of an impromptu duet with one of the Arabic boys who had drummed at the community event.

Another main draw that week was a food tasting event. Each class represented a different country and set up display tables in the gym, offering typical food from that country. A bagpiper piped all the classes in, one at a time. The students and teachers were demonstrably proud of their displays. Again, families attended the event along with other community members, such as the School Trustee. A fashion show was a much-anticipated feature. As Katy Perry's *Firework* song played, a country's name was called out and one by one the students representing that country – often, though not always, their home country – would strut into the gym and pose in their outfits; it was a great cultural mash-up as Western pop music played and Somali girls struck poses in hijabs. In later conversations, students often referred to these events as a highlight of their year and one of the things that made the school special; adults revealed a lot of behind-the-scenes issues and referred to it as a symbol of confusion, lack of communication, and stress. Regardless, for all, it represented a substantial bridge between the school and families.

Besides the celebration of cultures at the school, inclusion was also addressed through other programs. Differing socioeconomic backgrounds, for example, were partly attended to through a program providing students with a daily nutritious snack. The program was funded by a nonprofit organization, and was a normal part of the day for all students, regardless of need. While I was in the school, the nonprofit arranged for a visit to inspect the facilities and present the school to its board members. The event took an immense amount of organizing, as students in all rooms made and ate a pancake breakfast along with the visitors. A number of media outlets also descended on the school, holding a news conference and celebration in the library. The student leadership students came one by one and thanked the organization for their support. Then one of the sponsors, in front of the television cameras, announced that they would be donating a 70-inch television and full sound system to the school. The school also received a donated fridge and financial contributions. Not only was the snack program funding extended; it was also a successful fundraising day for the school.

The other source of diversity addressed by programming in the school was that of behavioural and learning assistance (BLA). The BLA program was both a source of pride and despair. The school had been chosen as a site for BLA programs, so students who met the criteria were bussed in from around the city. There were three classes: grades 1/2, 3/4, and 5/6. The classes, with much fewer students than the regular classrooms, finished earlier and ran on a slightly different schedule than the rest of the school so as to allow for more supervision over lunches and breaks. Some students were integrated into mainstream classes part of the time; others stayed solely in the BLA rooms. They were both separate and integrated, attending some of the same assemblies and activities but seen by both themselves and other students as being a special group. The principal described the attitude within the school to BLA classes as reflecting

the phrase, “Everybody’s in.” She continued, discussing a student in a BLA class, “Yeah, I know, sometimes he kicks and screams and bites other people but it doesn’t mean we can cast him into outer darkness. We have to get that kid back” (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013).

My initial BLA experience was with the grade 5/6 class on my first day in the school. All BLA rooms are equipped with time-out rooms, padded rooms where students go or are put when it is deemed that they need to calm down. Apparently, the doors cannot be locked, so I would often see a teacher sitting with his/her chair propped up against the door, keeping it closed. On the day I arrived, there was a child in the time-out room, thumping repeatedly against the walls. Apparently he had torn up someone’s book. He finally came out and a mini restorative meeting was convened; he was asked who he thought he had affected and how he could make it better.

A few days later, I sat in on a circle in the grade 1/2 BLA class, at the request of their teacher. They were having a circle – which they did not often do – on issues that were happening on the school bus. The teacher wanted to deal with the fact that some of the boys were coming to class angry every day. Some students were filled with so much anger during the circle that they were shaking, punching their own heads, or using shoes to beat their heads. A teacher later told me that was extremely mild behaviour; teachers get about three death threats a day from students. But the students did sit in the circle and eventually all spoke. After some talk, it came out that there were bullying issues on the bus. One boy decided to go with an adult to talk to an older boy, who had been instigating the bullying. The circle was framed as a way to figure things out together, not to get anyone into trouble. Interestingly, out of all the circles I witnessed, this one put the most onus on the students, even more so than those in the older *mainstream* grades: all the ideas came from the students; students were coached to speak to one another; and teachers kept going until they got to the root of the issue.

I also had positive experiences as I engaged with individuals from the 5/6 BLA class for the study. One girl and one boy from the class filled in the student questionnaire. Both were completely on task and they were the only two to spot (separately) an error I had made, referring to students as *pupils* in one of the questions. They also wrote the most in their detective notebooks and radiated when they had a chance to tell me what they saw. Their teacher used the notebooks as a teachable moment, too. The class had a circle where they discussed what the student detectives were observing.

My most memorable BLA experience came on the day that the snack program visitors were in the school. Every class was to prepare pancakes. It was an incredibly busy morning, so I helped out in the grade 5/6 BLA class. A grade 3/4 mainstream class joined them. I was amazed at how well the BLA students moved into leadership roles. One boy, dressed in a suit, welcomed people into the class; two students gave up their chairs for younger kids; one girl ran around helping teachers; another boy told stories to the younger kids; and one student helped me distribute food. All were pleased to be acting as hosts and role models.

From time-out rooms, with the doors held shut, to restorative circles that gave students ownership in their own issues, from self-abuse to vent a myriad of feelings to playing leadership roles and taking care of younger kids, BLA students, with their range of emotions, pain, struggles, and needs, were an integral part of the school experience, and yet separate, physically and relationally.

One program implemented as part of a larger focus on building relationships across the potential divides – cultural, socioeconomic, behavioural and learning – was Unicef’s Rights Respecting Schools (RRS), based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Similar to the Scottish school, this school was a pioneer in Canada with this program. Although

both schools are accredited through Unicef, Unicef Canada launched their RRS pilot program in 2008, a few years after Unicef UK, adapting the UK materials for a Canadian context (Unicef Canada, 2013). One of the main differences between the two regions seems to be in the assessment. While the school in Scotland went through a rigorous process, with Unicef personnel observing the school and interviewing students, staff and community members as part of the assessment, Canadian schools are “supported and guided” by Unicef and self-assess (Canadian and UK Trainer, personal communication, July 29, 2013).

The school’s staff handbook suggests that the RRS initiative fits perfectly with the school’s vision, recognizing the rights and responsibilities of the diverse student population (Document B, 5, 2012). The conduct philosophy section of the handbook states that the school has a culture based on all individuals respecting one another, achieved through using the building blocks of RRS. According to Unicef’s own training materials, a RRS gives children meaningful opportunities to voice opinions, participate fully in all aspects of schooling, genuinely participate in decision-making that affects them and help to resolve obstacles to well-being (Unicef Canada, 2013, p. 9).

Within the school there was much visible evidence of the commitment to being a RRS. Each classroom had developed its own charter of rights and responsibilities based on the UN convention (Document B, 5, 2012). For example, I watched a kindergarten class create their charter. Although I was not privy to the lead-up activities and discussions that would have introduced the idea of rights, on the day that I was in the classroom, they created this charter: We have the right to be safe; We have the right to have friends; We have the right to talk; We have the right to play; and We have the right to an education. The hallways were filled with posters featuring student versions of what it meant to have both rights and responsibilities.

Evidence of this commitment to RRS was found on more than just the walls. Staff had created a plan for 2012/2013 on how to better implement RRS principles throughout the school community, through relationships, decision-making and in curriculum (Document B, 5, 2012). Staff were in the midst of re-evaluating this plan, self-assessing their progress. One implication of their self-assessment was to revise their staff handbook in light of RRS language (Document B, 6, 2013). There was a suggestion to frame the section on “General Expectations for Learning and Behaviour” more in terms of rights and responsibilities. As even greater evidence of the RRS focus, the older students that I worked with consistently referred to conduct in their classrooms not in terms of behaviour, but in terms of rights and responsibilities.

I was able to join several staff members for a two-day training on becoming a RRS trainer, offered to educators across the district. The principal gave a short talk at the training session on the school’s experience with RRS. She saw RRS as a framework in which many different initiatives could fit. The principal highlighted the school logo, designed with student input, based on RRS values. The principal said that, as a staff, they needed to work on avoiding the use of *earning rights* language, and instead promote the recognition of rights as inherent. I also heard earning rights language, as some staff members tied rights and responsibilities together, implying that a student might lose their right (e.g., to have a voice) if they did not accept the responsibility (e.g., to speak respectfully) that the teacher tied to that right.

During a breakout group in the training session, we talked about student participation. The school was considering how to include their school leadership team (student council) in more meaningful ways. At that point, representatives in grades 4-6 were elected; the following year, elections would be held in grades 2-6. Staff were also considering including some students in staff committees and/or asking students to take on a project of students’ choosing. The school

appeared to be continually evolving, asking questions about how to give more voice to students, grappling with where they were falling short and where to move next.

Many in the school felt that there were strong connections between RRS and RJ. Although RJ was introduced to the school a few years prior to the introduction of RRS, there was a sense that one could not work without the other. The assistant principal named RRS the “precursor” to RJ, setting the tone and developing necessary characteristics in children to be able to then restore broken relationships through RJ (Assistant Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). The principal described the interaction between the two approaches this way:

Rights respecting schools talks big-time about how students need to be involved in meaningful decisions. They need to be part of making the policies, their dignity needs to be respected at all times, you need to extend that same courtesy to parents. You know, they have a right to be safe and they have a right to be honoured in their own home and culture. And I think that restorative practices really look at treating people that way. They are about healing, about ensuring that everyone is included in the larger society.

(Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013)

The staff handbook affirmed the connection between RRS and RJ, rooting the conduct agreement in Restorative Discipline and Rights Respecting Schools philosophies (Document B, 5, 2012).

This is the context into which RJ was introduced.

Restorative discourses. Prior to implementing RJ, the school relied on a standard discipline model. Along with receiving a timeout, forms detailing a student’s misbehaviour needed to be signed by the teacher, the principal and the parents. Upon her arrival several years ago, the principal recalled finding three three-inch binders full of these forms. She also described a staff culture in which each teacher was responsible for his or her own students; all other

students were seen as somebody else's responsibility. The divide was particularly impermeable between the three programs: Regular, Early Education and BLA. The principal's initial goals were to encourage a more cohesive staff culture and to move away from the form-filled binders and the discipline model they represented (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013).

Knowing she wanted the school to move in a different direction, but not entirely sure what that might mean, the principal booked the entire school into a professional development session with Barbara Coloroso, an American author and speaker on parenting, school discipline and RJ. After that experience, she sent staff members, in groups, to whatever professional development sessions they thought would help them discern how to move forward with a different discipline model, and had them present their findings to the whole staff (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). Some went to Tribes Learning Communities presentations but found its process too prescriptive; others attended Martin Brokenleg, co-founder of Circle of Courage, a model of positive youth development, and connected with his message; some enjoyed Michele Borba's teaching about bullying and moral development; and others connected with local presentations on restorative discipline. In the end, "the staff latched on to the notion of restorative practices as something that was small enough that we could take a piece of it and use it. Which was specifically the restorative justice circles" (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013).

The principal described the first efforts to implement RJ in the school as "rocky" (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). Teachers were asked to conduct weekly circles with their classes; many did not follow through. By the third year, however, the principal believed that most staff members had come on board. As RJ became more integrated into the school's philosophy, they also reached out to families, holding presentations on RJ to inform

parents of the move away from the punitive model. The principal found that parents were quite supportive of this new direction (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013).

It was also in the third year of implementing RJ that RRS was introduced to the school. The principal thought that if the staff had not already embraced RJ, RRS would never have been accepted (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). The shift that RJ caused in thinking – particularly involving students in decisions that affected them – facilitated discussion about children’s rights and children’s voice. Both RJ and RRS, according to the principal have the same message: “This is the students’ process, not just ours. You are not God sitting on a hill dispensing the commandments, you know? You’re down there and everybody’s working together. And you need to model what you expect to be done” (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). The assistant principal also saw the two working together, but viewed RRS as the proactive part and RJ as the reactive piece. RRS is a “stepping stone” into RJ (Assistant Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). During my study, five years into RJ implementation, the school was committed to both initiatives, RJ and RRS, with many seeing the two as intertwined.

It is interesting to note that the most common terms found in school documents and in conversations with school personnel about RJ were not restorative approaches, as in the Scottish school, but restorative discipline, restorative justice, restorative practices and, simply, restorative. The assistant principal provided some insight into this choice of words. She was new to RJ when she arrived at the school and attended training sessions along with other new staff. Staff attended two sessions, the first of which framed RJ through its roots in the judicial system, including the viewing of a frequently used video of a criminal case. The second session then moved RJ ideas to the classroom. The focus on the justice system is not surprising since the documents examined in the provincial and regional sections of this chapter also had this focus.

Using terms such as practice, however, did not seem to limit the understanding of RJ by those in leadership in the school. In considering the importance of RJ for students, the principal discussed RJ in regards to the culture it produced – both in the school and in the larger society. She felt that RJ ensured that everyone was included and respected, and that relationships were healed (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). The assistant principal, too, focused on the big picture, how RJ could lead to better citizenship and to being a “good person” (Assistant Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). She also identified the many skills and attitudes that she saw RJ instilling in students: self-confidence, inner sense of calm, respect for others, willingness to take responsibility, and skills to deal with conflict. One of the main benefits, as the assistant principal voiced it, was that RJ provided students with “that understanding that they can fix it. They’re not dead in the water. They can fix it” (Assistant Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013).

The framing of RJ in various school documents also provided a sense that the school’s goals for RJ reached beyond behavioural change. In a 2012 document detailing how the school met various district initiatives, RJ was mentioned as evidence of: strategies that build citizenship characteristics in students; practices related to student citizenship, health and creativity; and development of inclusive classrooms (Document B, 2, 2012). In an updated 2013 document, RJ was provided as evidence of: deepening students’ understanding of equity and empathy as key citizenship traits; and promoting health and wellness for all students and staff (Document B, 3, 2013). In line with the words of the principal and assistant principal, the goals in implementing RJ were to develop attitudes and skills to serve students well both in school and beyond.

The main manifestation of RJ in the school occurred in circles. I was able to view a variety of circles for different ages and different purposes. I sat in on a circle with a kindergarten

class. They reviewed how to be in circle: look and listen to the person talking, pass the talking piece, and do not talk while someone is talking. Then the teacher introduced the topic: being a leader at the school. The teacher asked students to think of a time when they had been leaders at the school. She gave them time to think about their answer and then went sequentially around the circle. They listened attentively. If a child could not think of a time he/she had been a leader, the teacher gave an example of when she had seen that child as a leader. The teacher reminded one girl of how she had been scared to go on the playground because an older boy was being mean to her. They had a restorative meeting and the girl spoke directly to him about how he was making her feel. He had denied any culpability to the teacher but when he spoke to the girl in person, he was honest and apologized. The girl beamed at the memory.

The grade 5/6 class ran circles on Thursday afternoons. The students were able to get desks into circle in a matter of minutes. They explained to me how and why they do circles. The students told me it was to solve issues or simply to share thoughts. They need to listen to each other; not talk when others are talking; and not put anyone down. The week I joined the circle they wanted to discuss playing soccer at recess. The circle discussion was not sequential, but rather jumped wherever there was a hand up. It took a while for the issues to emerge: the main issue was how boys acted toward the girls who were playing and how some girls did not take the game seriously and did handstands on the field. The students were open about the issues but still shied away from letting the conversation get too personal. The teacher was very competent at encouraging students to talk; she also, however, shaped the conversation through her questions. Later she said she would prefer students to run the circle, but did not yet feel they had the maturity. Within the circle she asked if I had any thoughts. I noted that I had seen some students smirking during the circle and I wondered if there were dynamics that needed to be discussed.

The students got a bit more specific about some of the issues and suggested a few solutions. I remarked on how brave it was for them to talk honestly and I asked if they had been able to do that at the start of the year. They reacted quite strongly and said, no, not at all. Only now do they know each other and feel safe enough to speak honestly.

Circles seemed to be a natural part of school life and the students relished them: from the young ones who shared stories of their lives to the older ones who had confidence that issues would be dealt with. In the learning circles for my study, students told me they appreciated circles, but also voiced their frustration at the tendency for some students to make false statements or false commitments in circle. Teachers, too, had mixed feelings, being particularly frustrated that the same issues kept coming up in circles.

With staff, the expectation was that staff also use RJ among themselves to address any potential conflicts. As the principal stated, “If we’re doing it with kids, why wouldn’t we do it with ourselves?” (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013). Although staff restorative circles had been run when RJ was first introduced to the school, staff circles did not appear to have been used with regularity within the last few years. A few documents mentioned the need to mentor new staff in understanding a restorative culture (Document B, 2, 2012; Document B, 3, 2013), though I did not see evidence of such an initiative while I was in the school. Several staff members intimated that they would appreciate more opportunities to practice the restorative work they were requiring of their students.

An idea that emerged from the staff learning circles that I ran for my study was for me to conduct a whole staff circle. One of the participants talked to the principal about it, who agreed, and it was planned as a special staff meeting for my last week in the school. Although it was an idea that originated with staff participants, it quickly came to be seen as a top-down initiative,

due to how it was communicated. It was presented to staff as a mandatory meeting, making initial acceptance of the circle difficult.

On the day of the circle, all the tables were cleared out of the staff room and we set chairs into a large circle. On each chair, I placed a piece of paper divided into four. As they came in, people were instructed to answer the four designated questions with words or pictures. They were told that they could choose what they wished to share. The questions were: What do I like about working with kids?; What do I appreciate about working at this school?; Who is the teacher/EA/principal I strive to be?; and What support do I need to better be that person at this school?

I reviewed the circle guidelines (which I had posted on the wall) and introduced the circle as their own circle, requested by staff, and they could use the circle however they needed. The first round went quickly, with almost everyone focusing on the first two questions. Only positive thoughts were shared. Since staff members, in asking for this circle, were hoping to open communication and build bridges, this feel-good round seemed like the necessary place to start. In the second round, I asked for people to share based on the last two questions. Here, more issues did arise and there were a number of tears. Some people spoke of their own insecurities and things they needed assistance with; others were very specific about what was not working in their current situations; one talked about the lack of respect she saw in how adults spoke to one another. Overall, the circle experience seemed to be positive for most. It occurred on my final day in the school so I cannot comment on whether there were any follow-up actions undertaken or whether it succeeded in opening communication. As a participant researcher, however, it felt like a tangible way to give something to a community that had opened their doors to me for almost six

weeks; something that was very much in line with the school's stated desire to use RJ as a way to build health and wellness in both staff and students.

As evidence of the school's commitment to RJ, the principal talked of their evolution in official documents from Conduct Policy to Restorative Conduct Policy to Restorative Relationships, with the document meant to reflect "how we manage what we do in this building" (Principal, personal communication, May 1, 2013; Document B, 5, 2012). Although the document was under revision while I was at the school, seen more as a living document than a static one, the Restorative Relationships document revealed the most current understanding of RJ. It is this six-page document to which I applied Williams's (1976/1990) technique of interrogating *key words* to make meaningful the RJ concepts of *relationships*, *behaviour* and *community/environment/culture*.

Relationships have a strong presence in the document, particularly in the main headings: Relationship Management Plan; and Restoring Relationships. Words coupled with relationships are: *positive*; *building*, *maintaining* and *restoring*; and *strong*. The document states that relationships are *key* to effective classroom management and suggests they are achieved by developing a sense of belonging among students and by teachers listening to their students. The focus on relationships extends beyond the student population to the home, calling on teachers to form strong relationships with students' families. *Behaviour*, on the other hand, is rarely mentioned in the document. When it is mentioned, students are asked to be responsible for their own behaviour and to display *respectful* and *courteous* behaviour to themselves, other students and adults. Staff are asked to teach and model the behaviour they desire. Interestingly *misbehaviour*, a word that has been referenced in all other documents enlisted in the key words analysis, is not used once. *Making inappropriate choices* seems to be used in lieu of

misbehaviour. I believe the difference in terms is significant. Making inappropriate choices suggests a decision, perhaps an isolated decision, something that is to be dealt with through reason and discussion. The terms *community*, *environment* and *culture* surface frequently in the document. Words coupled with them are overwhelmingly affirmative: *friendly*, *safe*, *welcoming*, *positive*, *caring*, *restorative*, and *respectful*. There is a belief that everyone can be part of the community and that students need to have a sense of ownership in and commitment to the community. Individuals respect each other in community and engage in collective conversations that foster positive relationships. Relationships and community were closely intertwined. Behaviour did not come up in reference to community.

The document revealed the school's desire to shape their day-to-day affairs through RJ, building relationships and a sense of community. Although behaviour is much more of a secondary focus than in most other documents examined, the general school expectations for students are still framed in terms of what students need to do: be punctual, participate in all class activities to the best of one's abilities, complete assignments, behave in a respectful and courteous manner, display appropriate self-control and follow school building regulations. And, if students make *inappropriate choices* in regards to these expectations, the school will, in minor situations, work to restore any harmed relationships; if the choice was deemed majorly inappropriate, the school will deal with the situation *severely*. The tone throughout most of the document is positive and optimistic, offering teachers and students the chance to foster positive relationships and environments. Underlying this is the expectation that students will make the right choices or, if not, will make the situation right when given the chance.

In the province, the region and the school, I was impressed by the embracing of complexity at each level and around each issue. Although less formed by a systematic coherent

vision than in Scotland, this is not a province that attends to the status quo. Building on the strengths and challenges of the past and present, relying on an entrepreneurial spirit to see them through, the people and documents reflect a context that is both highly individualistic and highly community-oriented. RJ reflects the same reality. This reality will be explored in greater depth in the findings chapters.

Chapter Six: Findings: Scotland

My research explored the understandings and broad goals that drive the use of RJ in schools. I wanted to gather data on students' experiences of RJ in school, as well as gain an understanding of the influence of the contextual factors in which these experiences were occurring. To frame this pursuit, I asked the following three related questions: How do students in Scotland and Canada perceive RJ in schools? What do students' perspectives reveal about the politics of RJ in Scottish and Canadian schools? How are discourses of transformation and discourses of affirmation evident in Scottish and Canadian school contexts?

Attending to the research questions, I analyzed my data as described in the methodology section of this paper, utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis (TA) approach. In this chapter, I focus on 12 themes identified within the Scottish data. The following chapter will focus on themes identified within Alberta data. The context of both Scotland and Alberta, described in the previous chapters, play crucial roles in understanding these findings. Findings from both sites, as well as their contexts, will be merged together in the discussion chapter, framing the final analysis.

Of the twelve themes identified in this chapter, six were developed out of the educator data and six out of the pupil data. Educator themes were drawn from documents, the educator questionnaires and the educator learning circles. Educator themes were developed through a deductive analysis, taking into consideration the affirmative-transformative RJ continuum. Student themes were drawn from student questionnaires, comments made in student learning circles, observations students took note of during the co-researcher activities, and the final individual student interviews in which students provided further explanation and analysis of their

co-researcher notebooks. Student themes were driven by the data, identified within the participants' own repeating ideas.

The intention of these next two chapters is to reflect the participants' thoughts, grouped under coherent themes. The educator themes more explicitly reflect my conceptual framework. I am clear, however, that even with the students, themes do not emerge independently out of data; they were carefully chosen by me, as the researcher, and, as such, reflect my own understandings. In both educator and student data, I paid attention to underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations, and ideologies; the "development of the themes themselves involves interpretative work, and the analysis that is produced is not just description, but is already theorized" (Braun & Clarke, p. 84).

I have chosen to discuss the educator themes first to set the context for the pupil experience. With this choice, I aim to keep the focus on the pupils, allowing them to have the final say once the context of their experience has been sufficiently described. Table 1 illustrates the organization of data into educator and pupil themes.

Table 1

Educator Themes	Pupil Themes
1. The hope that RA will teach pupils a different way 2. RA is natural for educators and alien to pupils 3. RA as too lenient, ineffective and hidden from sight	1. Relationships in the background as pupils negotiate place, rules and voice 2. Pupil-pupil relationships: From family to cliques 3. Adult-pupil relationships: Pupils express trust and sympathy

4. The ripple effect of RA: A change in pupil behaviour impacts all	4. Adult responses to rule-breaking: From discussion to wrongful punishment
5. Using RA to manage, control and improve pupil behaviour	5. Handling harm: Adult-facilitated talk or pupil-initiated force
6. The mutuality of RA, building relationships and engagement	6. Overall assessment of the school: Positive though not perfect

Scottish Educator Themes

The educator themes attempt to answer the theoretical question: How are discourses of transformation and discourses of affirmation evident in Scottish and Canadian school contexts? These discourses begin to emerge within the first four themes identified, through an exploration of what educators identify as the goals of RA, the context within which RA is utilized, concerns educators have with RA and the impact they see RA having. The final two themes more overtly discuss discourses of affirmation and discourses of transformation.

Before elaborating on the six educator themes, I wish to make explicit details and limitations of the educator learning circles and educator questionnaire upon which these themes are based. In the three learning circles combined, there were ten participants. Of these ten, one was male, three worked in the areas of guidance or pupil support and seven were employed as classroom teachers in a variety of subjects, with a few holding leadership positions within their subject area. Their experience in the school ranged from less than one year to almost 20 years. To protect participants' anonymity, I do not disclose particulars of the individuals cited in the themes below; however, it is important to note both the rich range of experiences represented as well as the caveat that their views do not necessarily reflect those of the staff as a whole. Participants will

be identified with numbers to further ensure anonymity; for example, Scottish Educator 1 or SE1 for the sake of brevity.

Out of 85 educator questionnaires distributed to staff, 27 were returned. Two of the 27 were returned by clerical staff members who felt unable to comment and did not respond to any of the questions. Therefore, the questionnaire was completed by 29 per cent of the staff members. The staff members who did respond to the questionnaire were a self-selected group: it is possible that they were more interested in RA than the general staff population and thus took the time to complete the questionnaire. Although the claim cannot be made that these 25 individuals represent the staff as a comprehensive whole, it is possible to pull out various trends and patterns in their responses; it is these patterns that are referred to when the questionnaire results are included in the theme descriptions.

Theme 1: The hope that RA will teach pupils a different way. The group that responded to the educator questionnaire actively used RA in the school. Seventy six per cent of respondents indicated that they used RA *often* or *always*, and the number rose to 96 per cent when including those indicating *sometimes*. Learning circle participants identified several goals for the use of RA including a few that focused specifically on staff members or on the school environment as a whole. In these instances, educators outlined the hope that RA would improve working relationships among adults within the school and change aspects of adult behaviour and attitudes so that adults would take responsibility for “how they react in a situation or how they

deal with a situation” (Ed1, SE3)⁴. Describing the impact on the school as a whole, SE9 named a main goal of RA as getting “the school to be a bit calmer” (Ed3).

Goals that focused on adults or the whole school, however, were unequivocally in the minority. The vast majority of identified goals focused on pupils. Educators hoped that RA would model or teach a different way for pupils to: behave, deal with their emotions, handle conflicts and issues, and take responsibility for their own actions. There was an oft-repeated sense that RA was a vastly different approach from what pupils experienced outside the school and, thus, teaching them this different way was both ambitious and necessary. SE5 described RA as teaching future skills particularly important to pupils with backgrounds typical to this specific pupil population:

Something a lot of them don’t think about are the repercussions. You force them to reflect on what they’ve done and therefore take responsibility for what they’ve done and that’s, again, a skill that if they’re going to go out and do something in the community or in their work in the future, they need to know what the repercussions might be of that action. So even on a small scale, making them think about, ‘look how upset you’ve made the other person,’ or ‘look what you’ve done by throwing that pencil’ or whatever. Hopefully, they’ll then, before they act in the future, they’ll reflect before they act, thinking how is this going to turn out. And that’s an important thing to have in the future. (Ed2)

SE1 concurred with the idea that RA taught their pupils crucial skills:

⁴ The notation here indicates that the speaker was part of the Educator Learning Circle 1 (Ed1) and is identified as Scottish Educator 3 (SE3). All notations in the findings section will follow a similar format.

They're very good at anger but they're not very good at expressing where that anger comes from. So maybe it's a way of helping them not get so angry or when they do get angry, of being able to deal with that. So that they can actually, therefore, modify their behaviour ... But maybe, try to get into their heads a little bit and make them emotionally intelligent about how they, about how other people feel. I think maybe that's... and improve behaviour. (Ed1)

The hope seemed to be that RA would offer pupils a calmer approach through which they could learn new skills for the present and new habits for the future.

In the educator questionnaire, responses also emphasized this hope that RA would teach a different way to pupils to behave and deal with issues. Selecting from a list, educators felt that RA should be used in the school to: deal with incidents of conflict (92 per cent of respondents agreed); teach pupils communication skills (88 per cent); teach pupils social skills (88 per cent); deal with incidents of harm (80 per cent); empower pupils to deal with their own conflicts (76 per cent); empower adults to deal with their own conflicts (76 per cent); bring about change in the school (76 per cent); teach the following of school rules (68 per cent); and empower pupils to fight systemic injustice (60 per cent).

In both the learning circles and the questionnaire, it is apparent that educators hoped that RA could, first and foremost, offer improvements in pupil behaviour and in pupil responses to incidents of conflict and harm. The focus on pupil behaviour indicates an affirmative understanding of RA. Using RA to empower both pupils and adults, to affect adult behaviour and attitudes, and to alter the ethos of the school – all indicators of transformative RA – are mentioned, but only as secondary goals.

Theme 2: RA is natural for educators and alien to pupils. In the learning circles, educators spent time describing the context in which RA was operating. For the most part, the *adult side* of the context was described as being favourable to RA. Several educators referred to RA as a “natural way to think” (Ed1, SE3; Ed1, SE4) and “just the way we are” (Ed1, SE4). RA was described as simply giving a name and focus to common ways of being. SE9 summed it up for many: “I was here when restorative approaches came in and although maybe we never used that term previously, we had really done it” (Ed3). Most educators who participated in learning circles did not see RA as a paradigm shift either for themselves personally or for the school in general. Corroborating this natural acceptance of RA, 92 per cent of respondents to the educator questionnaire either agreed or strongly agreed that RA fit well with the school’s values.

Part of this tight fit with RA was attributed to a staff culture that was supportive of both pupils and staff. Examples were given of staff members who took time to build relationships with pupils, helping them to achieve their potential in ways beyond a particular subject area. Although there were dissenting voices, most staff members were highly appreciative of the collegial support in the school. SE9 described it this way:

I think, as a school, we very much sort of have each other’s backs. You know what I mean? People who leave here say they’ll never find another school like it, where the staff support each other. So maybe we’ve always been restorative and supportive of each other. So it’s quite a tight-knit group that work here, especially the people who’ve been here a long time, you know. [The headteacher] said something the other day about [the school] getting in your blood, and it does. Once you’re here for a while, you’ll stay, ‘cause you love it. And maybe that’s what it is, it’s the support mechanism that’s there, everybody supports each other. (Ed3)

In addition to demonstrating the supportive nature of the staff, this comment shows how some educators equated RA with supportive relationships.

The adult part of the context was seen as being highly conducive to the implementation of RA. In contrast, there were multiple barriers described in introducing RA to pupils. In particular, educators raised the issue that most pupils came from very difficult backgrounds that taught the opposite of RA. Some educators saw the school's influence and the influence of RA as limited since school hours were not enough to "break the trend" (Ed1, SE1) of the surrounding environment. As proof of this limited influence, SE1 commented on how pupils behave after brief school holidays: "There is a wildness about them where they've had no routine, no boundaries and almost we have to start with some of them again. Because we can't, sadly, we can't change the society that they live in" (Ed1). On the other hand, the difficult environment in which pupils lived was also seen as reason to persist in the use of RA. Pupils were thought to have few stable relationships in their lives and educators who used RA to build relationships with them took on the role of surrogate parents. Several participants alluded to the responsibility that comes with this role, with pupils sharing difficult aspects of their lives with adults. This responsibility played out both in the building of mutually respectful relationships and in the attempt to instill skills and attitudes in the pupils that adults thought were lacking. SE5 framed it this way:

It's probably a very alien thing for someone – for an adult – to turn around and speak to them and show that they care. But they need to learn that that's an important thing in life. They're obviously not learning that from their home; so that's showing them, this is how you can deal with a situation or a conflict. And hopefully they'll go out into the real world and remember that. (Ed2)

As difficult as it was to teach restorative skills and attributes, such skills and attributes were also deemed to be necessary for this set of pupils.

The other part of the pupil context seen to be prohibitive to implementing RA was what was described as a vocal minority of disruptive pupils. All participants mentioned the challenge involved in dealing with these pupils; opinion was mixed, however, as to whether RA was an appropriate way to work with this population. Some educators felt that RA was too lenient for this group of “hardcore” pupils who had become “so well-versed in restorative” as to use it to their advantage (Ed2, SE8). As SE5 explained:

They say sorry and they say it five times and they say it ten times and there’s nothing else happening and you think how far do you allow a child to go using restorative approaches until something changes? Months could go by and all you do is restorative, at all different levels – pupil support level, in the class, [management team] – and yet they just give such a good spiel, they’re just very good actors, they know what they need to say. And it doesn’t necessarily change them as a person. I’ve not seen it happen very often but the odd person around the school, I think, they’re just playing us. And you feel they just need a good shouting at, almost. (Ed2)

Other educators, however, pointed to examples of pupils who had “restorative meetings and maybe have behavioural issues, it does make a difference to them. They maybe come back and realize what they’ve done – their actions were wrong” (Ed3, SE9). These educators felt that previous punitive approaches were ineffective and that RA was better suited to reach such pupils.

Thus into this mix in which adults found it natural and pupils presumably found it alien, RA was introduced. The context, as described by educators, in which RA was experienced was complex and layered. Due to the pupils’ apparent *deficits* – familial or personal – educators felt

that forming strong relationships and teaching social skills were crucial for the pupils' wellbeing. To this end, many felt that the school became a surrogate family for the pupils. This obvious care for pupils and focus on relationships facilitated social connection and was evidence of transformative RA; the deficit lens used by some adults to view the pupils, however, meant that adults were sometimes more focused on controlling pupils than engaging them, using RA in affirmative ways.

Theme 3: RA as too lenient, ineffective and hidden from sight. Some educators identified concerns with RA and, through this identification, revealed aspects of their own understandings of RA and the discourses that supported those understandings. The two main concerns repeated in the educator learning circles were that RA was too lenient and that RA was ineffective. As will be explained, these concerns highlighted a desire for RA to be utilized in a more affirmative manner, as a social control mechanism.

A minority of participants voiced the first criticism, that RA was too lenient. Some educators, such as SE1, claimed the critique as their own: "Sometimes, restorative has become a way to avoid dealing with serious consequences. And I still believe that they should go hand in hand" (Ed1). Most educators who raised this point, however, attributed the feeling to pupils ("I know some of the pupils who are maybe, like, have never been in trouble, for instance, maybe feel sometimes that restorative is a softly, softly approach with the ones that misbehave" - Ed3, SE9) or to other staff members or to both. SE5 wondered about the difference between an approach that is lenient and one that is restorative:

There's a fine line, I think, sometimes between the two. Sometimes a lot of children see that – and staff – will complain that we're crossing over into that leniency, as opposed to

just restorative. There's no discipline as such. Rather than understanding that the discipline procedures have changed; they just don't think they're there at all. (Ed2, SG)

Connected to the leniency critique, the other criticism, also voiced by a minority, was that RA was not effective, either with certain pupils or in general. As SE1 said, "To me, it's a combination of punishment and restorative. You can't abrogate all responsibility by saying having a wee chat with some of the pupils will work because with some of them, it doesn't" (Ed1). This perception connects to the debate mentioned in the previous theme, as to how best to deal with chronically disruptive pupils. The suggestion by those who felt RA could be too lenient or ineffective was that RA must be backed up by consequences, punishments, or, at least, the threat of those measures.

A final concern held by some educators was specific to how RA was handled in the school, not a critique of RA itself. A few educators took issue with what they perceived as the lack of communication that accompanied RA. Again most participants, such as SE8, who voiced this concern, raised it on behalf of pupils:

I think also, maybe I'm sort of second-guessing here, that pupils will have a gripe about what they see as persistent, repeat offenders, ones that repeatedly disrupt learning. And as far as they're concerned, nothing, nothing has happened to the pupils. But what they don't see are all the levels of intervention that are going on with people. (Ed2)

Others wished to be more personally involved:

It seems that people have talked to the class behind my back to resolve an issue; I was never involved in it. I was sometimes very upset by the way things have been handled. It always seemed to me that basically if you can't handle things yourself then you're not good enough at your job and then basically the responsibility is taken away from you and

then somebody deals with it in their own way. And they don't even ask your opinion about it, although you might have so many good ideas about it. (Ed1, SE2).

These educators were not concerned about RA in general, but specifically about how RA had been implemented in the school, highlighting their desire for better communication and more direct involvement on the part of pupils and staff.

All concerns – the first two aimed at RA as a general approach and the last directed towards the school's approach – speak to residual hierarchical beliefs that continue to resonate and hierarchical structures that continue to exist. The first two concerns suggest that at least a minority of educators believed RA should have controlled behaviour and, if it did not, then it was not effective. These concerns reveal an affirmative understanding of RA. The concern that there be better communication referenced structures in place in the school that prevented individuals – pupils (as presumed by educators) or staff members – from feeling fully engaged in RA and its use in the school. These structures or systems may have been residual from other discipline approaches or may have existed for practical reasons (such as confidentiality) underpinning them.

Theme 4: The ripple effect of RA: A change in pupil behaviour impacts all. Just as the identification of concerns with RA revealed aspects of educators' understandings of RA, so, too, did such revelations occur when educators identified the impact RA had had on the school and its members. Most respondents to the educator questionnaire (84 per cent) either agreed or strongly agreed that RA had impacted their school significantly. Although most goals educators associated with RA focused on pupils (as shown in Theme 1), impact indicators were spread equally across pupils, teachers, communication styles and the school culture.

Learning circle participants described the impact on pupils in multiple ways. Pupils exhibited “more of a willingness to cooperate and to work together” (Ed1, SE3), were more able

to see the other person's point of view (Ed2, SE8) and had come to "rely on" RA (Ed3, SE10).

When referring to pupils, the focus from most participants was on how RA affected pupil relationships. SE3 echoed the sentiment of several educators: "I do think it has an impact on how the pupils behave with each other and their ability to restore relationships" (Ed1). This sense that RA had impacted pupils positively was reiterated in the educator questionnaire. In response to a specific question about the impact of RA, 86 per cent of respondents felt that RA helped to teach pupils social skills and 79 per cent believed that RA helped to empower pupils to deal with their own conflicts. Although still mostly focused on changing pupil behaviour, the indicators of impact that educators pointed to included mentions of quality relationships and empowerment, indicators of transformative RA and concepts not present within the educators' stated goals for RA.

Learning circle participants also described how RA had impacted staff members. SE9 admitted that she goes "in much more sensitively to issues now" after participating in "eye-opening" restorative meetings (Ed3). SE5 appreciated how "it's easier, as well, as a teacher. The last thing you want to be doing is getting yourself upset and stressed at pupils (*agreement from others*). I've got two options here, they're both going to work, but it's easier to do restorative" (Ed2). Key to making situations *easier* was the idea that RA is "just discussion rather than shouting" (Ed1, SE4). This switch in communication styles was seen to provide a "better rapport" between teachers and pupils (Ed1, SE4) and to allow an opportunity to substantially transform a situation. As SE8 said, speaking to pupils rather than shouting at them "wrongfoots [pupils]. And then you get to the real root why they're behaving like that, you know. The tears come and they open up" (Ed2). SE9 continued, focusing on the mutual impact of RA, "Rather than, you know, 'you did this,' 'you did that,' actually listening to their side of the story. I think it's made a huge

impact on the way kids behave and the way we behave towards them” (Ed3). Learning circle participants elaborated on this mutual impact, describing how RA was impacting the school ethos (“I think, generally, the whole school is calmer” - Ed2, SE6; “There’s more of a kind of culture of that’s the way things are dealt with” - Ed2, SE7). The idea of RA being a *calm* approach came up repeatedly in the educator questionnaires, with respondents referring to RA as a non-confrontational, constructive approach that reduces both shouting and anger. As SE7 stated in a learning circle, RA made the school “very different and it is a nicer place to work” (Ed2).

Although educators referred to mutual benefits that RA offered staff and pupils, the primary focus remained on using RA to deal with pupil conflicts or pupil behavioural issues so as to bring about those benefits. RA’s impact on adult behaviour was only occasionally mentioned. In the educator questionnaire, there was a real divide in thought as to whether RA were ever used to address issues among adults: one quarter of respondents said often or always; one quarter said never or hardly ever. Only 62 per cent of questionnaire respondents agreed or strongly agreed that RA helped to empower adults to deal with their own conflicts; 21 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed. References to using RA to deal with adult conflicts were also rare in the learning circles. When mentioned, it was almost always in reference to the senior management team’s “open door policy” (Ed2, SE7), not to teachers approaching one another directly.

The lack of engagement with adult conflicts notwithstanding, a few participants suggested that RA was increasingly embedded in the school culture. Evidence of infusion of RA was provided through examples such as the reduction of shouting in the school (Ed2, SE5) and the school’s welcoming environment (Ed3, SE10). SE1 gave this example: “It’s so embedded now, you know, we take the pupils out and we say, ‘Well, where do we go from here? Do you want to stand here? Do you want to let me know how we’re not going to do this again?’ Because it’s now

embedded in what we do, I think sometimes we don't even realize we're doing it" (Ed1). Others were less convinced that RA had become the underlying approach. SE7 feared that the lack of explicit discussion about RA indicated not that RA was embedded but that it might be getting lost: "There's a feeling that a lot of people are using restorative more automatically now, but also it hasn't been re-visited for a while. Maybe people are forgetting, so I'm not really sure" (Ed2).

Whether RA was embedded or not was debatable in the educators' eyes; also debatable was which form of RA was becoming embedded, if it was indeed taking root. There were indications that both transformative RA and affirmative RA sat side by side in the school context, as described by educators. These discourses will be explored more fully in the final two educator themes.

Theme 5: Using RA to manage, control and improve pupil behaviour. In this theme I explore the evidence that points to affirmative RA in the school. I identify areas of social order and control that educators discussed, either in relation to RA or that served as a backdrop to RA. Areas of affirmative RA discussed included the ultimate authority of the teacher, utilizing RA as a classroom management tool, a focus on individual pupil behaviour and how to improve it, engaging peers in the quest to control pupil behaviour and a discussion of the role of punishment with RA.

It was rare to hear an educator refer to him- or herself as desiring more authority in the classroom. Explicit references to teachers as the ultimate authority were relegated to the exceptions cited about other educators: "But there's always going to be one or two, so... they're the teacher and they're the boss, so it should be their way, their way or the highway sort of thing" (Ed3, SE9). That said, even when framed in progressive language, many of the personal examples and sentiments expressed in the learning circles pointed to an inherent belief that the

teacher has final authority, particularly when keeping order within the classroom. As SE1 stated, she uses RA “very much as a tool to make the pupils understand that if they’ve done something where I’ve had to put them out of class, how it makes me feel about them and their behavior” (Ed1). The focus here was not on discovering the roots of the behaviour or on recognition of mutual accountability, but on *making* the pupil understand the *teacher’s* perspective. In the following excerpt, SE4 provided an example to illustrate her rejection of punitive measures. She reserved the right, however, to punish if she decided it was necessary:

I don’t believe in punishment exercises; I don’t bother with punishment exercises. I think the only time I’ve given them out is when I’ve told a pupil, I don’t know how many times, to stop eating in class or something and then they tell me ‘no, I’m no’ and then later on you find out they are and I’m like, well, I have to follow that part through because I’ve said it, I don’t know how many times. But that’s all I do, I don’t use punishment exercises for anything else; I talk to them. (Ed1)

Punishment in this instance might have been the exception, but it was still an option if the teacher decided that it was necessary for classroom management reasons. SE4 continued, in a discussion about how best to maintain order within the classroom: “I think it’s all about setting your goals, your boundaries, and sticking by them” (Ed1). Interestingly, SE5 offered this observation about the purposes of RA in the classroom: “So restorative isn’t just about, I suppose, order and control; it’s also about teaching them, isn’t it?” (Ed2). Although in this discussion SE5 expanded her understanding of RA to include a role for educating pupils, the comment revealed her primary understanding of RA as being about the order and control of pupils. Her comment, more explicit than others, nonetheless was representative of the evidence that affirmative RA existed in the school.

Consistent with the evidence of RA being used as a classroom management tool, there was little mention in the learning circles about amplifying pupil voice; rather the focus was on pupil behaviour and how to improve it. As SE3 explained, RA was used “with the pupils to let them see and understand the consequences of their behaviour” (Ed1). Many educators felt that pupils were themselves “very conscious about behaviour and what’s appropriate and what’s not appropriate” (Ed2, SE7) and could be called upon as allies in managing the classroom. SE10 provided this example: “If another young person, I don’t know, gives cheek to me or something, the other ones will actually say, ‘no, don’t be cheeky to her, ‘cause she’s actually helping you.’ So a lot of sort of peer mentoring as well, which they don’t actually know they’re doing” (Ed3). Pupils were lauded for regulating the behaviour of their peers, thus keeping control and order of their own environment.

The behaviour management focus also was apparent in the educator questionnaire. Respondents were given a blank page and asked to respond to the question “How would you define / describe restorative approaches?” Many staff members took a great deal of time and care in crafting a response, often filling the whole page and sometimes using additional pages. Within the responses, three main ways to refer to RA were identified: a way to solve conflicts; a behaviour management strategy; and a way to build relationships. The focus on relationships will be expanded on in the next theme. Thus, using RA to manage and control behaviour was evident in the school, but alongside other understandings and uses of RA, as well.

As depicted in the literature review section, an affirmative understanding of RA often includes acceptance of the necessity of punishment. Among the learning circle participants, there were a variety of beliefs about punishment. A few dismissed punishment outright, such as SE2: “It doesn’t come together, the punishing side and the discussion side. They don’t go well

together, that's my experience" (Ed1). Most rejected the use of punishment exercises, the writing of lines. For many participants, punishment exercises were equated with punishment in general; as long as they were refraining from assigning exercises, no punishment was occurring. Other actions such as sending pupils out of class or taking away privileges were not necessarily seen as punishments. SE1 was an exception, explicit in her rejection of punishment exercises but not other forms of punishment. She declared,

And giving out punishment exercises, well, some of these kids, you know, go without food. You know, some of these kids, you know, don't have great relationships with their parents or don't have any relationship with their parents. Us giving them a punishment exercise when they can barely hold a pencil is a really fruitless exercise. That's not to say I don't believe in some forms of punishment or consequences. (Ed1)

As evident in this comment, this particular teacher recognized that there were other forms of punitive action available to her and joined with a few other participants in calling for greater use of those measures. SE1 justified her response by referring to general society: "What stops people breaking the law? The fear of getting into trouble. There has to be some element in society to stop people disrupting and disregarding the laws and rules of society. If there is no consequence and no punishment, right, therefore society will run in chaos" (Ed1). SE3 summed up the difficulty in changing views about punishment, whether belonging to educators such as SE1, or the general public:

I think the whole Scottish education system is one that's been based in the past on punishment. And people work because the consequence of not working is that you're punished. You know, and so people will do things because, or behave because of the consequence of not behaving. (Ed1)

In both the learning circles and the educator questionnaire, areas of affirmative RA were identified. Educators employed RA to manage and control individual pupil behaviour and occasionally reinforced such control through punitive measures. This practice was not a monolithic approach, however. Alongside affirmative RA was transformative RA, as depicted in the following theme.

Theme 6: The mutuality of RA, building relationships and engagement. In contrast to the previous theme, educators also raised points that indicated RA was being used to promote social engagement. RA was used to increase empathy and connection to others and to build relationships. Importantly, the focus here was not only on pupils, but also on adults and the mutuality of their interactions – mutual respect, mutual challenge, and mutual expectations.

Beyond a focus on changing or improving behaviour, educators utilized RA to create understanding into how one person's actions impacted upon another's life. SE2 described her usual approach to classroom issues: "So usually I speak to them outside the class and I discuss basically, you know, why there's a problem and then what their perception of it is and what my perception of it is and what effect it can have on the others in the class" (Ed1). Similarly, SE6 used RA to encourage pupils to empathize with others' feelings, "And I kind of put him in the position, 'How would you like someone saying those things to you?' 'Oh, I wouldn't like it.' So when he came back in, I got no more of it, no more of the nastiness" (Ed2). By repeatedly using RA and encouraging empathy, some educators noted that pupils were beginning to take their own initiative to repair harm. SE10 gave this example:

I built a really good relationship with one of the young people. And yesterday they were just really out of character, I didn't know what was going on, I tried to speak to them and just very, let's say, cheeky behavior back and attitude and I was, like, okay. But then they

came in today and they did apologize – about 5 minutes after they left, they came back and apologized – but today they came in with a big note and it actually says, ‘I didn’t mean to take it out on you, I should know better, blah, blah, blah.’ But they’ve obviously went away and thought about it and reflected back on it and came in on a new day. (Ed3)

Although still engaged in shaping pupil behaviour, the focus in the above examples was on an outcome of empathy and connection rather than order and control.

It was also acknowledged among educators that pupils were not the only ones who benefitted from learning to see the world through others’ eyes; adults required that same lesson. SE9 revealed a lesson learned through a restorative meeting:

Kids can kick off at you but when you then hear about the fact that in the morning, such and such had happened and, you know, then you realize almost that it wasn’t aimed at you, it was just they needed to vent some form of anger or something like that. And then being able to sit down with that kid, talk it out, and then that has a huge impact on your relationship from then on because, you know, it’s been dealt with and it’s been sorted. Whereas previously, the old way, where you’d try and discipline them and they’d rebel against it, they never got the respect back for you and you never really got the respect back for them. So, it’s almost, getting that relationship thing again, building relationships and trying to get everybody settled. (Ed3)

Part of what this excerpt speaks to is the recognition that interactions in school need to be based on mutual respect and mutual understanding, and that RA can assist in building this mutuality. SE2 described the mutuality of education this way: “I think we’re all there together for their learning and we’re together there. I think of us as a team” (Ed1).

The team that SE2 refers to consists of multiple relationships. The majority of participants acknowledged the importance of relationships, though differed on their descriptions of what healthy relationships in schools looked like. In the educator questionnaire, respondents identified the building of relationships as the number one way in which they used RA. In the written portion of the questionnaire, this focus was elaborated on. RA was used: to build respectful, positive, trusting relationships; to deepen existing relationships; to give a new start to broken relationships; and to focus on rights and responsibilities within relationship.

In the learning circles, most staff felt very positive about relationships they had formed with pupils. Adults recognized how vital those relationships could be to pupils who may have had few stable relationships. Many staff members relayed stories of conversations they had on a daily basis with pupils, from checking in about the weekend to life-changing issues such as pregnancies. They declared that pupils were very open with the staff about their lives and that this built empathy in staff. Many staff recognized the mutual benefit of such relationships: “When you have a good relationship with the pupils you look forward to your work, to coming into work everyday” (Ed1, SE1); “And there is a level of respect on the whole between the staff and the children in this school. There are a lot of very positive relationships and some very, very difficult individuals. And yet they’re achieving, at their own level, eventually, within the school system; which they might not have given different circumstances and not the use of restorative” (Ed2, SE7). Although the mutuality of relationships was emphasized in many comments, highlighting social engagement, there were also comments revealing how relationships could be used in the employ of affirmative RA. SE10, for example, in praising fellow teachers, showed the dual purpose of building relationships:

You can see it in staff because they have a lot more time for the young people and it's not just about teaching the subject, it's about building a relationship with that young person. And I think that's really important, a really important part to restorative approaches especially. Without that – because I think once you do that, once you have that relationship with young people, that young person will have a lot of respect for you and will probably work better within the class. Because at the end of the day, they don't want to let you down, or that staff member. (Ed3)

In this instance, RA built relationships with the outcome being that pupils were more compliant.

It is clear that transformative RA existed in the school, according to the educators. Educators viewed RA as building empathy, creating connections, emphasizing mutual respect and mutual trust, and building relationships. Yet, ideas of transformation were intertwined with ideas of affirmation. Discourses of transformation and affirmation became more evident when the pupil voice was taken into consideration.

Scottish Pupil Themes

Pupils were almost completely unaware of the concept of RA and this lack of awareness necessitated a reach beyond RA to the pupils' general experience of schooling. Setting aside the idea of transformative and affirmative RA, and listening deeply to their portrayal of their broad schooling experience, I coded the data for repeating ideas and themes. The majority of pupil comments and observations revolved around the primacy and quality of relationships in the school – pupil-pupil and adult-pupil.

Before elaborating on the six pupil themes, I will explain the details and limitations of the pupil questionnaire, the pupil learning circles, the co-researcher notebooks, and individual interviews with pupil co-researchers upon which these themes are based. All four research

activities involved only first year pupils and thus are more representative of the experience of these pupils than of all the pupils in the school. Out of 90 first year pupils, 47 – just over half – returned parental consent forms and completed the questionnaire. Pupils who did respond to the questionnaire were in some ways a self-selected group: they were the pupils who were sufficiently interested to request that their parents/carers sign consent forms and their parents/carers did so. Thus, they may also not be representative of the whole first year population. That said, as with the staff questionnaires, it is possible to identify various trends and patterns in the responses from the 47 first year pupils who completed the questionnaire; it is these patterns that are referred to when the questionnaire results are included in the theme descriptions.

In the five learning circles combined, there were 19 participants. Of these 19, eight were male and 11 were female. Eleven of the learning circle participants became co-researchers, nine of whom were female. The predominance of females as co-researchers can be explained – at least in part – by a football program attended by several of the male learning circle participants during the observation period. To protect the anonymity of participants, all names are pseudonyms selected by the pupils.

Theme 1: Relationships in the background as pupils negotiate place, rules, and voice.

In the educator themes, adults described their view of the school context in which RA was utilized. In contrast, in this theme, pupils set the context. Again, since pupils did not refer to RA specifically, it was necessary to listen attentively to all aspects of their schooling experience. In setting the context, pupils occasionally referred to outside environments and their backgrounds; they did not, however, focus on these aspects to the same extent as the adults. Most comments concentrated on life within the school, with pupils emphasizing themes connected to relationships – either with other pupils or with adults. This explicit emphasis on relationships will be covered

in other sections of pupil themes. In theme 1, relationships sit in the background of a variety of repeating ideas: the outside environment, teaching of social skills, the following of rules and a respect for the pupil voice.

In contrast to the adult fascination with the discrepancy between the perceived difficult environment pupils endured outside of school and the oasis of calm adults saw offered within the school, only a handful of pupils made any reference to this divide. Sheldon raised the reputation of the surrounding neighbourhood, acknowledging that “I know, like, everyone says it’s not good” (P1 Communication)⁵. Two other pupils attributed some of their aggressive tendencies to experiences they had suffered within their families. Georgia, in her co-researcher individual interview, told a heart-wrenching story of witnessing abuse as a young child and ended the conversation by saying, “I will just automatically lash out at somebody if they actually, like, shout at me. Or they punch me or hit me. I just can’t help it. I automatically just punch them.” Beyond these rare mentions, pupils did not make drastic distinctions between home life and school life. In fact, there was a sense from a few pupils that those pupils who acted poorly in school would not be afforded such freedom outside the school. Far from the deficit model put forward by adults, Jeanne expressed hope that the outside environment would have a positive effect on such pupils:

⁵ This notation indicates that the comment was made as part of a learning circle, the Pupil 1 Communication learning circle (P1 Communication). Other notations refer to other learning circles (rules or community). If no learning circle is indicated, the comment was made during individual co-researcher interviews.

I know someone who gets picked on by people at the school and my brother was saying that you're best just to leave it 'cause they'll probably leave in 4th year, 'cause knowing what they're like, they're just not wanting to come to school. And when they go out and start treating people like what they do at school, they'll get a big surprise, and hopefully change. (P1 Communication)

Several members of the senior management team called the school an "oasis of calm" and other adults in the school echoed the sentiment. The majority of pupils, however, did not explicitly emphasize the idea that the school was a refuge from a difficult outside world.

Pupils did, however, indicate that the school felt like a community or a family. Jemima thought the school was similar to a big family because "sometimes people talk to each other, like, bad, but sometimes we're really nice to each other" (P1 Communication). Georgia agreed with this, suggesting the school had a community feel since "you've got a load of people that you ken and even if you're not pals with them, they're still there for you when you need them" (P1 Community). A couple of pupils believed that this sense of community was assisted by the explicit teaching of social skills to pupils. As Sheldon recalled, "We learn about relationships. And you see what kind of relationships you have and who your closest relationships are. And you see what a good friend is and how you could be a good friend" (P1 Community). The other pupils in Sheldon's learning circle, however, disputed the impact that explicit teaching had on their ability to make friends or be part of community. Awesome McAwesome's comment was typical of the sentiment in the rest of the group: "I don't think we should talk about being friends in school. 'Cause if you already have a good friend, you shouldn't have to talk about it, you could just learn from experience" (P1 Community). These pupils appreciated the environment that was

offered them at school but insisted they came to their social skills more naturally than adults believed.

Helping to form this school environment was the existence of rules. Pupils were very aware of rules and, for the most part, simply accepted the presence of rules, viewed them as fair and could articulate the necessity of them. For example, Daisy named a rule she thought was necessary: “I think that walking out of class ‘cause a lot of people do that and they’re not meant to. ‘Cause, like, if anyone did that then they’d think that no one’s learning, they just walk out of class all the time” (P1 Rules). A few pupils mentioned rules that they did not understand, but were still willing to accept. “In a way I think all the rules are fair, but, like, the thing about hoodies is it’s not the school uniform so of course we can’t wear them. So if it was the school uniform we’d probably be allowed to wear them. But it’s not so we’ve just got to put up with it and not wear hoodies” (P1 Rules, Eve). The school uniform was one of the more contested rules. Although most pupils in the learning circles claimed to follow rules unconditionally, they were quick to point out that not all pupils were like them. Continuing with the school uniform theme, Eve said, “Some people don’t like following the rules, they like trying to do their own thing. Most people, like, follow, they take off their hoodies in class and, like, behave pretty well. But some people don’t” (P1 Rules). There was a mix of reasons given for pupils who did not follow rules, from disobeying rules such as the school uniform for practical reasons (“‘Cause it is, like, really cold” - P1 Rules, Didier) to trying to get attention. There was also a mix of reactions from teachers to rule breaking that was commented upon either during the learning circles or documented later in the co-researcher notebooks. There was a lack of consistency in responses, as Emile noted, “Yeah, some teachers will, like, let you off with stuff if, like, if someone’s wearing a hoodie in class and they’re not supposed to. But some teachers will, like, tell them to take it

off” (P1 Rules). Observations in the co-researcher notebooks suggested that rule breaking was often ignored (“A guy was, like, abusing this other guy in class, and the one teacher didn’t do anything about it.” – Eve), sometimes confronted with shouting or threats from the teacher (“And the person that wasn’t doing anything got sent out. And then the teacher started shouting at them.” – Sheldon), occasionally discussed between adults and pupils (“The teachers just usually tell them to stop or, if they don’t, they’ll take them outside and talk to them” – Springer Spaniel) and, once, called out by other pupils (“Spaniel was chewing in class and he got told not to. Nathalia asked him why he was chewing” – Georgia).

The other contextual aspect of school I discussed with the first year pupils was whether they felt that they were listened to at the school. In the pupil questionnaire, 64 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy for them to share their opinions with adults in the school. The number dropped to 51 per cent when asked if pupils help to make decisions in the classroom; here, 21 per cent of pupils either disagreed or strongly disagreed. These lukewarm numbers were echoed in the comments made in the learning circles. A few pupils felt confident that they were listened to, with Nathalia highlighting the senior management team: “We do kind of have a say in decisions because [the headteacher] is that kind of guy where he, like, notices things and helps a wee bit” (P1 Community). With a few caveats, Springer Spaniel concurred:

Sometimes we’ll get to make a decision, the teacher will give us choices. Or when we go into groups, sometimes they’ll let us pick our own groups depending on how we’ve behaved. And, like they said with the [potential new school], [the headteacher] is letting us... he’s seeing what we want to have, although we’re not actually voting on it. (P1 Community)

Uncertainty as to whether pupil voice made an actual difference was stated more strongly by other pupils. John cited a recent call for pupil opinions about the potential new school: “But you know on the sheets, like, our opinion, they willnae get registered as anything, they willnae get used. They’ll just be chucked in the bin or something” (P2 Talk). Georgia echoed this cynicism: “No people can make a change. Not unless you’re the Queen”(P1 Community). Although pupil opinion was requested, many pupils felt that adults determined the topic and only listened to them if they behaved well. Pupils were even less clear as to whether their opinions actually impacted the outcomes of decisions.

The everyday context experienced by pupils was one characterized by a sense of community, the reality of rules and a feeling of ambiguity as to whether their voice mattered. Pupils did not make drastic distinctions between life outside school walls and that within, seeing positives and negatives in both. Even if not speaking explicitly about relationships, relationships were infused in the everyday context, serving as a constant background. The next theme explores relationships more explicitly.

Theme 2: Pupil-pupil relationships: From family to cliques. The most discussed aspect of schooling amongst pupils was relationships. And within relationships, pupils emphasized those with other pupils. Pupils presented a mixed assessment of these relationships: the school felt like a big family but was also divided into cliques; most pupils in the school got along but also argued and fought a lot. The ambiguity was first apparent in the pupil questionnaire. Thirty-two per cent of respondents agreed with the statement “Most pupils in our school respect one another”; no pupils strongly agreed with the statement; twenty-three per cent disagreed; two per cent strongly disagreed; and a full forty-three per cent neither disagreed nor agreed. The responses were slightly more positive for the statement “Most pupils in our school feel like they belong”: 13 per

cent strongly agreed; 28 per cent agreed; 53 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed; 4 per cent disagreed; and 2 per cent strongly disagreed. It is difficult to pinpoint the reason behind the large numbers of students who remained neutral for these two questions. There are many possible meanings behind this response, including: pupils did not have a strong opinion; pupils felt it depended upon the situation; pupils felt unable to decide upon an answer; pupils did not understand the question; pupils felt the question was irrelevant; or the question was poorly framed. Even without knowing the motivation behind the neutral responses, the lack of strong agreement indicates an area ripe for more exploration.

Through the learning circles and co-researcher activities, more was revealed about how pupils experienced peer relationships. As mentioned in the previous theme, several pupils alluded to the feeling that the school was “like one big family” (P1 Communication, Sheldon). Viewing the school as a family did not, of course, mean that all members got along at all times. There was some discussion about how the school was divided into “wee cliques” (P1 Community, Nathalia), depending, according to pupils, on the pupils’ appearance, intelligence, personality and a variety of other factors. In her co-researcher interview, Georgia illustrated both the range of groups and the importance of knowing your place in those groups, when talking about advice she would give to a new pupil:

Georgia: I’d tell her it’s a nice place, but people can be mean if you don’t match with the right crowd. ‘Cause there’s definitely, like, crowds in this school. There’s, like, good people, popular people, mean people, bullies, smart people, dumb people, fit people, unfit people, healthy people, just like chubby-ish people,...

Kristin: So what kind of group would you tell her to get herself into?

Georgia: The nice one. And the smart one, if she was smart.

Kristin: Is that the group you're in?

Georgia: Na. I'm in the angry group and the nice group. And a dumb group 'cause I'm dumb.

Although pupils warned against getting into groups that might get a pupil in trouble, there were also limits placed on mobility between such groups. Often where a pupil fit within the school was decided by factors deemed outside a pupil's control. One of the limiting factors which first year pupils spent much time discussing was age. There was a definite sense that there was a hierarchy of ages within the school in which all the older grades looked down upon the first years. The physical school was informally divided into sections where each year was allowed to sit, with no place left over for first years. First year pupils were quite discouraged by this, feeling the dominance of upper year pupils was supported by adults in the school. Although "pupils tend to be meaner if they're older" (P1 Community, Springer Spaniel), pupils felt adults viewed pupils as more important as they increased in age. As Awesome McAwesome put it: "And then there's the 6th years, no one really touches them. They're just the higher cause" (P1 Community).

The language used between pupils – and in general – was a hot topic for pupils. Although all pupils in the school spoke English as their first language, on the questionnaire, in filling in an open-ended response about the languages they spoke, 30 per cent wrote Scottish, 9 per cent Slang, 2 per cent Swag, 2 per cent Glaswegian, and 2 per cent UK. Language seemed to be an area where pupils could express aspects of their identity, whether regional or age-related. In the learning circles and co-researchers activities there was much discussion about the presence of "bad" language, swearing and slang. Nathalia lamented in her co-researcher interview that "people swear in our school a lot. There's not at least one minute when you don't hear swearing." Sheldon explained the variety of language used: "We all talk, like, slang quite a lot. But, like, to

each other, like a doormat or something. Or to each other like the best friends, like sisters or brothers. But depends on what mood they're in and who they are" (P1 Communication).

Language was viewed as a way to connect with other pupils as well as to disrespect one another.

Like the language used, examples were given both of pupils getting along and of pupils fighting. Almost all pupils at some point in conversation gave an overall assessment of the pupils in the school as being friendly and mostly getting along. Yet these summaries glossed over other points pupils made about peer relationships. Jeanne, in her co-researcher interview, summed up the range of relationships pupils needed to navigate:

Um, well, most of the pupils get along really well. That'd be nice if, like, everyone could get along. And some people, you're scared of 'cause you know that they'll hurt you that bad if you were.... 'cause we got someone in our class that's quite noisy and that, and if you tell 'im to be quiet, he'll go mental and start picking on you. Start being nasty to you or something.

Although the summaries often painted the school as a friendly environment, the majority of examples given – either in the learning circles or through the co-researcher observations – were of pupils in conflict. Discussion centred on individuals as bullies ("Some people, like, try and be cool and, like, bully on other people just so people think they're cool" - P2 Communication, Eva) and on the pupil culture as one that prolongs conflicts ("[Pupils] would start talking to the other person that's involved [in the fight]. And then it just comes like a huge argument and it could, like, pass but, like, most of the time it disnae. People will still talk about it" - P2 Communication, Emily). Of the numerous examples given in co-researcher notebooks, here are two that occurred during the observation period: "A girl shoved a Jaffa Cake in a boys' face and the teacher didn't do anything about it" (Daisy); and "Somebody asked for a pencil, right, and she went, 'Nwa! You

seen yourself, you're not gettin' my one!' And then she just starts being mean and cheeky and it's annoying" (Georgia). The responses in the learning circles and the co-researcher activities revealed pupil relationships with one another that were complex, varied and dependent on a large number of factors.

Theme 3: Adult-pupil relationships: Pupils express trust and sympathy. The other set of relationships that dominated pupil lives were adult-pupil relationships. Again, the pupil assessment was mixed. Many examples were given of how adults treated pupils with respect as well as how they disrespected them. Pupils did not often speak generically about adult relationships, demonstrating the centrality they placed upon context. Pupils were sympathetic to what teachers dealt with in classrooms, overwhelmingly characterizing pupils as treating adults poorly. Trust was a key aspect of adult-pupil relationships. Pupils expressed a great deal of trust toward at least some adults; they longed for more trust to be reciprocated from adults.

Pupils named many adults within the school who treated them well, who were, in their words, "nice" or "friendly", spoke to them with respect, explained lessons carefully, and gave them room to make decisions. As John said in his co-researcher report, the friendly adults were the "good thing about this school." This positive feeling towards adults was reflected in the pupil questionnaire, as well. In contrast to the response to the statement about pupils respecting one another in which only 32 per cent of pupils agreed, 87 per cent of pupils agreed or strongly agreed that they were respected by adults. Very few (13 per cent) were ambivalent about this and not one pupil disagreed with this sentiment. Of course, there were exceptions to adults respecting pupils, which became clear in the learning circles and co-researcher interviews. Buttercub raised a general complaint in her co-researcher interview: "Okay, so, like, some teachers don't listen to you. And some teachers just ignore you." Awesome McAwesome was more specific with his

concerns, articulating an issue of fairness that resonated with many pupils: “A pupil will do something and the teachers will go, like, really mental at, like, the whole class and then everyone will get a row and everyone will get the blame for it, and everyone will get a punishment. Which is annoying” (P1 Communication). Most of the comments about relationships with teachers took into account the context. Pupils were cognizant that teachers were not all the same (“Teachers talk to pupils like they’re trying... like, some of them say it as if you’re stupid. But some of them explain it, like, so you get it” - P2 Communication, Eva) and that even one teacher’s response differed depending on the pupils he/she was dealing with (“And some teachers are nice to several kids, but they’re not as nice to other children. Depending on the way that they’re acting” – Springer Spaniel) or other aspects of the situation (“‘Cause if they keep repeating it to you and you just don’t understand it, they kind of get, like, quite ... Not like rude but kinda like....” - P2 Communication, Rose). Despite understanding the contextual nature of relationships with adults, the one universal complaint from pupils concerned the amount of shouting that occurred. Most pupils did not understand why adults shouted to the extent they did, feeling that “they shout too much. Way too much” (P1 Community, Awesome McAwesome). Although pupils were often baffled by the shouting, Jeanne offered this explanation: “If one of the pupils are winding up the teachers, the only thing they can do, really, is shout, ‘cause they don’t have any way to take their anger out ... And they can’t really do anything but shout, ‘cause they’re not... you can’t really hurt people. Yeah, they’re not allowed to hit pupils ‘cause they’ll get fired or anything” (P1 Talk). The emphasis that pupils gave to shouting stood in stark contrast to the insistence from educators that shouting was no longer prominent within the school and that RA had helped to produce a calm environment.

Despite being baffled about the amount of shouting, there were very few pupils who suggested that pupils treated adults well. Examples given in learning circles and through co-researcher observations usually placed blame on pupils for negative interactions with adults. Daisy found that “quite a lot of students talk back to the teacher when they’re not meant to. ‘Cause they’re quite rude and, like, if you get in a row, then you get in a row and you’ve got to accept it and not shout back” (P1 Rules, 3). Pupils discussed how adults were often justified in their responses, particularly if pupils were repeatedly disruptive. As Nathalia reported in her co-researcher interview, “Like, they’re having to be told, like, three times to do something and they still didn’t do it after the third time. And teachers kind of get frustrated and in a bad mood.” Jeanne was sympathetic to teachers, seeing their choice to teach as a sacrifice and wishing that they received more respect since “they’re sort of giving up their time to teach us ‘cause they could be doing something – a proper job that they’ve always wanted to do – but instead they went and done teaching to help out or something. ‘Cause there might not be enough teachers around.” Pupils did believe that context played a role in how pupils treated teachers but, interestingly, did not give fellow pupils as much benefit of the doubt as they afforded teachers.

When discussing relationships with adults, one of the core ideas that surfaced was that of trust. Almost all pupils could name at least one adult in the school that they felt comfortable approaching to discuss a major issue. Staff who worked in the Pupil Support department topped the list of trusted adults, followed closely by registration (or *reggie*) teachers, those teachers in charge of what in North America is often called *homeroom*. As Awesome McAwesome confided, “And then something, like, something, like, sad happened to me out of school. And I was, like, I talked to my reggie teacher about it ‘cause, like, we do see her everyday and there’s not a teacher that we’ve got five days a week apart from our reggie teacher” (P1 Talk). Pupils did not seem shy

about seeking support from school adults. On the other hand, they longed for the trust to be more mutual. Sheldon saw mutual benefits in this type of trust: “Like, for teachers to, like, trust pupils. ‘Cause if they trust, then pupils would probably give them more respect.” For several pupils, trust was best expressed in tangible ways, such as allowing pupils to sit with friends in class or relaxing various rules.

Although adult-pupil relationships were also complex, pupils tended to see them as slightly more straightforward than pupil-pupil relationships. Examples were given of adults who did not treat pupils well and who shouted for perplexing reasons, yet pupils trusted adults more than they trusted other pupils and felt that pupils were much more to blame for bad relationships than were adults. Pupils yearned to be able to earn more trust, thinking this might be a way to create more mutually beneficial relationships.

Theme 4: Adult responses to rule-breaking: From discussion to wrongful punishment. Building on the pupil-adult relationships identified in the last theme, in this theme I explore how pupils experienced the handling of rule breaking and other behaviour issues within the classroom. Pupils identified a range of ways in which adults dealt with such issues and offered their own ideas for how best to approach such situations. Pupils acknowledged that particularly disruptive pupils were a challenge yet found that teachers rarely gave pupils second chances, often making their minds up on the first day of class; pupils were also unsympathetic when teachers wrongfully blamed pupils or punished the whole class for an individual pupil’s behaviour.

In the learning circle discussions and co-researcher observations, pupils identified a long list of examples of how teachers dealt with incidents of pupil misbehaviour. As already mentioned, shouting seemed to be one of the more common – and least understood – responses to

pupil disruptions. Almost equally as common, however, were teachers who would discuss the issue with the pupil themselves or send pupil(s) to Pupil Support to have a discussion. As co-researcher, Buttercub, reported: “Well, the teacher and the pupils would talk; like, if they had a problem, they would talk about it.” This discussion approach occurred most frequently in situations in which two or more pupils were having a conflict that disrupted the classroom. Jimmy voiced his appreciation for the role of adults in such situations: “[Teachers] would talk to them both. Then ask each side of the story. They wouldnae take sides on that” (P2 Communication).

Another common response to behaviour issues, however, was in the form of exclusion, either sending pupils into the hall or giving them detention. Detention was mentioned by a few pupils; many more gave examples of being sent to stand in the hall – for such issues as being rude or not getting on with work – sometimes for the whole period. Walking through the hallways, I also noticed a few pupils on any given day, standing and waiting in the hallway. Almost as common as being sent to the hall were the assignment of punishment exercises (or a *punnie*), a practice that all educators named useless and infrequent. In his co-researcher interview, John explained his own experience with the practice: “You get a punnie, if you’ve been bad. It’s a sheet like that, but it’s green... no, yellow... and it’s got lines on it you would write. Every time... for a certain... Like, I once... like you would have to write, *I won’t swear at the teacher*, like 100 times or something.” Others, such as Eve, included punishment exercises in the list of usual responses to rule breaking: “Well, usually [pupils] would, like, get a detention slip. Or a punishment exercise. Or get sent to the headteacher. Or the head of department to come and like give them a row” (P1 Rules). Even if adults felt the use of punishment exercises were infrequent, this was not the impression held by the pupil participants.

When asked how pupils thought adults could better deal with issues of misbehaviour, their responses were as individual as the pupils themselves. The following co-researchers offered these ideas: John suggested a “stronger approach” in which more pupils would be threatened with expulsion; Jeanne favoured rewarding good behaviour, “sort of like doggy treats if they sit down” and also thought that there needed to be more modeling from adults about how to “properly act”; and Eve made the suggestion that teachers get pupils more “involved, like, talking in group work” so as to build better relationships and cut down on peer conflicts. Pupils made these suggestions as they, too, grappled with the issue of a small group of pupils disrupting an otherwise enjoyable classroom environment, citing how a few pupils “ruin it” for the majority (P2 Communication, Rose). Jeanne voiced it this way:

I think when you're in your class and there's somebody disrupting – 'cause we've got somebody, a couple of them are like that, they're, like, quite disruptive and the teachers are getting annoyed and stuff. Sometimes if everybody's shouting it just goes to your head and stuff. It's just sort of really annoying. I just wish it would stop. (P1 Communication)

Again, pupils were sympathetic toward adults in these situations and expressed much frustration toward the pupils themselves.

Pupil sympathy for adults, however, did have its limits. As frustrated as pupils might be toward chronically disruptive pupils, they did not dismiss them outright and were critical of adults seeming to do so. As Jemima explained:

Sometimes the teacher's at fault, sometimes 'cause if someone's being quite nippy [sharp-tongued] someday and they get sent out, the teacher wouldnae give them a second chance. Which they kinda should, 'cause they didn't mean it or anything. 'Cause some people

actually have anger problems and that, so when they get sent out, they're like sent out for the rest of the class, so they don't really get a second chance. And maybe that makes them a bit more upset and angry. (P1 Talk)

Other pupils gave examples of pupils who made a bad first impression and then were unable to convince the teacher to view them differently. The main grievance, however, as mentioned earlier, related to teachers who reacted to one pupil's misbehaviour by getting "angry at the whole class and we end up in trouble for doing nothing" (Daisy).

Overall, pupils understood the need for adults to respond to incidents of misbehaviour or disruption and were well versed in the multiple options available to teachers. Although discussion was a fairly common response by adults and was appreciated by pupils, discussion joined a list of much more punitive responses. Pupils were sympathetic toward adults, as long as adults were seen to be responding in a manner that was fair to both individuals and to the class as a whole.

Theme 5: Handling harm: Adult-facilitated talk or pupil-initiated force. Beyond what are deemed to be behavioural issues, is a focus on harm, when a conflict or someone's action has caused another to be hurt in some manner. The line between the two – behavioural issues and harm – is not clear-cut; the focus in the previous theme, however, was more how the breaking of rules were handled whereas in this theme I deal with interpersonal issues. When harm occurred, pupils had more trust in the ability of adults to help sort issues out than in their own ability to do so. Trust in adults, however, was not limitless with multiple examples given of teachers who dismissed pupil concerns, ignored issues and refused to believe pupils. Left to their own devices, pupils expressed a variety of methods of sorting things out. For the most part, however, they did not feel they were equipped to adequately handle issues themselves.

In the pupil questionnaires, pupils exhibited confidence in the ability of adults to help sort issues out with 75 per cent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that adults would help them resolve conflicts. This confidence was reiterated in the learning circles and co-researcher activities. Rose discussed adult support as a given: “I think, like, the pupils get more listened to ‘cause, like, if somebody’s bullying you or something, somebody has to listen about it to sort it out” (P2 Communication). As an illustration of adults intervening in a positive manner, co-researcher Eve explained the following scenario that she had recorded in her notebook:

One time two boys in my class were fighting and the teacher split them up and sent one of them outside and talked to the one to try and see what was happening between, trying to make things better. And I think it did work because they stopped fighting afterwards.

They went back to just being boys.

As has been mentioned previously, pupils had almost unanimous trust in the ability of the staff at Pupil Support to listen to their issues and assist in figuring out how to make things better. In his co-researcher report John told a story of a friend of his physically humiliating him, resulting in a visit by some adults from Pupil Support. He ended the conversation with an unconditional endorsement of Pupil Support: “If something goes wrong, they’ll sort it. Definitely.” As exceptions to this trust, pupils gave a few examples of being let down by the adults in the school. Most of these examples involved inaction on the part of the adults, such as Jemima’s example in her co-researcher interview: “It was, ehm, somebody in first year, as well, stole my phone away from me and a teacher was talking to another teacher not that far away. And looked at them running away but, like, didn’t really do anything about it.” A few felt they had been wrongfully dismissed by adults, including another example from Jemima, this time involving Pupil Support:

Once I went to Pupil Support and, um, I think it was like once – no twice – in two days, ‘cause I had this quite bad problem with two people. And, um, one of the teachers told me, um, ‘this is continuous, Jemima,’ um, like, and they said, basically they said not to come back quite a lot when, like, my problem was still not fixed. So, I didn’t really go back because I didn’t want to annoy them, ‘cause I felt like I had annoyed them. I ended up, like... it ended up getting worse. (P1 Communication)

Many of the examples given to illustrate a lack of trust in adults involved a pupil who was seen to be responsible for the conflict or harm, or not believed to be innocent. Respondents to the pupil questionnaire concurred, indicating a belief that pupils would be listened to more readily if they were the one hurt (80 per cent agreed adults would want to hear his/her side of the story) rather than the person who had been seen to be misbehaving (64 per cent agreed adults would want to hear his/her side of the story).

Pupils also provided anecdotes and examples of how they were able to sort out their own issues. Some pupils felt it best to ignore minor issues and a few others relied on discussion to deal with conflicts. Jemima offered a combination of these two strategies:

I, like, get along with everyone in my class. And then, like, if we have a fall out, then we’ll talk about it, and then hopefully, like, we sort it. But if not, then we’ll, like, leave it for a little while. And it’s, like, quite a lot of people argue, but then, like, they’ll talk and just talk... Not realizing that it’s just talking and, like, that fixes everything. (P1 Communication)

Pupils who mentioned walking away or discussion were, however, in the minority. Most of the pupils who indicated they would take care of issues themselves employed force, even if as a last

resort or in self-defense. Co-researcher John did not see himself as aggressive, but was willing to defend himself:

Like, maybe four, like, three weeks ago. One of my pals was standing on a railing, and I was under him. And he jump off and land... grabbed onto me and smacked my head on the ground. But that was like... I was... so I just got up and whacked him. That stopped him. Ha.

Force did not seem limited by gender; co-researcher Georgia was also willing to defend herself physically:

Last time I got in trouble by the police 'cause a guy was really annoying me – he was an older guy, he was about 15 or 16. He came up to me and he pushed me, so I punched him and I gave him a black eye and people that saw phoned the police.

These various strategies aside, most pupils did not feel that they were equipped to deal with conflicts or issues of harm themselves. Awesome McAwesome could not imagine pupils resolving an issue without adult support: “It’s always usually the teachers that, like, sort it out. Because if you’ve just had an argument with someone you wouldn’t really want to talk to them about fixing it. So, it’s always usually the teachers” (P1 Communication). The pupil questionnaires backed this sentiment up. In contrast to the 75 percent of pupils that agreed or strongly agreed that adults would help them sort conflicts out, only 29 per cent had confidence that pupils could do it themselves. Supported by adults, pupils exhibited trust in the ability to talk through issues and harm; left to themselves, most turned to force as an effective response.

Theme 6: Overall assessment of the school: Positive though not perfect. Replete with examples that pointed to a school in which peer and adult-pupil relationships were supportive and empowering on the one hand and controlling and destructive on the other, pupils insisted that,

overall, their school experience was positive. Pupils expressed a sense of pride in their school, while at the same time identifying aspects that they would want to improve. Most of their recommendations had to do with the quality of relationships within the school. Their overall assessments were balanced, recognizing that schools are never perfect.

Pupils often compared their school to other schools, finding others lacking. Several pupils raised the issue of violence and physical fighting; Sheldon declared that “compared to other schools, it’s hardly violent.” Others pointed to various clubs, projects or opportunities offered that were unique to the school. The male pupils were especially quick to acknowledge the football program as being superior than in other jurisdictions. Finally, a few highlighted the support mechanisms that existed at the school, whether for academic or social issues. Springer Spaniel talked about such support:

We have guidance and learning support which a lot of other schools might not have.

They’re very involved in what we do. Whereas in other schools, they might not be so involved. And we have the buddy room that we can go to if we want. (P1 Community)

Pupils were content with many aspects of their school experience.

In the individual interviews, pupils were asked to offer an analysis of their school. Building on their observations, they were asked the question, “Of what you observed, what would you like less of?” Without exception, every response centred on relationship issues, either between peers or between pupils and adults. Georgia focused on peer relations, offering this list in her co-researcher interview: “Less shouting, less bullying, less picking on people, less... less screaming! Less picking on [a pupil] just because he’s different.” Others, including co-researcher Jemima, wanted relations between pupils and adults to be more respectful within the classroom wishing for less pupils “talking back and interrupting the class.” On the flipside, pupils were

asked to respond to the question of what they would like more of. Much of what was said in response articulated similar sentiments to the previous question, desiring better relationships and pupils to be more respectful in class. Nathalia gave her own wish list in her co-researcher interview: “More people to stop being annoying and disrespecting, and shouting out and being silly and being idiots.” The other theme that emerged in response to the second question was the desire to be given more choices by teachers – both in terms of academics and social situations – and to be awarded more trust.

As a final question in the individual co-researcher interviews, pupils were asked to imagine a new pupil arriving the following day and to provide advice to that pupil. In answering this question, pupils offered an analysis of what they had been observing over the three specific observation days combined with their general student experience in the school. Despite their observations containing many negative examples of pupil-pupil and pupil-teacher interactions, their final analysis was decidedly more balanced: “It gives you a lot of great opportunities to do stuff in life, they do lots of good shows and people are very talented. But I would say watch out for the bullies and people who are just annoying because they’ll let you down” (Nathalia); and, “There could be like arguments and that, but no one would come up and just start stuff with you. And the teachers are very nice, too. They just need to explain it more, but if you ask for it, they’ll tell you” (Rose). Jeanne summarized what seemed to be the feeling of many with her comment, “I suppose if it were a perfect school, I’m pretty sure it’d be quite boring. Just the same thing repeating itself. Quite boring.” These co-researchers brought together peer discussions, individual observations and their own analysis to present layer upon layer of the complexities of schooling.

Conclusion

Taken together, the educator and pupil themes reveal how RA in the school is “attentive to the range of private and public relationships that support, or potentially thwart, human flourishing” (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming). Relationships play a central role in educator comments and, especially, in the pupil experience. Relationships are used by educators to create connections and mutually respectful interactions as well as to subtly or explicitly enforce compliance with rules and order in the classroom. Evident in educator comments, in the connections between educator views and pupil views, as well as in the disconnection between those views, are discourses of transformation and affirmation. Pupils, in relating their general schooling experience, point to RA as an approach that transforms and engages them, offering experiences of trusting relationships underpinned by mutual respect, concern and dignity. They also paint a portrait of an environment in which adults fit RA in with rules, threats and punishment in a quest for classroom order and control. Evidence of affirmation and social control sits, sometimes comfortably, sometimes uneasily, beside evidence of transformation and social engagement. The pairing of the two will be explained more fully in the discussion chapter. The next chapter focuses on findings from the Alberta school.

Chapter Seven: Findings: Alberta

Of the thirteen themes identified in this chapter, seven were developed out of the educator data and six out of the student data. Consistent with the Scottish themes, educator themes were drawn from the educator questionnaires and the educator learning circles. Student data were developed out of student questionnaires, comments made in student learning circles, observations students took note of during the co-researcher activities and the final individual student interviews. Again, the educator themes are discussed first to set the context, with the final say offered to the students. Table 2 illustrates the organization of data into educator and student themes.

Table 2

Educator Themes	Student Themes
1. School reality makes implementation of RJ both challenging and necessary 2. From affirmative to transformative: Aspiring to practice the RJ being taught 3. Circles as manifestation of RJ in the school 4. Hope that RJ will help students develop empathy, skills and voice 5. Concerns with RJ: From getting lost to manipulation 6. RJ as part of a broad relational ethos 7. The impact of RJ: Empowering	1. School context: An ethos of respect and a testing of that respect 2. Soccer epitomizes the best and worst of student-student relationships 3. Adults as almost unconditionally supportive 4. Trust that issues will be solved 5. Learning how to solve problems, make choices and be a good friend 6. Overall positive assessment with room for improvement

students.	
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Albertan Educator Themes

The educator themes attempt to answer the question: How are discourses of transformation and discourses of affirmation evident in Scottish and Canadian school contexts? These discourses are both explicit and implicit within all seven themes. I begin by outlining educators' views of the context of the school, with a particular focus on their own staff culture. The subsequent themes attend explicitly to RJ, as educators discuss the application of RJ in the school, the hopes they place in RJ as well as their concerns, and explain how RJ has impacted the school. As with the Scottish school, the themes speak to the presence of both transformative and affirmative discourses within the school. In the Alberta school, however, discourses of transformation emerge as dominant.

Before elaborating on the seven educator themes, I make explicit the details and limitations of the educator learning circles and educator questionnaire upon which these themes are based. In the four learning circles combined, there were 15 participants, about one quarter of the total staff. Of these 15, one was male, and all but two were White; these demographics were representative of the larger staff body. All participants worked primarily in the classroom, two as educational assistants and thirteen as classroom teachers. Together they represented the breadth of the school's programming; at least one teacher from each grade participated in the learning circles, as well as teachers from the Early Education program and the Behaviour Learning Assistance (BLA) program. Their experience in the school ranged from less than one year to over 20 years. To protect participants' anonymity, I do not disclose particulars of the individuals; however, as with the Scottish educators, it is important to note both the rich range of experiences

that they represent as well as the caveat that their views do not necessarily reflect those of the whole staff. Participants will be identified with numbers to further ensure anonymity; for example, Alberta Educator 1 or AE1.

Of 47 educator questionnaires that I distributed, 23 were returned, almost half of the staff members. Compared with the 25 per cent return ratio of Scottish questionnaires, the Alberta response rate allows a more comprehensive view of educator beliefs and thoughts. As with the Scottish educators, the respondents were a self-selected group: it is possible they were more interested in RJ than non-respondents. Nonetheless, I identified trends and patterns in the 23 responses; patterns that are referred to in the theme descriptions below.

Theme 1: School reality makes implementation of RJ both challenging and necessary. Ninety-two per cent of educators who responded to the questionnaire either agreed or strongly agreed that RJ fit well with the school's values. To better understand the nature of this fit, it is necessary to explore the school context as experienced by educators. Educators discussed the challenges in introducing RJ to the school, how they viewed the student body, and other approaches – particularly Rights Respecting Schools (RRS) – that they felt shaped and reflected the school and its values.

Impacting the school's values and the approach chosen by the school were certain realities. Being an elementary school, educators discussed limitations on what young children could be expected to understand about RJ. As AE6 stated, referring to RJ, "It's just a little bit too abstract for them" (Ed2). AE2 and AE12 concurred, naming limited conceptual understanding as an issue, as children often saw actions as either *good* or *bad*. Beyond conceptual comprehension, some educators also found young children too developmentally egocentric to be able to participate in an approach such as RJ. As AE4 relayed:

Like, little kids don't care! Because it doesn't occur to them. Not because they're bad kids but because they haven't developed the empathic part of their nature yet. Because they're little. I mean, a three year old grabs a toy from another three year old, doesn't feel empathy for that other kid because they want that toy, that's all they can see. (Ed1)

That said, most educators did not dismiss the value of introducing RJ to young children; they merely felt that the approach needed to be tailored to developmental realities. Circles for younger children were described as being more teacher-directed (AE2, AE8, AE10) with pictures used to express feelings instead of abstract words (AE1, AE2). AE1 shared what she saw as a success story with young children:

In our classroom, we have to teach it to the kids who come in. Because they're in kindergarten and it's their first exposure. So it's directed, at first. Halfway through the year they start to know to ask for it and to have a circle. We kind of model it for the kids, and then help them through it as they start. At first, maybe for the first part, quarter, of the year, it's all tattletaling. Basically, you know, Johnny pushed me and the other one says, well, Johnny pushed me, too. And so on. But then after they get to realize that it's not about that. And then they end up requesting it. After recess, coming in: We had a problem; we need a circle. (Ed1)

While appreciating RJ's role in empowering students to deal with conflicts, many educators felt RJ's reach was constrained in an elementary school.

Contextual realities in the school went beyond developmental issues. A topic that often emerged – particularly from those educators who were most intimately involved – was the challenge of working with students in BLA classes where issues were often “more severe” (Ed1, AE2). AE2 painted a vivid picture of the challenges inherent to bringing RJ to BLA classes:

But the thing about BLA is, you don't just have somebody biting someone. You have someone throwing a chair and you have somebody running in circles and somebody leaving the room and... The circle is nice and neat and tidy if you have one issue to deal with and you're going to deal with it, solve it and move on. But when you've got five different things going on at once, it's hard. You don't, sometimes you don't deal with things fully that you should. Days go by when yeah, so-and-so ran away or left the room or whatever and we got him, we put him in timeout and that was the end of it.

Unfortunately we don't have the time to do a circle for every little... (Ed1)

The chaotic nature of such classes were also described as taking a toll on educators who found it hard to engage restoratively when they felt victimized themselves. AE3 lamented:

You know, I'm getting punched, kicked, bit, bruised, whatever. And, yeah, yeah. But there's nothing at that level. And so there's days, even as an adult, when I go home feeling, like, what the hell? ... Why is it okay? Why is it okay to be yelled at like this, to be hit and kicked? (Ed1)

The unique nature of BLA classes caused several educators to call for more administrative support if they were to implement RJ with their students. Again, the possibility of using RJ effectively with BLA students was not dismissed; there were simply caveats given for its implementation. One educator told a story of how RJ empowered her BLA students. She held circles with her students to talk about issues they wanted addressed by the student council. When student council acted on their ideas, "my teeny little BLA class that thinks they're in isolation and not liked and are feared by everyone... There'll be a new policy that will emerge, for the swing or something, and they'll think, wow, we did that" (Ed3, AE9). BLA classes added one more layer into the context in which RJ was introduced.

Similar to the Scottish educators, Alberta educators viewed much of the student context as countercultural to the values of their school and of RJ. The context here, however, was different from that of the homogeneous Scottish student body. Alberta educators identified issues arising from the multicultural nature of the student body, with values held by new Canadians often seen to oppose *Canadian values*. Such cultures were seen as more “punitive” than Canadian culture (AE6) with a “hit ‘em back harder instinct” (Ed2, AE5) and children from these cultures were seen to “not really understand what respect is” (Ed3, AE10). Overlapping with the issue of different cultural values were incongruent familial values – sometimes attributed to cultural differences and sometimes not. As AE10 described it, “Like, we’re trying to teach them, you know, right from wrong but if they’re not getting that from home, then... That’s their most important teacher, right? To them, is their parents, their role model” (Ed3). Even when the school seemed to be having an effect on students, educators lamented that it would not last. The school’s population was transient with “about a 50 per cent changeover in a couple of years” (Ed3, AE9). Instilling the values of RJ in students at the school was seen as an uphill battle. As in Scotland, however, the discrepancy between the students’ backgrounds and RJ also made the undertaking worthwhile. AE14 thought:

It makes you feel good, because a lot of them, it makes you kind of wonder, you know, everyone comes from different dynamics at home, right? There’s a lot of kids that don’t have the best examples at home. So, we’re teaching them here. (ED4)

The dynamics within the school, especially within the student body, created a context that offered educators both challenges to implementing RJ and reasons for engaging with RJ.

For many educators, the context into which RJ was introduced reached beyond the school walls. As already demonstrated, educators were highly aware of the influence that families held

on student beliefs and actions. A few educators also provided examples of how family feuds being played out in the neighbourhood found expression on the playground and in classrooms. In recognition of the neighbourhood context permeating the school context, the school chose to act as mediator for some inter-family disputes, deciding, “Let’s solve it here and make it okay everywhere else” (Ed1, AE4). Engaging in these disputes, according to AE9, also made visible complex dynamics within cultures that educators previously viewed as monolithic. By engaging with their students’ families, educators felt better equipped to help students deal with issues at school.

One reason to engage with students’ families, often repeated by educators, was to bring neighbourhood values more in line with school values. As AE5 stated, RJ “shouldn’t be something weird you do at school” (Ed2). Besides the occasional community mediation, most educators felt that families received little information as to the nature of RJ. AE7 and AE10 both suggested involving parents in circles as a way to open up understanding. Although lacking direct communication about RJ, some educators felt that trust between the school and families was growing.

We’re getting more and more families saying, oh, we know that they’ll deal with this.

They’ll listen and there’s a little bit more trust. There’s more trust with the families now.

A lot of them are coming from fairly traditional educational backgrounds that this is how it’s done and there’s a straight line. There’s no sort of restorative about it. And there’s a lot of revenge-seeking sort of kids, that they go after, they protect their own, kind of thing. And I think we’re starting to see some of that change. But they’re not shutting us down right away. I think that’s starting to move a little bit. (Ed3, AE8)

Even if consistency between values was not present, there was more engagement between the two – school and home – contexts that students were experiencing.

The final aspect of the context into which RJ was introduced was another approach implemented around the same time as RJ: RRS. All educators mentioned RRS when discussing RJ; for many the two were so intertwined that it was difficult for them to differentiate the approaches. Even the traditional restorative questions (What happened? What were you thinking about? Who has been affected? What needs to happen to make it right?) had been tweaked in the school to contain an additional question aligned with RRS: “Whose rights were not respected?” (Ed2, AE5). AE5 voiced the feeling of most educators: “I see a pretty natural fit between respecting rights and wanting to repair harm that you’ve done to someone” (Ed2). AE4 felt that RJ and RRS were:

Sort of hand in glove, really. If you have the right to a good education, then you and everybody else has the responsibility to be active and learning. Or if you have the right to be safe in school then we all have the responsibility to be, to act in a safe way to each other, right? So if you have jeopardized somebody else’s right, then you need to take responsibility to repair that. And that’s sort of the same idea. (Ed1)

RRS was described by many educators as the proactive piece (learning to respect rights) and RJ as the responsive aspect (taking responsibility if rights are not respected) of the same approach. AE12 felt that RRS and RJ “should be, like, embedded in each other. And then if there’s a problem because people’s rights aren’t respected, then [RJ] is how we can solve it or make amends” (Ed4).

Although educators clearly viewed RJ and RRS as complementary approaches, there were also diverse understandings of RRS. For some, the possession of rights depended on living up to

responsibilities. AE5 gave this example: “If I get caught speeding too many times, they take my license away. If you don’t live up to your responsibility to get your work done, you lose some rights” (Ed2). In this case, punishment is what convinces students to act responsibly, an affirmative view. Other educators saw rights as inherent and not dependent upon living up to responsibilities. AE10 expressed the connection this way:

You can say, everyone has the right to be heard, so we have the responsibility to listen.

But what if we’re not taking on that responsibility, what happens? Then you’re taking the rights away from somebody else. So if you’re talking when someone else is talking, they don’t have the right to be heard anymore, you’ve taken that right away from them. So that’s why you have the responsibility – you don’t want to take rights from someone else. (Ed3)

In this case, relational interconnectivity is emphasized, a transformative view. AE7 expanded on AE10’s view of rights and responsibility, suggesting that “responsibility” should be viewed as “empathy for others” (Ed3). All educators viewed RJ and RRS as mutually supportive approaches; interestingly, it becomes clear that both of these approaches can be implemented in both affirmative and transformative ways.

This theme identifies the context of the school, as described by educators, into which RJ has entered. Educators lamented the difficult background of the students – including differing cultural and familial values, transiency and language barriers – but also saw much benefit in the students being exposed to RJ. Within the school walls, educators focused on developmental issues and the BLA program as two factors that affected how RJ was perceived and achieved. RJ was seen as closely connected to other approaches in the school, particularly RRS. It became

apparent as educators described the tight fit between RJ and RRS that there were both affirmative and transformative ways to view the two.

Theme 2: From affirmative to transformative: Aspiring to practice the RJ being taught. Educators in the learning circles focused significant time discussing their own staff culture – as much if not more than that focused on students. Many educators welcomed the opportunity to explore staff dynamics, citing aspects of the culture that were conducive to RJ as well as those that detracted from RJ. A thread running throughout this theme was the extent to which staff acted restoratively. Staff shared ideas for making their own culture and interactions more restorative.

Sixty-six per cent of respondents to the educator questionnaire indicated that they *often* or *always* use RJ in their classroom and/or school. The number rose to 92 per cent when *sometimes* was included. For many educators, RJ aligned closely with their values. In contrast to the assumptions made of students, educators described RJ as fitting with their “mindset” (AE7) and hitting their “moral centre” (AE9). These personal values were seen to be embodied in staff interactions. Words used to portray the staff culture were *supportive, respectful, warm, caring, accepting* and *collegial*. As AE10 stated:

I’ve never had conflicts with anybody here; I can honestly say that. Because, like, everyone probably has this mindset already of the support and the honesty, to a certain degree, that makes someone new feel comfortable and able to come and ask questions and ask for help and ask for resources. (Ed3)

For some educators, the positive staff culture was encouraged by an administrative team that expressed trust in educators “as professionals” (Ed1, AE2). These were all aspects educators identified as conducive to RJ.

There were also, of course, aspects of staff culture identified by educators as disruptive to RJ. Many educators pointed to other staff members who acted in ways deemed antithetical to RJ. AE4 characterized the implementation of RJ as mixed: “Well, it’s not consistent within the school, because there are quite a few staff who totally buy into the restorative justice and other ones who just, pfffft” (Ed1). Others named aspects of the culture that made it difficult for RJ to take deep root. Several members felt isolated from the rest of the staff with sources of this isolation identified as being new, working outside the regular program, and working in a portable. Participants also attributed their isolation to a common complaint: poor staff communication. Issues were expressed in terms of general information sharing and the consultation of staff on decisions. AE3 and AE4 felt they were “totally in the dark” about most happenings in the school (Ed1). Usually, this critique was directed at the administrative team. Discussion in a few learning circles suggested that educators felt undermined by the administrative team’s apparent lack of support and mutual respect. AE14 admitted that, with the administration, “I don’t feel safe even expressing my true opinion” (Ed4) though conceding that such an atmosphere was most likely not intentional. Intentional or not, the result seemed to be a staff culture that had significant tensions, both between some staff members and with the administrative team.

Connected to the above general critiques of staff culture, some educators raised issues particular to the implementation of RJ. Although most staff members had received restorative training, a few staff indicated that their training had been inadequate. For AE3, limited training led to lack of confidence in implementing RJ in her classroom. For others, there was confusion as to how and when to use RJ, and whether the use of circles was considered restorative. AE15 expressed frustration with her lack of understanding:

I'd known this whole year that I've been missing something 'cause, like, I do these circles when there's a problem. It's always the same thing: he said this, she said that, it made me feel like this, I'm going to do that, sorry, it's not going to happen again. ... And it's clearly because as a new person doing this I'm missing something and I'm figuring it out as the end of the year is approaching that I'm missing the whole restorative part of it, the how do you make it better, what do you do after. (Ed4)

The confusion felt by some combined with general poor communication led a few educators to abandon RJ all together. AE6 justified her dismissal of RJ this way:

'Cause you know when you don't hear it, when you're not exposed to it and it's not a part... when you haven't learned it well enough and you don't use it and I have piles of other stuff to do. I couldn't remember this stuff! (Ed2)

Thus, for some, the staff context was not conducive to RJ taking root.

A main topic of conversation regarding RJ and educators was the extent to which staff members were practicing what they were teaching. Learning circle participants continually moved the focus away from whether students were acting restoratively to whether adults were acting restoratively. Cohesion between words and actions was deemed important by many because, as AE3 expressed it, "if it becomes a part of us, it will become a part of the kids" (Ed1). As evidence of RJ becoming part of the staff, examples were shared: there had been staff circles in the past; one educator invited others to her classroom to view circles in process; some staff members approached one another when in conflict. Corroborating these examples, 30 per cent of questionnaire respondents said that RJ was used to address issues among adults *often* or *always*. That said, another 30 per cent of respondents indicated that RJ was used among adults *never* or *hardly ever*. There were also numerous examples provided in learning circles as evidence of RJ

not being present in staff culture: staff members talked behind each others' backs; one educator yelled at another in front of students; disrespectful comments were made about staff and students; and the use of circles for discussion or dealing with issues among adults was rare. Several educators (AE7, AE11, AE13) felt that students were more restorative than adults, even though the fit with educator values was considered more natural. AE13 proclaimed that the biggest issue facing the school was that students were "seeing a non-cohesive staff" when it came to RJ and RRS (Ed4). There was also discussion as to why it seemed so difficult for staff to act restoratively. Although AE7 raised the issue of educators being bound to certain protocols by union membership, the majority of learning circle participants felt that it was "issues of trust and fear, risk" (Ed3, AE9) that really kept adults from fully engaging restoratively with one another. The consensus seemed to be that adults were falling short of practicing the RJ they were teaching; yet the fact that this was a main topic of conversation suggested a staff culture open to reflection. Although staff indicated that the reality of RJ within their school was affirmative in the sense that students were expected to act restoratively while adults did not, aspirations were for a transformative version of RJ in which adults were held to account, as well.

Within all four learning circles, the self-critique of staff actions was followed – unprompted – with a variety of suggestions for improvement. Several staff members suggested implementing the use of circles for staff, used for: sharing ideas and information, learning from one another, supporting each other and dealing with conflicts or issues. AE13 suggested having circles "about how to run circles" (Ed4). It was within this conversation that learning circle participants suggested I facilitate a staff circle. There were also numerous ideas shared about how to better support one another: mentor new teachers; model good practices for each other; and engage in community-building professional development. Finally there was a call from a few

educators for ongoing reflection. AE8 proposed continually asking: “How could we change things? How can we grow it? Like, where can we go from here?” (Ed3). These questions spontaneously became the focus of several of the learning circles.

Theme 3: Circles as manifestation of RJ in the school. In this theme I look at how RJ was actually used in the school. Among the questionnaire respondents, the most common use of RJ was to address incidents of conflict between students (83 per cent indicated *often* or *always*) followed by those who used it to address incidents of harm between students (78 per cent). There was a strong correlation in the questionnaire results between what respondents believed RJ was already doing in the school and what they thought it should ideally be used for. Rating high on both aspects were: dealing with incidents of conflict, dealing with incidents of harm and teaching students social skills. In the written portion of the questionnaire, all respondents saw RJ as dealing with individual incidents rather than as a proactive measure.

In the learning circles, participants provided numerous examples of how they personally used RJ and saw it being used within the school. Most educators referred to utilizing restorative questions in informal ways – whether in the classroom or on the playground. AE5 offered a typical example:

Someone will come up and will complain – so-and-so hit me or so-and-so’s not sharing. And I see teachers just call the other child over and they get into the four questions right away: What’s happening? What are we going to do to make it right? You know, whose rights aren’t being respected? Yes, so it’s used fairly frequently and fairly informally. (Ed2)

This example also shows how closely aligned RJ and RRS had become in the school.

Utilizing RA in slightly more formal ways, teachers gave examples of what they called mini-conferences. AE10 excitedly shared a recent experience using RJ with kindergarten students:

I consciously made the decision not to let them talk through me – which is kind of like that traditional way of disciplining or working through conflicts as a teacher or a parent or I don't know. In our society you're like, you tell me what happened, I get mad at this person, they tell me their story, I go back to that person. And instead I said, okay. They're yelling at me back and forth. I said, well, why don't you tell him that, if you didn't do that, why don't you tell him, 'I didn't do that so I don't know why you're saying I did', right? Right away, the other boy looked at him and said, 'I'm sorry I said that to you.' I was, like, oh. I'm not going to get into the thing that they were lying to me and stuff. But I was, wow, this really works if I just do that in the first place, where I say, don't talk to me, talk to each other, kind of thing. It really, really actually works. (Ed3)

This example was unique in AE10's release of adult control. As will be demonstrated later in this theme, most educators deemed it necessary to maintain adult control within RJ processes. For serious issues, although less frequent than other uses of RJ in the school, either the administration or designated staff members facilitated restorative conferences. By far the main manifestation of RJ in the school, however, was through circles.

Educators used circles to build a sense of community, for students to share ideas and to deal with issues. Some classrooms had weekly circles; others utilized them only when the need arose. Examples of issue-related circles included: creating a class soccer charter (AE5); dealing with tattling (AE10); and addressing inter-family conflicts (AE8). Most educators spoke positively about how students engaged with circles. AE13 found older students took initiative in

the circle: “For the majority of my class, they’re able to sit down and have a circle after recess about soccer and they’ll come up with a solution and they’ll figure it out and solve the problem; I just ask the questions” (Ed4). AE14 also found circles to be useful in the classroom but emphasized the need to set circles up for success: “Before we even start a circle, every time, I talk about how it takes such courage and such strength to admit when you make a mistake” (Ed4). The comments from learning circle participants aligned with my own observations; circles were a common sight in classrooms, as likely to be used to deal with an incident as to build community.

The leadership of the circles and other restorative processes emerged as a topic in the learning circles. Although there were some examples of student-initiated [“When I’m on the park, they’ll come find me and say, we need to do this. Or they’ll find me in the hall and say, we need to do a circle” (Ed3, AE8)] or student-led processes (AE13’s example in the previous paragraph), the vast majority of educators viewed RJ as an adult-driven process. For some, RJ needed to be adult-driven given the age of the students; as AE2 explained: “But, I mean, when they’re in grade 1, it’s still very directed and if it’s not directed, if I let it be more self-directed, it just turns into: ‘On the weekend I’m going to the waterpark and I’m excited about that’” (Ed1). Others reached for adult direction due to the constant influx of new students. And others felt that the process would only be fair if led by an adult. AE7 drew upon previous experience with conflict mediation to explain:

Because the whole premise behind a mediation is that everyone’s voice gets heard. And if everyone is screaming and yelling and crying and that sort of thing, no one’s voice is getting heard. And your feelings aren’t being, you know, relayed to the people who need

to hear them. There's no voice when there's so many people talking, so I fully believe that you need to structure this. (Ed3)

A few educators emphasized the difference between community RJ circles and school RJ circles. School circles, according to these educators needed more structure and adult input. AE8 mentioned working with the external RJ trainers to help them understand the need to “shape and form a more school-type circle. And that there's still going to be a consequence or stuff for your actions. Because we were finding [a community RJ circle] wasn't as effective as it could be” (Ed3). For many a *school-type circle* was one that was adult-directed, structured and included consequences for students who were seen to be in the wrong.

Although the term *punishment* rarely arose, *consequences* did. A conversation between three learning circle participants revealed a typical sentiment.

AE2: There needs to be a consequence.

AE3: There needs to be a consequence. A logical consequence.

AE1: Otherwise, I don't think they would really understand what harm has been done if there is no consequence.

AE3: Right. And I feel like, perhaps, some people's view of restorative is that there are no consequences. (Ed1)

For most participants, RJ was compatible with the assigning of consequences. AE14 explained it to her students this way: “And I always give them the accolades for the strength they had to admit they're wrong. And you know what, you're going to get consequences. But it's good you told the truth” (Ed4). Those consequences might come from adults, from the student in question or from other students. It was only through the assigning of consequences that many educators believed students would learn.

Thus educators used RJ in a variety of ways in the school, mostly to deal with incidents of conflict or harm. Often used informally and through circles, RJ as an everyday approach to giving students voice in handling their own issues is evidence of transformative RJ. The fact, however, that adults tended to lead RJ, through their modeling, structuring and insistence upon consequences, is evidence of affirmative RJ.

Theme 4: Hope that RJ will help students develop empathy, skills and voice.

Educators placed a variety of hopes in RJ. As they discussed these hopes, either in questionnaire responses or in the learning circles, educators revealed more clearly their own understandings of RJ and their goals for its use. Most goals were focused on students, with specific hopes ranging from affirmative ones encouraging students to take responsibility to transformative ones empowering students to voice their thoughts.

In the educator questionnaire, responses emphasized a range of hopes. Selecting from a list, educators felt that RJ should be used in the school to: deal with incidents of conflict (96 per cent of respondents agreed); deal with incidents of harm (91 per cent); teach students social skills (91 per cent); teach the following of school rules (91 per cent); empower students to deal with their own conflicts (87 per cent); teach students communication skills (82 per cent); empower adults to deal with their own conflicts (82 per cent); bring about change in the school (78 per cent); and empower students to fight systemic injustice (74 per cent). Building on these responses, in the written portion of the questionnaire, four main understandings of RJ emerged: a chance to take responsibility for actions; a collaborative way to solve problems; an approach that gives voice to all involved; and a way to make things right. These were also themes discussed in the learning circles, clarifying the brief statements put forward by the questionnaire respondents.

Students taking responsibility for their actions was the most common goal of RJ mentioned in both the questionnaire and learning circles. For many, taking responsibility simply made common sense. AE5 explained: “Yep, you made a mistake; we all do. Let’s fix it. Let’s take responsibility for it and let’s take responsibility for fixing it” (Ed2). In order for students to take responsibility, educators felt they first needed to develop an awareness of others. According to AE9, RJ helped students “to develop their empathy towards what their actions have done towards others” (Ed3). This awareness needed to be made explicit since, as AE12 suggested:

Sometimes they don’t know that what they’re doing is wrong or how it affects other people because they’re just thinking about themselves. Well, I was mad because you didn’t want to play with me, so I did that. But then having people explain, oh, when you do that it makes me scared and I don’t want to play with you or be around you. (Ed4)

Several educators felt that RJ should be used to teach not only immediate impact, but broad impact as well. AE2 discussed why she used circles to broaden the conversation:

Their actions don’t just affect the one person that they’ve done something to. But there are other kids in the class who may feel affected. It could be anything from them feeling uncomfortable or they’re feeling torn because two people are fighting. (Ed1)

The most powerful lessons for students in terms of the impact of their actions, educators felt, came from the mouths of other students. AE13 shared this experience:

I’ll have, like, a boy and a girl, just random people as part of the circle that weren’t even part of the problem, so they can help solve. And they’ll be like, they’ll go over to the person and they’ll look them in the eyes and they’ll go, this is not worth fighting over, you’re really causing a lot of grief in people. And they’re, like, little counsellors! And

that, when I see them do stuff like that, it makes me want to cry because I'm so proud of them. (Ed4)

By understanding how their actions impacted those around them, educators hoped that students would take responsibility for those actions.

After taking responsibility, educators hoped that students would then engage in collaborative problem solving, naming this as a goal in both the questionnaire and circles. As a first step, educators hoped RJ would teach students "skills to be able to talk about problems, to be able to develop skills and vocabulary to talk about problems" (Ed3, AE9). Those social and communication skills, although essential for school, were also thought to be beneficial for students in the long term. AE10 offered this wish:

It's just a really powerful skill for them to have to solve their own problems. And that's what it teaches, in the end, when they go off into the world on their own, they're going to approach conflict and problem solving in that way, if they've been here long enough to gain that skill. (Ed3)

This goal represented both current and future hopes; as one questionnaire respondent stated, RJ was a "future-oriented, solution-based approach."

Another understanding of RJ was that of an approach that gave voice to all participants. Questionnaire respondents appreciated RJ's ability to empower students to express opinions that would otherwise be unheard and to allow students to feel fairly treated. Although the understanding of RJ as an empowerment tool did not surface often in the learning circles, the few educators who raised this as a goal were adamant. AE9 hoped that participating in circles would impact students positively: "Making them feel like, No, I'm capable; I can solve my problems;

I've got some skills. Empowerment" (Ed3). AE7 more explicitly made this hope part of her practice:

I'm thinking that they'll be able to stand up for themselves. Because there's a lot of kids that can't voice their concerns. I have a lot of quiet kids that are too scared to rock the boat, kind of thing. So hopefully I'm also teaching them how to stand up respectfully for yourself, not just mouth off at somebody and go 'Shut up!' at everybody. I want them to learn how to do it so that people will listen to them. (Ed3)

Although not mentioned often, those who did mention the hope that RJ would give voice to students were firm in their belief.

Finally, a few respondents saw RJ as a way to "make things right." In the questionnaire and learning circles, making things right was interpreted in two ways: restoring the situation to the way it was before the conflict; or making the environment better than it was before the incident. Incorporating aspects of the other three goals – taking responsibility, collaborative problem solving, and giving voice – making things right was seen as an all-encompassing goal. AE6 discussed kindergarten girls who she saw as working to making things right: "And the language that they use and the caring that they show towards other people and, even at such a young age, their willingness to admit their mistakes and their efforts to make it better, and to make the school better, it's just, it's really great to see" (Ed2). Making things right expanded aspects of the other goals to a holistic hope that RJ could restore or create better school environments.

Although educators discussed how RJ could be used in the present, most saw hope in planting seeds for the future. AE3 felt that for younger students, "our goal is just to have them being exposed to the language, being exposed to the process and the steps. And more

understanding for them will come as time goes on and the more they use it. Just like it will for the adults, right?” (Ed1). Discussions among educators focused on growing RJ from young students to older ones; from the start of the year to the end; and within individual students. As AE14 vividly put it: “We can’t plant a seed and expect a rose the next day. It’s not going to happen. They need consistent reinforcement” (Ed4). Some educators admitted that the seeds of RJ were growing within them as adults. AE7 reflected:

We never had the processes that we are engaging our kids with when they are young. Had we had those opportunities as children, I think that we could probably feel a little more comfortable. But I don’t think we’re there yet. I think we’re touching the surface a little bit. (Ed3)

Educators also offered stories of success, encouraging one another to continue planting seeds.

AE3 reflected on her own classroom:

I think it’s having an impact. If I just look at my class as it’s own little... you know, the fact that we can sit and have a circle and people can share their feelings is a start. They certainly couldn’t do that at the beginning of the year. You know, it takes over and over again and they’re hearing the same stuff everyday and I guess that’s what it comes down to, for all of our kids. (Ed1)

Regardless of the differing hopes educators might have had for RJ, all admitted that those hopes would not be realized in the short term.

The hopes educators had for RJ – taking responsibility, learning how to problem solve collaboratively, empowerment, and making things right – mostly focused on students. The hopes, however, did not focus simply on changing the behaviour of students, an affirmative RJ focus. They expressed the desire of educators to help students develop empathy, communication and

social skills, and find their voice – indicators of transformative RJ. Although some educators were frustrated in the lack of short-term benefit, most appreciated that RJ would offer students lifelong skills and attitudes.

Theme 5: Concerns with RJ: From getting lost to manipulation. In this theme I detail areas of concern that educators identified as having with RJ. Those that supported RJ felt that RJ sometimes got lost amidst a slew of other priorities and felt it needed to be implemented more consistently across the school. Others took issue with the process itself, complaining that: RJ did not work if students did not take responsibility; circles themselves were ineffective at changing behaviour; and that some students manipulated the restorative process. Understanding what educators point to as issues helps to reveal how they viewed RJ and its purposes.

Most of the educators who participated in the learning circles felt that RJ was valuable for their school. Some, however, felt that insufficient time and priority was afforded RJ, resulting in RJ being unable to achieve its full potential. This criticism was laid at the feet of both the administration and teachers. AE2 expressed it this way:

And I think a lot of it has to do with having the time to do it. And not even having the time, but making the time to do it. Because I think what you're saying about people saying administration is too soft, that perception comes from the fact that administration has a lot of stuff on their plate. They have a lot of stuff to do. And they're just as guilty as the rest of us of prioritizing things and maybe putting restorative discipline on the back burner. (Ed1)

Most educators were empathetic of administration's need to juggle school priorities; some, however, then wondered whether a time-intensive approach such as RJ could be expected to succeed. AE6 spoke to that quandary: RJ is "quite a comprehensive thing. It's not just something

you pick up and do. You need to have lots of opportunity to not just talk about it, but to implement it and to watch and to learn. ... And you just get carried away with everything and everything is just as important, you know?" (Ed2). Educators involved with the BLA program called for BLA-specific training if the hope was to make RJ consistent throughout the whole school. A questionnaire respondent wrote a full page detailing his/her concerns regarding the lack of training offered for using RJ with students with diagnosed behavioural issues. Although educators understood the issue with finding time and resources amidst a variety of other priorities, they then conceded that RJ would most likely not reach its full potential.

Besides inconsistent prioritizing of RJ, educators also had a number of other concerns about both the process and philosophy of RJ. A couple of educators found RJ lacking as an approach because it required all involved to be willing to take responsibility. AE5 expressed her frustration by citing this example:

Yeah, I've had situations where I'll say, 'Okay, you two go off and talk about it. Figure out what you're going to do about it.' And one will come back and say 'Well, I'm trying to talk but she won't listen to me.' Nothing I can do. Again, that's where the whole process just grinds to a halt. (Ed2)

AE13 guessed that about five per cent of students had "reactive detachment disorder" in which they were unable to feel guilt for their actions. In those situations, "it doesn't work for those kids. There's no punishment. The other kids are so upset that were involved in it, but this kid, it means nothing to them. They don't learn anything from it" (Ed4, AE13). These educators felt that RJ had nothing else to offer in a situation where at least one student was unable or unwilling to take responsibility.

Other educators questioned whether what the school was doing was actually *restorative*.

AE4 was particularly unconvinced by the process:

And really, we are doing restorative justice? A circle isn't restoring. That's part of the restoration piece. But what is actually happening that's restorative? And part of restorative justice – I wouldn't say it needs to be public but it needs to be made... people need to know. Like, if so-and-so is cleaning the graffiti off the school because they graffitied it, we all need to know that it's so-and-so doing it so we feel like it's been restored. Right, do you know what I mean? So if I feel like somebody's gotten away with something and isn't having to make good, then I'm not – like, not me, but the person who's been wronged – is not having their faith restored. So it isn't restorative justice, right? So it's being done, but sometimes I sort of feel it's being done in a half-assed way. Like, kind of lip service. We're going to have circles. Good idea – I think we should totally have circles. And what else? Like, a circle isn't enough. Like, it's part of it. (Ed1)

For this educator, RJ needed to include visible restitution for the process to be considered restorative. AE15 was equally skeptical. Although AE15 attempted to implement the processes in her classroom, she found RJ ineffective with her students. As a result AE15 questioned her own understanding of RJ:

But when it comes to things that have happened in the classroom that need to be resolved... At the time it gets resolved with the language, but then I don't see an effect. Because I'm missing something that makes it so that they're not going to do it again. Because the next day, it's the same thing; the next week, it's the same thing. I don't see an effect to it. (Ed4)

Neither of these educators saw their understanding of RJ – an approach that results in behavioural change and visible amend-making – reflected in the school’s implementation.

A final concern voiced about RJ was its susceptibility to manipulation by students. AE6, AE7, AE12 and AE13 all provided examples of occasions when they felt students “wasted time” intentionally by insisting on circles. AE12’s example was typical of the others: A certain group of students “were a little bit of manipulators and they knew, oh, if they called for a circle they could take the time out of class. And some of those circles were, what, over an hour, hour and a half with nothing accomplished” (Ed4). These educators spoke of how they dealt with this concern – by structuring circles, limiting circle time or agreeing to circles until students exhausted themselves. All felt that the manipulation needed to be dealt with; and once addressed, circles could be used to greater effect.

This theme identified the concerns educators associated with RJ as practiced in the school. Underlying these concerns were various discourses about how educators viewed RJ. Comments on the lack of time and priority afforded RJ point to an appreciation of RJ as a comprehensive approach, best accomplished through consistency in philosophy and practice. The concerns that RJ was ineffective if people did not take responsibility, did not offer visible restitution or did not change their behaviour, suggest an affirmative understanding of RJ as an approach limited to addressing individual incidents or behaviours, seeking compliance rather than transformation. The educators concerned with RJ’s susceptibility to manipulation raise questions of who needs to control the process; in this case, these educators were clear that adults are in control, evidence of affirmative RJ.

Theme 6: RJ as part of a broad relational ethos. The concerns I detailed in the previous theme suggest that educators viewed RJ as only one piece of a bigger puzzle. Educators consistently referred to how RJ could not work in isolation in the school. In this theme I focus on the factors educators identified as crucial for creating an environment conducive for RJ. Staff discussed the importance of building respectful relationships. Educators felt this could be accomplished through community and character building activities, such as the use of weekly circles. Educators were clear that RJ would not be effective if groundwork was not laid first.

Building mutually respectful relationships – between adults and students, among students, and among adults – emerged as both a necessary precursor to RJ and a product of RJ. Referring to relationships as a product of RJ, sixty-five per cent of respondents to the educator questionnaire said that they *often* or *always* use RJ to build relationships in their classroom. The number rose to 91 per cent when *sometimes* was included. Within the learning circles, however, the majority of discussion focused on relationships as a precursor to RJ. In reference to adult relationships, AE8 and AE11 pointed out that restorative processes used with staff only worked if a sufficient level of trust existed. Relationships were deemed essential to using RJ with students because, as AE6 expressed it: “It’s really hard to problem solve when [students] don’t know who you are” (Ed2). Many educators spoke of having strong relationships with students, with some referring to them being similar to parent-child relationships. AE14 described her relationship with students: “I always tell them at this school, I’m like your mother. Because if you’ve done wrong, you know that I’m going to come to you and we’re going to deal with it. But if somebody’s hurting you, know that I’m going to look into it, too” (Ed4). Relationships needed to be in place first, so that RJ could then assist in the reparation of those relationships.

When discussing relationships between teachers and students, most educators focused on the idea of respect. Interestingly, although mutual respect did emerge occasionally, most discussed teachers needing to show students respect. AE9 felt that showing students respect was “the big piece” (Ed3) for building relationships. Although respect could be defined in a variety of ways, educators in the learning circles often described it as students feeling heard or being given a voice. AE8 felt that:

Voice is really important. But I think our kids, when I talk with kids, I feel like they’re being heard. ... And they have that little, little power. Like, it gives them that voice, so I think it reduces a lot of anxiety for kids. And they know darn well that yes, they do have a voice in this building. (Ed3)

In the written portion of the educator questionnaire, the idea of respect for students also surfaced. Here respondents voiced an appreciation for how RJ validated and honoured student feelings, treated students with dignity and respect, and allowed students to maintain pride. Again, there appears to be a virtuous loop in that respectful relationships both are increased through RJ and ensure that RJ is implemented successfully.

In order to create an environment in which students felt respected and relationships among students were strong, educators had a variety of techniques. Some focused on building a sense of community through weekly circles or other activities. AE1 provided this example:

We try to have a lot of positive circles where the kids have to say something nice about somebody in the circle, in the class. Something that somebody’s done good for them, that’s been nice for them. Whether Johnny helped him pick up the toys or something like that. And that really... the kids really enjoy that. Because it makes everybody feel good to hear something good about them. (Ed1)

Others, like AE7, detailed lesson plans emphasizing respectful classroom relationships. AE14 concentrated exclusively on character building in her classroom. For AE14 and many educators, creating a respectful classroom environment was the precursor to using RJ. As AE14 expressed it: “You need to do a lot of legwork to make that circle happen” (Ed4). A common sentiment among educators was that the “legwork” of creating a respectful ethos was RRS; restorative circles were only possible within a rights-respecting environment.

Although difficult to pinpoint exactly what was considered *restorative* by educators and what was seen to be preparation, it was clear that educators did not feel that RJ was a stand-alone option. Although RJ was believed to help maintain respectful relationships, allow students to be heard and build a sense of community, educators did not feel that RJ could accomplish this in isolation. A chicken and egg question, the school environment needed to be conducive for RJ and RJ needed to maintain and strengthen that environment. This holistic view of RJ, as part of the broad ethos, speaks to a transformative understanding of RJ.

Theme 7: The impact of RJ: Empowering students. In this theme I focus on the impact educators believed RJ has had on the school. RJ was seen to be very different and more effective than previous approaches. Seventy-four per cent of respondents to the educator questionnaire felt that RJ had impacted the school significantly. In general, educators identified changes to the school culture as a whole, in classrooms and on the playground. Educators found the impact easiest to see in students exposed to RJ for several years, contrasted with new students. Students were described as listening to each other, being willing to talk things out, helping with group decisions, learning skills for the future and being empowered.

Educators who had been in the school for more than five years discussed the stark contrast between the previous approach and RJ. AE5 and AE9 described an atmosphere in which

broken rules resulted in set sanctions that got progressively more severe with repeated offences.

AE5 was skeptical of the previous system's impact:

But I didn't see the old approach, the recess room kind of approach, helping it any. It was... we even kept statistics! About how many kids were there for how often. By the end of the year, it was the same 30 names in the book. Week after week after week. They didn't learn anything. (Ed2)

When the current principal arrived and staff embarked on a series of professional development workshops to determine a new way forward in terms of discipline approaches, AE9 reported that staff looked for approaches that better fit the school's "value system" (Ed3). Once RJ was decided upon as the way forward, AE9 recalled a comprehensive shift: "First year, or two years, there was almost 100 per cent staff trying to do the same thing and so we had all the skills being built everywhere consistently, vocabulary. And so I saw that transfer into every aspect of the school – office, playground, classrooms" (Ed3). Although that "100 per cent" consistency was no longer the experience of staff, educators still felt that the school as a whole was being affected by RJ.

When discussing the impact of RJ, some educators focused on the overall atmosphere of the school. AE8 and AE9 spoke fondly of the school:

AE8: This is such a warm, caring school. I've subbed in a lot of other schools, I'd never go back. Even though some of your kids are tougher, the support and the feeling...

AE9: The feeling, the caring.

AE8: Yeah, is different. So I think the kids sense that, too. (Ed3)

The sense of caring was also described as being present in the classroom and on the playground.

AE12 explained the impact by contrasting playground behaviour before and after RJ's implementation:

There's less problems outside at recess than before we had circles. Because I remember when I was outside on supervision we'd be breaking up fights almost every recess before, and I'd have some big problems. Since we started the circles I think the frequency of those major eruptions is far less. I can go outside on supervision and watch kids playing together. And they may have a dispute but then they'll talk about it and I don't have to intervene. So in the last two years I think I've intervened in just a handful of, you know, physical altercations, fights. Whereas before, it was pretty regular. (Ed4)

As AE6 observed this caring environment did not emerge without effort. In her classroom:

We spent those first few months and it's just learning how to get along because until we learned how to get along, we were getting nowhere, it was just a fight to get through everything we wanted to do. ... And once we all learned how to get along and how to talk to each other when we have our issues instead of screaming and shouting and pushing, it was just a dream. (Ed2)

As is evident from these comments, the impact that RJ had on the school – the creation of a more supportive environment – was due to the change in student behaviour and attitudes.

Educators in the learning circles reflected on how RJ's impact on students depended upon long-term contact. According to AE2, "In the older grades, especially if they've been here since kindergarten or grade 1, if they've had that exposure for 4 or 5 or 6 years, you start to see it, you do" (Ed1). A few educators provided examples of how new students behaved differently than

existing students, citing this difference as evidence that RJ was changing student attitudes. AE13 shared this story:

You can tell the ones that just came in this year and have no idea. Like, [a student] came in and when she has a problem – I’m not sure if you saw in the library yesterday – she’s just up in tears: ‘No, I don’t want to deal with it, no, I don’t want to talk to anybody!’ And she’s really isolated. But the other girls, when they have a problem, they’ll approach one another. (Ed4)

Many educators lamented the transient nature of the school, claiming it diminished RJ’s impact. When AE12 made this comment, everyone in the circle concurred:

So you have students who understand the way to work with their words and then students who don’t have any understanding and they butt heads and they can’t come to a common solution based on skills. And then students go away and get replaced with new students so that just the consistency aspect... If we had the same group of students, the whole time, then we’d see a bigger difference than what we’ve had. (Ed4)

Although the transient nature may diminish RJ’s impact on the school, educators believed in RJ’s potential. AE12 saw RJ’s influence on students as being the antidote to issues caused by transiency: “So we have to work with the ones we have and hopefully they can train the new students who come in and show them and lead by example, be leaders”(Ed4). Long-term exposure to RJ impacted students; such exposure also affected the culture as a whole.

Beyond a sense that RJ was generally improving student behaviour and attitudes, educators shared examples of specific impact. AE10 found that RJ helped students articulate their thoughts and feelings. AE1, AE7 and AE13 all gave examples of how RJ had improved group

decision-making skills. A significant impact identified by some educators was the willingness of students to talk out problems rather than resort to other methods. AE6 described it this way:

For the most part, if there's a problem, one person will tell me what happened, one person might deny it for a little bit, we'll talk through it and then they both figure out, you know, and the other person takes responsibility and it's... they're willing to talk it through and they're not, like, no, no, no, no, no, no! They're actually... what I've seen is that they're much more willing to talk. (Ed2)

The willingness to talk referred not only to students talking to adults or those in authority positions, but also to one another.

Students talking directly to one another emerged as a main indicator of RJ's success, in the eyes of educators. Most educators encouraged students to talk directly rather than use the teacher as an intermediary, seeing minimal teacher involvement as a success. AE10 shared this moment:

When they come to me tattling, saying, oh, so-and-so said I wasn't going to be able to go on the field trip and that hurt my feelings. And I said, 'Okay, are you done talking to that person already or did you need to discuss that more with them?' 'I need to discuss it more with them.' And then I hear them go over to that person and say, 'That was not kind words when you said that I couldn't come on the field trip, I already got my paper signed.' And explaining the details. And the other person is like, 'Oh, okay, I didn't know.' And so in having that conversation, they work it out themselves. And I don't have to go over there and say, 'Don't do that' or 'Those aren't kind words' or whatever. They know it all themselves. (Ed3)

Several educators, including AE10, found that students were more likely to be truthful to each other than when an adult was involved. Educators also expressed appreciation for peer mentoring and peer support occurring in their classrooms. AE11 provided a powerful example of peer mentoring taking place in a restorative circle in a BLA classroom:

We had a young gentlemen who had gone through the process, had struggled greatly and after a year, all of a sudden, he could address the circle better than any adult I've seen. Because he referred back to himself: 'I did this... You guys must remember when I threw chairs, I kicked, I ran out of the room... so this is what you might want to try because when you do it you look silly, you look bad, you look...' whatever words he used. And the impact he had on the circle... I wish I would've had a film to film it. And basically, because he was one of them, because he'd been down the road – and it was a rocky road – and came out the other side, he could speak to these kids and have an impact. (Ed4)

Educators delighted in the stories of students either working out issues on their own or helping others to work through conflicts.

Educators believed that RJ had impacted their school. Due, in part, to RJ, the school was seen to be warm, caring and supportive. Students – especially those who had attended the school for all grades – were seen to be willing to talk out problems, both with teachers and with each other; had good social and communication skills; and acted as peer mentors and peer supporters. Although the focus was primarily on the impact RJ had on student behaviour and attitudes, educators were not fixated on improving student behaviour for the sake of calm and order. Most educators felt RJ's most significant impact was on empowering students in their interactions with their peers – whether working out issues, or mentoring and supporting one another. The focus on empowerment was a clear indicator of transformative RJ.

As in Scotland, affirmative RJ existed in the school. In Alberta, however, transformative RJ seemed to exist more broadly, as educators took a comprehensive approach. Layering the student voice into this context allows for these discourses to become more evident.

Alberta Student Themes

As in Scotland, students in the Alberta school were mostly unfamiliar with the term RJ and thus I focused on understanding the students' general experience of schooling. The first theme sets the context, according to students. The next three themes deal with student peer relationships, student-adult relationships and how issues are solved. The final two themes – lessons learned and overall assessment – provides a broad sense of the messages being sent to students in the school.

Before exploring the six student themes, I elaborate on details and limitations of the student questionnaire, the student learning circles, the co-researcher notebooks and individual interviews with student co-researchers upon which these themes are based. All four research activities involved grade 5 and 6 students and thus are more representative of the experience of these students than of students in other grades. Out of 85 grade 5 and 6 students, 38 – slightly less than half – returned parental consent forms and completed the questionnaire. Broken down further, 32 per cent of grade 5 and 55 per cent of grade 6 students completed the questionnaire. As with the Scottish pupils, Alberta students who responded to the questionnaire were a self-selected group: they were sufficiently interested to request that their parents/caregivers sign consent forms. Thus, they may also not be representative of the whole grade 5 and 6 population. Again, it is the patterns in the responses from the 38 grade 5 and 6 students who completed the questionnaire that are referred to when the questionnaire results are included in the theme descriptions.

In the five learning circles combined, there were 20 participants. Of these 20, seven were male and 13 were female. Almost all of the learning circle participants – 18 of them – became co-researchers, including six of the male participants. In addition, one female student who had been absent during the learning circles also received permission from her parents to participate. Thus, 19 students acted as co-researchers for three days. Two participants were from the BLA program. To protect the anonymity of participants, all names used are pseudonyms selected by the students.

Theme 1: School context: An ethos of respect and a testing of that respect. In this theme I identify the context of the school, as described by students. For the most part, students referred to the school context in positive terms, focusing on the relationships that made the school feel like a family. As part of this context, students discussed school rules, the Rights Respecting Schools program, the BLA program and the multicultural nature of their school. Overwhelmingly, these aspects were spoken about with pride. Connected to some of these unique features of the school, however, were also issues of racism, gender inequality and aggressive behaviour.

Several students mentioned how the overall school and each individual classroom felt “like a family” (Corcork). This familial feeling was evidenced for students in the ethos of welcoming new students, and in the various events and programs that the school ran to support students and their families. Students repeatedly discussed the importance of ensuring that new students felt welcomed in the school and held themselves responsible for this welcome. Co-researcher Kiwi explained what happened when someone new arrived: “We would just catch them. Like, we would say hi already and we would have a big conversation with the new kid. And they would feel comfortable, like, they would feel like they were part of the big family

already.” Although students felt responsible on an individual level to be welcoming to others, they also spoke of the school’s role in supporting students. Several mentioned appreciation for the snack program where “kids that don’t get to eat breakfast at home, they can eat breakfast at school” (Code7). Students found it natural for the school to meet a wide variety of student needs. Lily discussed her needs being met through the clubs offered by the school; Kitty Pie talked about individual staff members being supportive of her needs. In her co-researcher interview, Kitty Pie had this to say in praise of one staff member:

He brings us together so that we can feel, so we feel we belong together, that the school is a Rights Respecting School and that we feel like we have friends and that we don’t feel like trash. He brings us together, he makes us communicate, he puts us on teams, he also gets new students, and he plays with us, talks to us.

Overall students described a supportive, nurturing school context.

School rules were part of what constituted the school context. Rules were discussed as mainly focused on respecting others. Students consistently equated the wellbeing program (show pride, use gentle words, keep hands to themselves, listen actively, and be leaders in school) as the school rules. All students participating in the learning circles believed the rules to be important; they also found it disturbing that not everyone followed the rules. Student participants felt that the most frequently broken rule was students keeping their hands and feet to themselves (Bob; Monkey; Soccer; Faith). The only explanation for rule breaking, according to Faith, was that “some kids just aren’t, like, raised that way.” Most students voiced a desire for more students to adhere to the wellbeing program.

The idea that people follow rules and respect one another was closely related, for many students, to the multicultural nature of the school. Most students talked about the variety of

cultures in the school as an asset: “And it’s just cool to have fun with your friends and know lots of people you don’t know, have new friends from other countries and other languages, learn other stuff about other countries and stuff like that” (S1 Community, Soccer); “A good community has lots of different cultures in it and our school has lots of different cultures” (S1 Community, Kiwi). Indeed, the school did have a whole variety of cultures and languages. Asked on the questionnaire to write in which languages they spoke, 92 per cent of respondents said English; 40 per cent Arabic; 18 per cent Somali; 5 per cent each French, Spanish, Turkish and Punjabi; and receiving one response each were Hindi, Urdu, Persian, and Ukrainian. Sam, Soccer, Sunflower, Corcork and Bob all mentioned specific multicultural events held by the school as proof that students’ cultures and languages were valued and respected.

Layered into this background of respect, was the school’s designation as a RRS. This designation was mentioned with pride by most of the students. As Bob said, “Our school is a rights respecting school and other schools aren’t” (S1 Rules). Most mentions, however, were simply a mention of the term – Rights Respecting School – with little clarification or elaboration as to what that actually meant. A few, such as Soccer elaborated when I asked explicitly what being a RRS meant: “We have rules and the rules are just the rights of the child. And we respect each other. And we don’t make fun of other people and their cultures, language...” (S1 Community). For Soccer and a few others, RRS was closely tied with the wellbeing program and with the multicultural nature of the school. Most others viewed the term as self-explanatory, unclear as to why elaboration was necessary. One student, Justice, felt the school did not deserve the RRS title, sharing this opinion: “I’ve never thought it was the first rights respecting school. I just have to go along with it. ... ‘Cause kids never respect one another. Teachers respect each

other, but kids don't." Although Justice's view was in the minority about RRS, other similar concerns did emerge about the school in general.

Students voiced concerns about racism, sexism and the presence of negative, harmful behaviour. Many of these concerns were attributed to the unique nature of the school; others stood in contrast to what students expected from the school. Some students thought that racism, for instance, was prevalent due to the multicultural nature of the school. Corcork talked about occasional issues arising between cultures during soccer games: "There is some discrimination, like, you're not allowed to play 'cause you're from a different country and all that. But most of the time, it's like, all good. Like, there are some people that do all that" (S1 Rules). Kitty Pie felt racism was actually more widespread, citing this scenario as a typical example in her co-researcher interview:

Yeah, in our class, we see [racism] a lot, we see that a lot. When [the teacher] is here, we don't, like, say it aloud, we would, like, whisper it or people send notes to each other saying, like, ewww, go back to your country, ewww, I don't like your hair colour, ewww, your breath smells like this, ewww, your skin colour's ugly.

Kitty Pie continued, explaining that racism was never addressed by teachers due to widespread secrecy among students: "'Cause if you tell what other people do, the class will, like, gang up on you and start yelling at you and saying, 'Why do you have to be such a snitch? Why are you such a tattleteller?' No one gets it why you would do that." She felt that racism would remain an issue since it was so hidden.

Gender discrimination was mentioned by several students – both boys and girls – as an issue in the school. Most examples involved the playing of soccer. Kitty Pie provided a typical example, "Soccer's a big problem, 'cause if the girls want to play soccer, the boys say, no,

they're not worthy, they're not good soccer players and that they suck at passing, they suck at scoring." In contrast to the allegations of racism, however, suggestions of sexism were dealt with openly by students and teachers. Several students mentioned circle discussions about how boys could treat girls more fairly. Corcork shared the class' recent decision about soccer behaviour in her co-researcher interview: "We'll at least have to pass to the girls so we're not excluding the girls in any way possible." There was optimism from both males and females that gender issues were being dealt with effectively.

The other issue that students discussed as part of the school context was aggressive behaviour exhibited by some students, particularly members of the BLA classes. The members of those classes who acted as co-researchers provided innumerable examples of such behaviour. One BLA co-researcher shared the events that took place within five minutes in her classroom:

Kid moaning. Kid said no. Kid said that did not like one another. Kid angry, defiant, not being kind. Kid is being disrespectful. Kid not listening to teacher. Kid saying shut up.

Kid threw chair across the room and said F You. Kid talking out. Body contact.

According to the other BLA co-researcher, such behaviour was "completely normal" in BLA classes. The behaviour was accepted by most students as simply a necessary part of the school; although some, as Justice observed, found the school "kind of scary" (4) due to the behaviour of BLA students. The BLA students themselves felt uncomfortable in BLA classrooms. One co-researcher shared her own plan to escape BLA classrooms: "There's a thing, it's called integration and BLA kids use it to get into a formal, a normal, class. And, well, it's kind of really hard to get into. But once you finally learn how to get into it, then you just know how to get in" (S2 Rules). Although deemed necessary, no one had much positive to say about the BLA program or its students.

Overall, the context described by students was one in which they felt cared for and supported. The school had several unique aspects – the wellbeing program, RRS, multicultural nature, BLA program – that both created an ethos of respect and provided a diverse student body that tested that ethos.

Theme 2: Soccer epitomizes the best and worst of student-student relationships. In this theme I explore the daily experience of student relationships, set within the broader context outlined in the previous theme. When speaking generally, students described an atmosphere in which students, for the most part, supported one another. Support was not universal, of course, and students also shared numerous instances of harmful behaviour – gossiping, excluding, fighting, bullying, and more – between students. Soccer often dominated conversation and daily life, illustrating both the break down of relationships as well as the need to get along.

There was no topic more discussed in learning circles and co-researcher reports than student relationships. All participants had something positive to say about student relationships, with some students speaking of them in glowing terms. Bob represented the positive views: “It’s a terrific school to be in ‘cause a lot of people get along” (S1 Rules). Most, such as Libby, were more measured in their responses:

People get along pretty good when they’re not fighting. It’s really peaceful and you just see friends being friends, and like, being funny. And you don’t really see much big fights and people beating each other up here. So, I would say, sometimes it’s okay, I guess. (S2 Community, 5)

Libby’s measured view was reflected in the student questionnaires. In response to the statement “most students in our school respect one another,” 52 per cent of students *agreed* or *strongly agreed*, 21 per cent *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed*, and 26 per cent *neither agreed nor*

disagreed; when asked if students felt like they belonged, 50 per cent *agreed* or *strongly agreed* and 47 per cent *neither agreed nor disagreed*. The large portion of respondents that chose the neutral response for both questions suggests the complexity of student relationships; they encompass a gamut of both positive and negative emotions, thoughts and behaviours.

On the positive side of student relationships, participants felt that students demonstrated support for one another in a variety of ways. Students were quick to help those who were struggling. RaRa shared this example in the co-researcher interview:

I liked how people, if somebody was having trouble with something, maybe, like, say, if you were having trouble in math, like, if you had partners, they would come and help you even if they're not your partner. You're allowed to go around helping.

As already mentioned, befriending new students was something most participants felt responsible for. One of the co-researchers, Tay-Tay, shared the experience from a different perspective: "I think that you should be able to feel included because I was a new kid this year – me and [student] – and we felt really included at the beginning." As further evidence of this inclusive atmosphere, students shared examples of peer encouragement, standing up for others, and helping peers solve their own problems. Inclusion and support were described as being encouraged both by other students and by teachers.

Although students spoke in general of a supportive, inclusive atmosphere, they were also quick to point out negative behaviours. Joe Bob characterized the way students communicated with one another as "really mean" (S1 Communication). Sunflower revealed in her co-researcher interview that despite insistence otherwise, not all new students were welcomed like family: "Cause some kids, like, sometimes, they go and pick on new kids for some reason. And they'll say, 'Oh, you don't belong here, you're new.'" Monkey also felt that some students excluded

others, suggesting the school was “like high school, yeah. You have to play with the right crowd, like, your friends and stuff like that” (S1 Community). The co-researcher reports were full of examples of students being rude to one another. Most participants felt that the older students – of which they were all apart – were less respectful than the younger ones. Shadow007 was at a loss for words, saying “People who are in grade 6, just some of the boys, they just... I can’t even explain how bad they are” (S2 Community).

Other students were able to provide specific references to what they believed constituted bad behaviour. The main complaints revolved around gossiping, telling lies, physical fighting and bullying. Gossiping was mostly an issue raised by the female participants. Kiwi, Tay-Tay and Lily all shared personal examples of being victims of gossiping; most were examples that occurred during the three-day co-researcher observation period. The telling of lies, sometimes connected to gossiping, were of interest to both genders. Students felt that others told lies to stay out of trouble and to make themselves look better [“They did communicate to the teachers when they got in trouble. But like they wouldn’t tell the whole truth sometimes. It’s like they didn’t want to get in trouble” (Corcork); “And then, when they tell each other a story when they’re mad, they’ll twist it up to make sure that they seem like the good guy” (Joe Bob)]. The telling of lies annoyed student participants, but they felt that the truth usually emerged, either by the lying student’s own volition in circle discussions or through witnesses. Shadow007, however, during his co-researcher interview, spoke of the relationship toll taken when he had been a witness. Students he called out for lying accused him of lying and refused to continue the friendship. Though, he claimed, “I don’t really care if they’re not my friends. ‘cause they’re liars, anyway.” Although such behaviour was thought to be widespread, it was also universally denounced.

Fighting – both physical fights and “talking fights” (Sophia) – were also prevalent. Most of the co-researcher reports focused on examples of students fighting. Students related the incidents with great detail and often, significant emotion, even if they themselves were not involved. Their reports frequently indicated how the incident was or was not dealt with. Co-researcher Kitty Pie shared this example which covers all of the above:

Yeah, last week, it was a huge problem ‘cause a boy in our class got punched by another boy in the other class and he had a black eye and a bloody nose. So, he wasn’t here. And a girl, too, she got, she was being, she felt like she didn’t belong to the school because someone was being racist to her. She felt, she felt really, she felt bad for her own colour because she told [teacher] that she didn’t want to be that colour anymore, she felt like being a different colour. And the other boy that was, like, yelling at her and stuff started laughing and calling her names in Arabic and swearing at her, making fun of her parents, making fun of her. But then we helped her with the problem. We walked her away, we calmed her down, we made her laugh, we played with her, we gave her cookies, and some of us gave her gum. We talked to her and we talked to the boy, too.

Although fights were a common aspect of student relationships, so was the solving of them. As raw as the details and emotions surrounding fights sometimes appeared in the retelling, students felt confident that they would not be left to fester for long.

Students, however, were not as confident that bullying could be addressed effectively. In contrast to the Scottish students who rarely mentioned the term *bully*, the Albertan students discussed bullying frequently. Most felt that bullying was too widespread, especially for a school that was supposed to be a “no bullying school and a Rights Respecting School” (S1 Community, Soccer). Faith expressed this wish, “What I would change is most of the bullying, because it

happens a lot. And it bothers me, seeing other kids being bullied. And they don't, the bullies don't realize how much it hurts" (S2 Community). Although participants discussed how the school used similar approaches to address bullying as to address fighting – teacher intervention, circles, peer intervention – bullies were often seen to be immune to most approaches. As Corcork described it, "Circles do help most of the time, but for some of the kids they don't help 'cause they'll just keep on bullying other kids and we'll just keep on having circles every day" (S1 Rules). Bullying was grudgingly accepted by most students as an unfortunate fact of the student experience.

In all the learning circles and in most of the co-researcher interviews, soccer came to epitomize all that was positive and negative about student relationships in the school. The game was often cited as the cause of fights. As Bob said, "When the boys fight it's mostly about soccer." For female students, too, soccer was an oft-raised issue since sometimes, "the boys say the girls can't play soccer" (S1 Talk, Joe Bob). Students discussed how soccer could involve exclusionary practices, incite lies and gossiping and test friendships. Students also shared that issues that arose during soccer games were always addressed, usually in satisfactory manners. Most of the circle discussions I witnessed involved classes figuring out how to better manage their disputes about soccer. Monkey provided this example:

Like, outside, most people are, like, fighting about like anything, mostly soccer. The teacher says, oh, we can't do soccer for a week until you learn to participate. And we play with the other grade 6/5 class, so bring them in and we talk in a circle, like, what are we going to do about soccer, are you going to participate, like, time out and time in, the crease and stuff like that, the kick out.

Soccer, for many students, was not only a game, but the venue where the complexity of peer relationships played out.

Student relationships were complex. Students felt both supported by their peers and undermined by them. The drama of relationships surfaced daily and dominated the thoughts and reflections of student participants. Although many of their examples were of negative behaviour, most students gave measured assessments of student relationships.

Theme 3: Adults as almost unconditionally supportive. In this theme I look at how students viewed their relationships with adults in school. Adults were framed as being almost unconditionally supportive; there were only a handful of examples of adults who either ignored issues or were seen to blame the wrong person. To the student participants, adults had the role of enforcing rules in order to make the school safe for everyone. There were times when adults used disciplinary measures to deal with issues of rule breaking. Students described the variety of these measures – from exclusionary practices to discussions and circles.

When discussing student-teacher communication, student participants often focused on the student side of the equation. Students felt that most students were respectful of teachers; the exceptions, they felt, were often disrespectful for no reason. Joe Bob explained that “most students listen but sometimes students think the teachers are just being mean to them when they’re just trying to help. So they get mad at that teacher” (S1 Communication). For students, disrespecting the teacher fell into two categories: not listening to the teacher and talking back to the teacher. Co-researcher Monkey shared what she felt was a typical example:

Like, every time’s the teacher’s like, okay, no, you can’t go to the washroom, there’s going to be, like, 5 more minutes until, like, recess so you can go then, they’re like, no, I

want to go to the bathroom now! And they just, like, slam the door and just walk out of the classroom.

The student participants almost always viewed the student as being in the wrong. They expressed sympathy for adults in the school.

Students felt almost unanimously supported by adults. Overall, students had more faith in the adults in the school than in each other. Only 52 per cent of student questionnaire respondents felt that students respected each other as compared to 87 per cent that felt respected by adults. Although peer relationships dominated conversations, relationships with adults also featured prominently in student life. Soccer thought that relationships with adults were as important as those with other students: “Everyone in the school has a friend and, like, there is no one in the school that doesn’t have anyone to talk to. There’s teachers, there’s staff, there’s lots of people to talk to” (S1 Community). All student participants had something positive to say about the teachers in the school, who they described as: “caring”, “nice” and “funny”. Many students expressed appreciation that “students can talk to teachers and teachers listen to them” (S1 Communication, Bobby); or, as Sam put it: “When we have a problem we can tell the teachers what’s going on and we can be open with them” (S1 Rules). Seventy-four per cent of student questionnaire respondents found it easy to talk to adults in the school. Notably, there were only two instances recorded by the co-researchers of adult behaviour that students found unsupportive – one of a teacher “by accident” (Shadow007) getting the wrong student in trouble and one of adults ignoring bullying on the playground. Overall, students had confidence in the adults in their school.

Students also felt as though they had a say in decisions adults were making about the school: sixty-six per cent of respondents agreed that students help make classroom decisions and

half of respondents felt they could make changes in the school if something was unfair. Liby was unequivocal in her belief that student voice was considered by adults:

And, most decisions made in our school is... it's not that the teachers, or the principal, is being unfair and saying, no, I want this, or no, I want... The principal's fair because she goes around to the students to see what the students think of it. And if they don't like it, she wouldn't do it. If they did like it, she would do it. (S2 Community)

One of the responsibilities that students attributed to adults was that of enforcing school rules. As already noted, most students equated rules with the wellbeing program and thus felt that rules made sense and were not arbitrary. RaRa believed, like most students that “the only reason that there are rules are so we're safe in school” (S1 Rules). Thus, students felt that adult enforcement of the rules also made sense. Bob believed that “the teachers like the rules because they want students to be safe and come to school in a safe environment” (S1 Rules). Connected to the enforcement of rules were actions adults took if students broke rules. There were a variety of measures that adults were known to take to deal with students who broke rules or in other ways made the school unsafe. Although there was some mention of exclusionary practices [“They get sent to another class or she asks them to move their desk back from around people. And, like, yeah, if they're really bad, then they get sent to the office” (Bob)], most teachers seemed to employ discussion or a circle approach. Soccer gave this example of a mixed approach: “If anyone bullies, they will get detention or something ‘cause bullying isn't something from our school ‘cause our school is a rights respecting school. And stop bullying. Well, it is stopped, but we have circles about it and then we solve it” (S1 Community). BLA students spoke mainly of the padded “timeout” room and of physical restraint. Even for these students, however, the school was seen to often approach issues with BLA students in a collaborative manner:

Because in [a different school's] BLA classes, when you were, when you didn't, when you refused to do your work, you were automatically forced to go to the timeout and in [this school] you actually get a chance to correct it. But when I was in grade 2 [in the different school] and I didn't want to do my work, they actually pushed me out of a chair and restrained me and brought me to timeout (S2 Rules)

Again, for many participants, the way that teachers handled negative behaviour and rule breaking seemed to make sense.

For students, relationships with adults may have been secondary to those with other students, but they were still significant. The role adults played made sense to students – adults were supportive, listened to students, kept the school safe, and engaged in sensible measures when rule breaking needed to be dealt with. Students had faith that adults had their best interest at heart and would work collaboratively with students to solve issues.

Theme 4: Trust that issues will be solved. Building on the previous theme, in this theme I identify how issues were dealt with within the school. Without question, students were confident that issues would be solved, often with help from the school. Discussion revealed that teachers could be counted on to help solve issues, often through the arrangement of a circle. Students were seen as equal partners in the solutions.

Students were confident in the ability of adults to help them work through problems. Seventy-nine per cent of questionnaire respondents agreed that the school would help them sort out conflicts. As Corcork said, “When we try to solve a problem all the teachers help the students solve the problem so that we can minimize it so it's not as big a problem so we can all get together again” (S1 Rules). Although in the questionnaire, students felt that they would be listened to more readily if they were the one hurt (84 per cent) rather than the person deemed to

have been misbehaving (73 per cent), learning circle and co-researcher participants provided examples in which stories from either “side” of the conflict were heard equally. RaRa provided a typical scenario in her co-researcher report:

Like, when [teachers] see kids fighting they come in, like, a little place and talk to them. And they talk to them about their feelings and they get one story at a time from each person. And the stories are both heard and eventually it gets resolved and they become friends again.

Beyond bringing students together to talk, adults assisted students through other measures to solve issues. At times, students looked to adults to be arbitrators of disputes [“Teacher called them back in and told him not to talk about people’s weight ‘cause it’s rude. And they both said sorry to each other and they started working again” (Code7)]; other times students would seek help directly from teachers [“Sometimes it’s just too bad, they need to talk to a teacher about it” (Sophia)]; and some students took advice from teachers to heart [“But the teacher tells us, like, if you rage or if you get angry, take 10 breaths, take 10 steps away and just, like, be calm. Try to be calm” (Monkey)]. The action most often cited as being taken by teachers, however, was arranging a circle discussion.

Most students expressed appreciation for circles, viewing them as necessary components of the classroom community. Seventy-nine per cent of questionnaire respondents were confident that issues that affected the whole class would be dealt with as a collective. In practice, circles were the way in which such issues were approached. Circles were seen as a safe place to share emotions and thoughts. Sunflower stated that “in circles, I like how all the kids can be really honest and they can actually share their true feelings” (S1 Rules) because, as RaRa articulated it, “whatever goes on in the circle, stays in the circle.” Circles were viewed as a place where the

truth emerged, where everyone was able to share his/her side of the story and as a way to minimize problems. Co-researcher Liby believed that if some students “don’t have a circle it gets bigger and bigger and bigger and they just go to the point where they want to, like, beat each other up.” Circles were also practical, seen as a process in which actual solutions were decided upon. Code7 shared an example from the co-researcher period of a complicated, multi-person, multi-grade dispute that resulted in a large circle. Although this particular issue took “an hour and a half to discuss what happened and solve it” (Code7), students trusted that, for the most part, solutions to problems could be found in circle. In circle, those solutions might be provided by adults or by other students. Sophia praised the process, stating that “it’s like you don’t have to leave the classroom, really, to solve a problem. Like you can discuss it with your whole class. And your classmates might have solutions for the problem” (S1 Communication). Although circles were overwhelmingly relied upon to solve problems, students did share a few examples in which circles did not work. In these cases, individual students were seen to prevent the circle from working, either refusing to listen to the other person or not being honest in circle. Kitty Pie also pondered whether the solutions suggested in circle might really only work for young students, and not for the more complex problems of grade 5 and 6 students.

Outside of circle discussions, participants relayed stories of student intervention in conflicts. A few students referred to an official peer mediation program in which students were given badges and “you go around and you try to fix the problem and you try to help” (Liby). Co-researcher Kitty Pie, one of the peer mediators, felt too much was asked of older students:

Like, it’s too much a load for us – it’s their problem, they need to try and solve the problem but it’s too hard for them. They’re putting all the load on the students in our class. ‘Cause we have to come up with strategies, we have to help them, we have to calm

them down, we have to talk to them. It's so hard. It's just too hard to communicate with them.

Most of the examples, however, were of students voluntarily intervening in conflicts simply because they wanted to “calm them down and, um, try to stop their fighting” (Sophia).

Participants also shared some examples of students working out their own issues. Cupcake, for instance, wrote in her co-researcher notebook about two students who argued over a toy figuring out an acceptable solution on their own. One way for students to solve their own problems was to take time away from the person they were in conflict with. As Bob explained it, “Well, they don't always become friends but they eventually become nice to each other and just don't fight anymore.” However, examples of students working out their own conflicts – even deciding to walk away – were rare. Joe Bob felt that she had “seen it once. Once or twice” (S1 Communication). The questionnaire responses back up the sense that student-solved issues were rare: compared to 79 per cent of respondents who believed the school would help them sort out conflicts, only 34 per cent had confidence that students could do it themselves. Co-researcher Liby felt it was difficult for students to solve their own problems “because you can't just, like, fight and be screaming at each other and then be, like, (*whispers*) ‘sorry.’” Although that seemed to be a reasonable explanation of the difficulty of student-led interventions, Tay-Tay did not believe it an adequate excuse. In her co-researcher interview, she explained her reason for not approaching teachers with her problems: “We've got to learn how to solve things. We're going into grade 7 soon.”

Students had the utmost confidence that problems would be solved at school. Although most of their faith lay in adults to facilitate appropriate processes, some students were able and

willing to intervene in conflicts themselves. Regardless of whether the process was teacher- or student-led, students were involved in the process and the outcome.

Theme 5: Learning how to solve problems, make choices and be a good friend. In this theme I explore some of the lessons that students seemed to be taking from their time at the school. Students identified learning how to solve problems, how to responsibly make choices, how to be a good community member and how to be a good friend. These lessons were sometimes taught to students explicitly; most of the time, the lessons were absorbed from modeling and seeing them in practice.

As seen in the previous theme, students had continuous opportunities to see problem solving in action. A few students felt that explicit teaching of problem-solving skills and approaches was necessary because some students only realized how to solve problems when shown in circle (Liby). During the co-researching interview, Liby also shared a personal example of how she learned to be a problem solver. She was prone to conflicts when she was younger and her teacher decided to make her a peer mediator. Liby felt taking on this role impacted her life significantly “because it makes you do a good deed, you learn how being – you see the difference between being bad and being good is – and you see how much you become a better person if you do those kinds of things.” Students internalized messages about problem solving from their teachers, either from their words or actions. Sam shared something he had learned:

If you have a problem, like, two students then a lot of times you go to the teacher and talk it out. But sometimes, like, our teacher says it’s better if you go talk to the person. ‘Cause that’s the person you’re having the problem with so you should sort it out with them. But she’ll help you. She’ll, like, she’ll be there when you guys talk and she’ll help you. (S1 Rules)

Interestingly, during one of the learning circle conversations, the lessons they had internalized about problem solving were put into practice. Two students – Sunflower and RaRa – spoke about their frustration with a reading activity. The other students – Bob, Corcork and Sam – disagreed with their assessment. In the middle of the learning circle the five students facilitated their own discussion about the topic, using I-statements and expressing their thoughts without dismissing the opinions of their peers. The conversation was a clear indication that problem-solving skills were not only discussed in the school, they were practiced as well.

Another lesson being taught to the students in the school was how to make choices. Students felt that adults were open to having student input in many choices. Kiwi gave this example: “If we have something to do, like a subject or something. Or if there’s, let’s say, math or gym and she asks us, oh, what do you want to do, math or gym? In a democracy, you put your hand up and the majority rules” (S1 Community). One practical venue for having student voice heard, students thought, was through the student council. Liby remembered a time when student voice made a difference:

We used to have a thing where Div 1 [younger classes] would go to the park first and Div 2 [older classes] would have the last recess. And the older kids didn’t think it was that fair, so when we started student council, they changed that. And most of the things that the kids thought were really unfair, they changed that to make it, like, a fair school where everybody can have fun. (S2 Community)

Students had learned that their voice made a difference. Although students felt they had a say in many school choices, they were still eager for more opportunities to be heard. Some students, such as Faith, also acknowledged that although students wanted more choice, “sometimes they don’t make good decisions” (S2 Community). A lesson articulated by some students was that

with choice comes responsibility. Soccer related an instance where this lesson was clear: “We made a decision that we can play on the far field ‘cause there’s lots of soccer fields. So they said, would you guys like to play there and open the field? But you have to respect each other, play with each other. And we made a decision that we will” (S1 Community). For these students, making choices was something desirable, but also laden with responsibility.

When asked what it meant to be a good community member, most students referred to cleanliness. Corcork explained that good community members “don’t write bad words on the school, don’t litter outside... when we’re playing soccer in the fields, if you have a snack, go throw it in the garbage” (S1 Community). These students often referred to events in which students and teachers walked around the school, cleaning up garbage. A few students, such as Liby, also felt that “being a good community member is, like, helping people in your community and doing things for the community” (S2 Community). Other students referred to events the school hosted to which the broader community was invited and charities that students in the school supported. Although a bit of an abstract concept, students did feel that their school was a community, drawing their understanding mostly from how they saw the school conducting itself in reference to the surrounding community.

Much less abstract was the idea of being a good friend. Students had much to say on the topic, though almost all of it centred on the idea of loyalty. Monkey felt that friends “always have your back, caring. And they always talk to you, play with you. Every time you fall, they always have your back. And sometimes they’re like more than your friend; they’re like your sister or your brother” (S1 Community). Most students had learned lessons of loyalty from their own experience. A few students found those lessons backed up by explicit teachings from the school: “Our school teaches us, like, never lie to your friends. And don’t be rude to them. Because if you

do, you won't have any at the end. And then you'll just be at the side, all lonely and stuff" (S1 Community, Kiwi).

Students seemed to have adopted many lessons from the school – how to solve problems, make choices, and be good community members and friends. The lessons were mostly implicit, though backed up by explicit teachings. Students discussed these lessons as works in progress. As Corcork said, in reference to some students still feeling excluded: "We've been working on it a lot and we've come very far with it." Students felt comfortable with the lessons they were learning and saw them as ongoing.

Theme 6: Overall positive assessment with room for improvement. Consistent with the examples provided of a supportive staff and a school ethos in which problems were unfailingly dealt with, students reported that, overall, their school experience was positive. And, consistent with the mixed assessment of relationships, the areas of improvement identified by students all focused on student-student relationships and student-adult relationships.

Most students appreciated the school and compared it favourably to other schools. Bobby exclaimed, "I love this school because it has nice teachers and it's cooler than all other schools" (S1 Communication). As in Scotland, in the individual co-researcher interviews, students were asked to offer an analysis of their school. They were asked to consider their observations and answer the question, "Of what you observed, what would you like less of?" Again, as in Scotland, without exception, every response centred on relationship issues, either between peers or between students and adults. Students responded that they would like less fighting, rude behaviour and gossiping. Shadow007 voiced his desires this way: "I would want, um, none of them to be nasty and stuff like that. Like, you know how normal people, they don't keep secrets and stuff like that. They just... like, life goes on. They don't have any secrets or things like that.

They don't do anything bad." In a similar vein, when asked the question, "Of what you observed, what would you like more of?" students also focused mainly on relationships. Within student-teacher relationships, students wished for better listening and more respect. Within peer relationships, students wanted to see more students getting along, helping one another and solving problems together. It is interesting to note that students identified all of these aspects as being present in their school; they simply wished they were more widespread. One different response came from a BLA co-researcher who wanted the BLA's early dismissal changed so that BLA students went "home when the normal kids do." This response also expresses a relational desire, to be seen by others as "normal."

Throughout the learning circles and co-researcher reports, students occasionally offered suggestions for how to move the classroom environment closer to their ideal. A few students suggested there be more rules or more discipline. Shadow007 liked the idea of electing a student president who "checks if there are any fights and he tries to think of a rule that stops that." Others like co-researcher Sophia felt teachers "could, like, encourage them a lot. And reward them for everything they accomplish." In line with Sophia's suggestion, a few participants felt that control for a better classroom environment rested in the teacher's hands: one student suggested teachers give more timeouts to calm the classroom environment; another thought teachers should entrust students with more choices so as to encourage better behaviour. Most students, however, felt that responsibility for the ideal classroom environment lie within the power of students. Faith recommended that students talk about what they want their classroom to be like and "set it as our goal before the end of the year." Liby agreed, stating:

We have to learn how to do the things that you're supposed to do more. Like, we have to learn how to respect each other more and more and we have to learn how to talk things

out more and more. And we have to learn how to do – basically, the rules of the school, like, kind words, show pride, ... we have to learn that.

Since the breakdown in the classroom environment was seen to be the responsibility of students, participants felt students needed to be the ones to improve it.

As a final question in the individual co-researcher interviews, students were asked to imagine a new student arriving the following day and to provide advice to that student. In answering this question, students considered what they had been observing over the three specific observation days combined with their general school experience. Although students took into consideration some of the negative aspects about student relationships, their final analysis painted a positive, realistic picture of the school. Cupcake succinctly summed it up: “It’s fun and we learn lots and sometimes there’s fighting.” Code7 was more verbose:

I’d say it’s actually a pretty nice school. People actually get along sometimes. And if anyone fights they would actually be solving it. So you wouldn’t have to worry about after school, what would happen to you if you got in a fight. And we eat lots of good stuff. And we get lots of community-like stuff so parents can come in for, like, events. Lots of amazing events.

Although students recognized the reality that human relationships are complex [or, as Faith put it: “Everyday is a different day ... you’ll either get along really nicely with people or you won’t get along with anyone”], the confidence they had in their own, their peers’ and the school’s ability to deal with issues as they arose, made for a positive overall assessment.

Conclusion

Viewed together, the educator and student themes reveal how RJ in the school was perceived by students, making evident discourses of transformation and affirmation.

Relationships and self-evaluation played central roles in educator and student comments. Adults spent significant time holding themselves to account for their un-restorative behaviour and posing suggestions for moving forward more restoratively. Students similarly had high standards for their peer relationships, assessing their interactions and behaviour to fall short of what they would expect from members of their school.

Students described a complex reality in which relationships – with adults and with peers – are continually navigated. In relating their general school experience, students pointed to RJ as an approach that transforms those relationships into associations of trust, in which people work together to deal with issues and learn from one another. Although there were instances in which that trust was broken, those instances were the exception. Transformation and social engagement was the rule in Alberta.

Findings from both Scotland and Alberta, as well as their contexts, will merge together in the discussion chapter.

Chapter Eight: Discussion

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze how RJ is understood and implemented and what objectives drive its use in schools. To frame this pursuit, I asked three related questions: How do students in Scotland and Canada perceive RJ in schools? What do students' perspectives reveal about the politics of RJ in Scottish and Canadian schools? How are discourses of transformation and discourses of affirmation evident in Scottish and Canadian school contexts?

I embarked on this study with a transformative understanding of RJ, consistent with many RJ advocates. According to this view, RJ holds the potential to “address injustice and to improve the lives of the many” (Woolford, 2009, p. 17), transforming schools to places “characterized by possibility, relationship, hope and justice” (Vaandering, 2009, p. 39). My understanding was tempered, however, by observations – anecdotally and in my Master's thesis – that RJ was, in practice, often used in an affirmative manner by schools who were more interested in student compliance than in student or structural transformation. To test this, I sought to hear directly from students, who are ostensibly both the subjects and objects of RJ, to learn about their experience of RJ. Were they experiencing RJ as an instrument of transformation or as an instrument of affirmation?

In order to gather rich data, I focused on students in two different contexts, Alberta and Scotland. Presenting the data from these different countries side by side provides a more in-depth understanding of the students' experience than would only a single case study of RJ. The first two sections of this chapter – the first on Scotland, the second on Alberta – provide a critical analysis of what was learned in each context. To add depth to the themes developed in the findings section, I bring them together with their social, cultural and institutional contexts. For

this, I employed what Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) describe as a “top down and a bottom up process” (p. 155). Top down was my conceptual framework based on theory; bottom up was my analysis of themes and the context as derived from my data.

My analysis of the data engaged Woolford’s (2009) conceptual framework of the politics of RJ. Woolford sees RJ used either as an *object* of politics, employed by political actors to maintain the status quo, or as a *project* of politics, a movement working for social and political change. This distinction between political object and project parallels that of *affirmative* and *transformative* RJ. The former reinforces status quo dynamics while the latter disrupts them. In the analysis of the two case studies, I focus on the discourses of affirmation and transformation apparent in the data.

Following these two summaries, I identify general lessons that become apparent when the case studies are held side by side. In analyzing the data on the transformative-affirmative RJ continuum, it became clear there was another dynamic underlying and defining the continuum that should be added to and brought to bear on this analysis: the concepts of social engagement and social control and how these pertain to actual school relationships.

Scottish Summary: The Reality of Both/And

The Scottish pupil experience, as relayed by my participants, was layered and complex. It was a reality of “both/and”, as pupils encountered discourses of both transformation and affirmation: an educational system that was both cohesive and disjointed; staff that were both reflective and shortsighted; and relationships that were both empowering and controlling.

On the transformative side, Scottish culture as a whole prioritized critical reflection. This tendency toward reflection was evident in national, regional and school contexts. As suggested in the brief historical overview of Scotland, the Scottish enlightenment encouraged its citizens to

“see the world as it really is” (Herman, 2001, p. 428), a possible precursor to the critical reflection seen today. Critical reflection, however, was undertaken not for its own sake, as a good in itself, but to engage and mobilize the values – wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity – which the Scots see as representative of themselves. These values are engraved on the Scottish Mace in the devolved Scottish Parliament. As the 2014 independence vote approached, Scots seemed to be aspiring to live out these Mace values and the legacy of their enlightenment with renewed energy.

In the education system, there was, as the data from Anthony Finn suggests, systemic cohesion: educational leaders, policy makers and educators found common ground in focusing on professional educator autonomy and student-centred teaching, two themes embodied in the Curriculum for Excellence. Within this systemic cohesion, RJ was implemented in a thoughtful, deliberate manner, introduced through a uniquely Scottish pilot project that considered regional contexts and focused on the complexities of schooling, not formulaic techniques. Although the initial impetus of RJ nationally and regionally was to improve exclusion rates, there was a more recent, intentional move beyond this metric to focus on the quality of school relationships and establishing a restorative ethos. Nationally and regionally, there was much evidence of discourses of transformation.

Within the school, itself, pupils were experiencing a transformed environment in which violence had been radically diminished since the arrival of the current Headteacher. Staff were empowered to deal with issues themselves and the senior management team was actively involved in students’ lives. Most pupils trusted at least one adult in the school – particularly those adults in Pupil Support. They had faith that adults would help them sort issues in their lives, from conflicts with other pupils to life-altering issues such as pregnancies. Staff often dealt with

students' interpersonal issues through restorative conversations; such impromptu conversations were visible throughout the school. Overall, pupils loved their school, equating the relationships of trust there to those of a family; pupils embraced the school in all its complexity. The Scottish school appeared, from the broader policy context and the elements of its everyday implementation and practice, to be a model of a transformative vision of RJ.

In the spirit of "both/and", however, the Scottish reality of the school's national, regional and community context brought with it cultural residue, the historic precedent of a long Calvinist tradition anchored in a moral system where redemption is achieved through punishment. I do not wish to simplistically suggest that modern Scotland (nor Alberta) is directly defined by its history; yet I do believe that historical contexts often reverberate in current ones. As an example of the reverberations of the Calvinist history, only recently had the Scottish educational system discontinued corporal punishment (embodied in the use of the strap), which had been supplanted by a reliance on punishment exercises and other punitive practices.

The national, regional and school RJ documents reflect contradictory impulses along the transformative-affirmative continuum. For example, Education Scotland website's page on RJ emphasized positive relationships, created within a supportive and fair ethos, concepts that tend toward the transformative end of the continuum; yet the videos featured on this website depict RJ affirmatively, as "one of the latest behaviour management tools available to teachers." RJ was frequently framed as part of a broader menu of behaviour management options, backed up with the threat of punishment. For example, in the school's staff handbook, the section following an explanation of RJ suggests the deployment of formal sanctions when RJ does not improve behaviour. As several adult participants observed, the religious tradition of relying on punishment

to alter behaviour continues to reverberate in Scotland; and the reverberations affected how RJ was understood and implemented among the school administrators, teachers and pupils.

Within the school, educators hoped that RJ would help improve pupil behaviour and would teach skills the adults thought absent from the pupils' home environments. The educators, while caring about pupils, saw themselves as separate from the pupils and their social context, and saw RJ as primarily impacting pupil – not staff – behaviour. This perspective was evident in the description of RJ as being natural for adults (“just the way we are” [Ed1, SE4]) and alien to pupils (“They’re obviously not learning [restorative skills] from their home” [Ed2, SE5]). RJ was commonly used as a classroom management tool where staff remained the ultimate authority. Pupils, although feeling that they were listened to, were uncertain how much their opinions mattered. They, in contrast to what adults said, felt that staff were quick to shout and blame pupils unfairly. While pupils empathized with the adults in these stressful situations, they did not believe that this empathy was always reciprocated. For example, pupils felt that teachers did not often give chronically disruptive pupils second chances. Pupils longed for more empathetic and trusting relationships with adults.

I witnessed a system pursuing a transformative agenda, embodied by a range of initiatives including RJ, and supported by people in leadership positions nationally, regionally and within the school. Yet national agendas do not necessarily reflect what happens on the ground. Within the staff learning circles I encountered a continuum of beliefs as staff members grappled openly with how restorative and inclusive an effective school could be. By the time RJ reached the pupils, pupils experienced a mixture of transformative, mutually respectful relationships alongside authoritarian, punitive ones depending on the particular individuals involved and the particular context. The transformative agenda found roots in the Scottish values of the Mace and

in their critical and systematic approach to schooling; it also found inhospitable ground in the traditional religious focus on punishment and authority. Pupils were experiencing the reality of both transformative and affirmative RJ.

Alberta Summary: The Right to Choose

The Alberta student experience was as layered and complex as in Scotland. The layers and complexity, however, took on a different, uniquely Albertan, dimension. As in Scotland, the experience was not monolithic.

In contrast to the Scottish education system's discourse of systemic cohesion, Alberta was characterized by systemic fragmentation. Albertan educational discourses eschewed talk of vision and instead focused on damage control in the midst of impending budget cuts. There was no provincial or even regional plan to implement RJ in a cohesive fashion; the few documents that did mention RJ mostly framed it in criminal justice language, rather than in education terms.

Lack of systemic cohesion, however, is traditionally seen in Alberta as more asset than hindrance. Albertans have a long history as a maverick people who embrace contradictions and break rules. Albertans prioritize individual rights – especially the right to choose – in such areas as education. Consistent with this approach, Alberta's schools were free to choose how to best ensure their schools met safe and caring standards, as laid out in the provincial Accountability Pillar. The school I studied chose – independent of any provincial or regional encouragement – to focus on RJ and Rights Respecting Schools (RRS). They framed the two approaches as a combined effort to: ensure students felt safe and cared for; build relationships; and give students voice. While students experienced RJ in a school not connected to a systemic framework, it was carefully thought through at an individual school level.

Within the school itself, there were many social and pedagogic challenges. Students were at different developmental stages, there was poor staff communication, the Behaviour Learning Assistance (BLA) program was demanding, and many students came from cultures seen as non-supportive of restorative values. Students provided examples of exclusion, bullying, racism and sexism; all circumstances not easily dealt with through circle processes. Many educators responded to the challenges in the school by exercising control on the leading of circles and, when deemed necessary, by the imposition of consequences (or punishments) as the outcome of circles. This school, with its challenges and without systemic support, seemed positioned to allow affirmative discourses to thrive.

Yet, despite an environment ripe for affirmative RJ, signs of transformative RJ were everywhere: educators openly confronted their own attitudes and behaviour, holding each other to account in the same way they held their students to account; circles were used proactively to build community; and educators hoped that RJ would empower students and give them voice in both the short- and long-term. Behavioural change, in this school, was not the primary focus. Students completely trusted that the adults would work with them, listen to them and support them. Importantly, students felt decisions adults made – including the rules they enforced and how they enforced them – were not arbitrary, but made sense.

The school leadership and staff, embracing their right to make independent choices, created their own interpretation of RJ to implement in the school. The personal commitment that staff members had to RJ and RRS resulted in relatively consistent school-wide restorative practices in which students identified transformative experiences. Although systemic support for transformative RJ was lacking – and it is difficult to know how students fared after leaving this school – the experience of students while in this particular school was predominantly

transformative. The personal commitment of staff members ensured that the implementation of RJ was transformative. Since the commitment originated in individuals directly interacting with students, transformative RJ was much less diluted by the time it reached the students.

Holding the Studies Side by Side

As profiled in the above summaries of the Scottish and Alberta schools, student experience in each school is complex. When held side by side, the complexity is multiplied. There are no simple explanations as to why and how discourses of affirmation emerged as dominant over transformation or vice versa.

In Scotland, the school in this study would appear, with its systemic cohesion and tradition of critical reflection, poised to embrace transformative RJ; the Alberta school, within a context of systemic fragmentation and focus on the individual, would appear to be disposed toward affirmative RJ. Despite contexts suggesting opposite outcomes, the school-level experience in Scotland leaned toward the affirmative and in Alberta toward the transformative. Scotland, with its radical reimagining of the curriculum and schooling in general, appears well poised for possible long-term transformation, but has, at least in the example of the school studied, not definitively achieved this at the student and classroom level. The practices in Alberta predicated on personal connections and a focus on relationships result in a more transformative application of RJ in the classroom, despite a level of systemic disorganization that would suggest otherwise.

Could it all come down to relationships? Returning to the research questions, what do student perspectives actually reveal about the politics of RJ? As I attempted to make sense of this question, my own thinking evolved. The remainder of the chapter documents this evolution.

I began this research project with a transformative understanding of RJ and its role in education. With some limitations identified in my earlier Master's research, I believed in RJ as an ideal that would naturally disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions, power dynamics, and structural injustices in school. I wanted to learn from students to what extent the practice and application of RJ embodied these transformative dynamics and/or might actually deviate from this ideal to be affirmative. I intended to examine student experiences along an affirmative-transformative continuum. As I conducted my research, I realized the focus on RJ, even when expanded on the continuum, was too narrow for the complex realities that students and educators were experiencing.

Most directly and definitively, it quickly became obvious that students in both settings were completely unaware of the term *restorative*. That did not mean that they had not experienced or been impacted by RJ as practiced or formulated by school staff; they were simply unaware of restorative terminology and did not interpret their school's values and practices as being part of a restorative framework. It was impossible, therefore, to ask students direct questions about their perceptions of RJ using the terminology of RJ.

Being unable to ask students explicitly about their experiences with RJ required casting a wider and deeper net that reached beyond RJ as a phrase or definition. This step took the research beyond RJ and a narrow analysis along the transformative-affirmative continuum, directly into the schooling experiences of students. The evidence, as provided by the student co-researchers, suggests that their schooling experience is mediated and defined almost entirely through and within relationships. Relationships are central, notwithstanding any other educational agenda, RJ or otherwise. The students shifted my analysis as it became clear that filtering the student

experience through any agenda, including RJ, narrowed and limited the analysis of how students experience their schooling.

For the students, it is all about relationships. In both Scotland and Alberta, the student experience of school was best characterized as a constant navigation of relationships: with peers, teachers, and other adults. There was very little that mattered to students outside of relationships; everything else was framed as either an afterthought or byproduct. The learning circles, the co-researcher notebooks and the co-researcher interviews all revolved around how staff members interacted with students and with other staff members, and the various relationship dynamics on display between students in classrooms, in the hallways, on the playground and outside of school.

For pupils in Scotland, relationships fell firmly into the “both/and” category. Although the school was “like one big family” (P1 Communication, Sheldon), pupils felt mostly unable to sort out issues with their peers without force and only 32 per cent of the pupils felt that they respected one another. In contrast, 87 per cent felt respected by adults and all participants could name one adult that he/she trusted and would approach if necessary. Yet, the actions of some adults in reference to behaviour issues or conflicts baffled them.

Students in Alberta, although naming such relational issues as racism, sexism, bullying and fighting in their school as prevalent, had almost universal confidence in the ability of their peers – with adult help – to sort out issues in a satisfactory manner. As Code7 said, “People actually get along sometimes. And if anyone fights they would actually be solving it. So you wouldn’t have to worry about after school, what would happen to you if you got in a fight.” Notably different from the Scottish experience, students in Alberta thought that what adults did – whether in enforcing rules or supporting their needs – made sense. Students had what

Antonovsky (1987) defined as a *sense of coherence*, in which they saw school life and the relationships in it as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful.

In answering the questions at the end of each co-researcher interview, students from both countries offered an analysis of what they had been observing over the three days combined with their general student experience in the school. Their final analysis of the schools almost always focused on relationships: “It gives you a lot of great opportunities to do stuff in life, they do lots of good shows and people are very talented. But I would say watch out for the bullies and people who are just annoying because they’ll let you down” (Nathalia, Scotland); “It’s a good school, you don’t have to be afraid that you’re going to get hurt or anything. And when we get a new student, our teacher always tells us, who wants to, somebody play with him at recess, make him feel comfortable with the school and the students. And if it was a boy, he, like, usually becomes friends with me and my friends and we, like, go play soccer and stuff” (Bob, Alberta). School – indeed life – was nothing but a series of relationships for these students.

At its core, Hendry (2009) says, RJ in schools is about building, maintaining and repairing relationships. Although students were almost completely unaware of RJ as a term, students were acutely aware of the very relationships that RJ seeks to build, maintain and repair. RJ in its ideal is attentive to *right relationships* that enable human flourishing (Llewellyn, 2011). Students confirmed the significant position that relationships held in their lives; they provided mixed reports on whether the majority of relationships in their schools represented *right* relationships – those that allowed for social transformation, engagement and coherence – or hindered human flourishing – those that confused or sought to control and manage students.

For the staff, it is about more than just relationships. In both Alberta and Scotland, relationships were in some ways officially prioritized. In Scotland, in 2012, the region within which the school was located changed the “Behaviour and Discipline Strategy” to the “Strategy for Relationships and Behaviour”; in Alberta, the new conduct policy at the school had been renamed “restorative relationships”. Whether proactively building or repairing them, within both schools, relationships were stated as key to RJ specifically and education in general.

In Alberta, several members of the staff raised the idea that relationships must be created in order for circles to be successful. As AE6 stated, “It’s really hard to problem solve when [students] don’t know who you are” (Ed2). Trust was closely tied to relationships. There was the feeling that RJ would be ineffectual if relationships did not already exist. Staff discussed this criterion as important for adults as well: adults could not engage with one another restoratively if relationships of trust and support were not first present. Although important, educators also raised the notion that relationships were not sufficient, particularly when students were involved. There was a sense that students would not understand the impact of their actions – either for the specific incident in question or to deter future misbehaviour – if there were no externally imposed consequences or punishments.

In Scotland, relationships came up repeatedly when discussing education in general. Members of the senior management team listed relationships in the school as a key priority. Positive relationships in the school were seen as crucial to helping pupils learn how to be active members of the broader community. Mutual respect and mutual trust were identified as important byproducts of the relationships – especially those that RJ helped to build. Yet there were a few disconnects to this relationship focus. Staff saw themselves and their culture as separate from that of pupils, caring for them though not necessarily identifying with them. Although most staff

stated that they neither shouted nor gave punishment exercises, the majority of pupils countered this by reporting both shouting and punishment exercises as common responses to misbehaviour. Additionally, some staff did not recognize that other actions could also be construed as punishment, such as: sending pupils out of the room, using blaming language, or giving consequences.

Relationships were a stated priority for staff in both schools, yet, contrary to the students' all-encompassing focus, they were not the only – and often not the first – priority. Although many staff in the schools viewed relationships as important, they also valued – and/or were told to value – such things as order, academics, authority, tradition, discipline, safety, curricula, and consequences. As such, the schools in Scotland and Alberta were cluttered with other agendas and discourses. Hoy and Weinstein (2006) point out that while students place primacy on relationships with teachers, teachers commonly focus more on student behaviour, seeking respect, cooperation and compliance. Relationships are only one consideration – and sometimes a bothersome and time-consuming one – layered into many somewhat contradictory values and agendas. Much of what happens in schools exists in what Bingham and Sidorkin (2004) call a “fog of forgetfulness” which, they write, clouds the simple idea that education is primarily about human beings meeting one another to learn. Relationships are such a constant that they often remain unexamined in schools.

For the researcher, it is about letting go of restorative. After casting my research net wide and paying close attention to my data, I then attempted to force all that I learned back into the box labeled *restorative*. It did not fit. I started this research journey generally convinced that RJ was the panacea that would transform conflict, people, schools and societal conditions. Yet, students kept repeating a much simpler and more obvious message: it is all about relationships.

Since RJ attends to relationships, some of what they revealed to me can indeed be parsed and sorted as restorative. But the lines are not at all distinct between what can be called restorative and any or all of what can be called RRS, School of Football, circle time, Pupil Support, teachers who care, a headteacher that walks the corridors, reflective staff, pals that have your back, and any other of the less defined layers of student experience. RJ is enmeshed with all the other approaches and the inherent dynamics of schools. RJ, I learned, both reflects and affects – as do the other approaches – the real core of the school: relationships. Relationships are both the noun (the what) and the verb (the how) of schools.

This message might seem too obvious. Or, conversely, not obvious at all because it was so central to and implicit within all aspects of schooling. Teachers and administrators, faced with many competing agendas, each with their own imperatives, tend to lose focus on relationships, even when and if those agendas would be more successfully served by prioritizing relationships. This is not the case for students. They care about the centrality and quality of relationships. Period. Broad frameworks that shape school practices are mediated through relationships. When frameworks – whether RJ or otherwise – are grounded in public and private relationships, embodying “what is necessary to live collectively and as our ‘best selves’” (Elliot, 2011, p. 5), they are more likely to be coherent, relevant and potentially transformative to students. When frameworks prioritize one of the myriad of other agendas within schools, they may be narrowly effective by their own isolated matrix, but matter little to students and, more than likely, be of little long-term consequence. If educators wish to be relevant to students, then it is the relationships to which they must attend.

The Real Politics: Social Control or Social Engagement

In *No Education without Relation*, the Manifesto of Relational Pedagogy states, “Human relationality is not an ethical value. Domination is as relational as love” (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004, p. 7). Once the centrality of relationships is established, the question then becomes what sorts of relationships exist and what is the effect and affect of being in relationship. Relationships – personal and public – have the power to both foster and hinder human flourishing (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming). Understanding the quality and effect of relationships necessitates a return to the concepts of social control and social engagement.

In the literature review chapter, I moved beyond the affirmative-transformative continuum to suggest a need to identify the purposes underpinning such understandings of RJ – a desire for social control versus a desire for social engagement. To reiterate, Morrison and Vaandering (2012), drawing on Elliott (2011), Morrison (2011) and Zehr (2005), write that institutions that embrace RJ experience a paradigm change characterized “as a shift away from being a rule-based institution to a relationship-based institution, or from being an institution whose purpose is social control to being an institution that nurtures social engagement” (p. 145). They argue, in effect, that RJ is, by definition, what I call transformative. In the literature review chapter, I argued that different purposes – social control or social engagement – apply to RJ also, that it can be affirmative or transformative.

Although my data do indeed reveal the presence of both affirmative and transformative RJ, the focus is too narrow to be meaningful. Students experience social control and social engagement not only in RJ; regardless of the framework or approach used, students experience ideologies – restorative or otherwise – within relationship. Relationships are the baseline by which to understand the extent of transformation and affirmation.

It must be stated that relationships as the milieu in which we as humans understand ourselves is both an ancient and continually evolving idea. Llewellyn and Llewellyn (forthcoming) place RJ within relational theory which draws on such thinkers as Buber, Bakhtin, Dewey, Gadamer, Heidegger, Noddings, Gilligan, and Freire, among others (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Llewellyn, 2011b; Llewellyn & Llewellyn, forthcoming). Other theories make similar claims about the centrality and primacy of relationships: attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby, 1969); self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012); socioecological models (Berkes & Folke, 1998; Bookchin, 2007); and, in education, school climate research (Anderson, 1982; Cohen, 2006; Smith, 2008). My study confirms the significance of relationships in schools, exploring the quality of those relationships.

In my study, I build on Morrison and Vaandering's (2012) conceptualization of schools as institutions of social control and social engagement, but branch from their thinking in a number of ways. One, my research shows that a school that embraces RJ does not necessarily become an institution of social engagement; schools can continue to operate as agencies of social control while embracing RJ. In fact, RJ can become a tool of social control. Two, I disagree that schools that focus on social control are rule-based and those that focus on social engagement are relationship-based. As the students in my study reveal, schools simply are relational spheres and everything that happens in schools unfolds in this relational context. The difference is whether those school relationships are about control or engagement.

Despite these differences, I concur with Morrison and Vaandering (2012) that schools based on social engagement are better situated to support individual and communal well-being and development than those based on social control. This echoes Llewellyn and Llewellyn's

(forthcoming) assertion that relationships have the power to foster human flourishing (those based on social engagement) and hinder human flourishing (those based on social control).

Thus the real politics of RJ are not about whether schools use RJ as an object or project of politics, or whether RJ is affirmative or transformative. The real politics are about relationships. Are relationships in schools about social control? Or are they about social engagement? And what can be mobilized to ensure that relationships lean more toward social engagement in schools than control?

School relationships as social control. In the literature review chapter, I identified four components of social control: *compliance, rules, behaviour and punishment* and a focus on the *individual*. In the schools studied, all these components were on display. To explore this insight further, I draw upon examples from all aspects of student life in the schools studied, not strictly those identified as restorative.

Compliance. As McCluskey (2013) writes, it is hardly surprising that, in the face of external and internal pressure to achieve, “school leaders and teachers may come to see compliant students as good students, a quiet class as a good class, and a good school as one where there is no conflict” (p. 135). In Scotland, many of the Scottish educators referred to their belief that RJ was a helpful instrument to maintain order in the classroom. I found that this belief was reinforced by national, regional and school documents that wrestled with the tension between a focus on student needs versus school order. In Alberta, components of social control were also present. Here the focus on order and compliance had to do with bringing the values of students from other countries in line with *Canadian values*. Educators, sometimes paternalistically, saw the values that students brought to the school as being antithetical to being Canadian. Thus,

although music, food and clothes from students' cultures were celebrated, students were socialized to comply with homogeneous values.

Rules. Rules are often the vehicle to enforce social order. The Scottish school had a code of conduct focused entirely on maintaining school order. Pupils were expected to, among other items: follow the school rules; follow the teacher's instructions in class; and follow the school Dress Code (Document A, 6, n.d.). Raby (2012) categorizes school rules as falling into these three domains: moral rules that refer to actions innately seen as wrong without the presence of a rule; conventional rules that are contextual and supported through consensus or authority; and personal rules that cover individual choice within cultural parameters. In the Scottish code of conduct, the rules fell into both the conventional and personal domains, the two areas most contested by students. In Alberta, rules were framed as wellbeing rules, identified by pupils as being predominantly about safety and "getting along." These rules were moral rules; they were perceived as common sense to students and thus were not contested. They did, however, fall into the realm of social control in that they expressed expectations primarily for student, not adult, behaviour.

Behaviour and punishment. Educators were called upon to enforce rules. Usually, enforcing rules meant that educators focused on student behaviour and often attempted to improve behaviour through punishment. In Scotland, pupils recounted a variety of ways that educators attempted to change their behaviour – commonly through shouting and punishment exercises. In Alberta, too, although educators were more apt to use the term *consequences*, most educators did not feel that students would change their behaviour if some form of punishment/consequence did not exist. As Kohn (1996) and Raby (2012) point out, however,

students rarely distinguish between the concepts of *punishment* and *consequence*. Regardless of the term used, students either choose to behave or choose to suffer an externally imposed penalty.

Individual. The final component of social control is a neoliberal focus on the individual as rational and independent. Raby (2012) notes that *repeat offenders* – often marginalized students – are defined as defiant and frequently seen as responsible for their own failure to comply with rules, while structural inequalities that lead to such students being labeled defiant are ignored. In Scotland, there was a core group of pupils described as disruptive. Likewise, in Alberta, BLA students were seen as separate and dangerous. Although Pupil Support in Scotland, BLA teachers in Alberta and other individuals in both locales worked actively to address the reasons why these students were defiant, many educators, according to students, blamed the individuals for their behaviour, disregarding larger forces at work.

School relationships as social engagement. In the literature review chapter, I identified four components of social engagement: *relationships*, *mutuality*, a *broad focus* and attention to *power relations*. Again, in both schools studied, all of these components were displayed. Since the first component, relationships, is at the centre of this discussion, I focus on the remaining three components, which explore the character and conditions of such relationships.

Mutuality. In schools, equality of relationships is experienced when adults view students as humans to be engaged with rather than as objects to be controlled (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). This shift in thinking is characterized by mutual decision-making and sense-making. In Alberta, mutuality was evident as adults grappled with their own behaviour and attitudes and as students genuinely felt consulted in the decisions adults made. In Scotland, although pupils

expressed the sense that they were consulted, they were less sure if their opinions mattered in the final outcome.

A broad focus. A focus on equality of relationships means that schools engage with students in all realms of school life – policy decisions, pedagogy, curriculum, and to deal with incidents of harm and rule breaking. In Alberta, circles were used to build a sense of community, to deal with incidents that occurred on the playground, to make collective decisions, and to engage with lesson content, to name a few. In Scotland, the senior management team was seen to value pupil voice and to be actively involved in their lives. In their daily walks around the corridor, for example, they engaged with pupils on a range of issues from academics to family life to athletic achievements to behavioural issues. In both schools, at least some of the time, students were engaged in a holistic sense, not only as students but as whole human beings.

Questions of power. Genuine engagement between students and teachers, based on equality of relationships, opens up questions about the organization of schools (Raby, 2012). Raby (2012) concludes that school staff need to be genuinely receptive to potential, possibly radical, changes resulting from student participation. Among all the components of social engagement, this is the most difficult component to both enact and identify. I observed that both schools were open to change in power dynamics to an extent, and the difference between the two ways in which this engagement was enacted mirror the bigger differences between the two sites. In Scotland, radical changes were happening at the national educational level with the new curriculum and other initiatives that invited a focus on student-centred learning. These changes emerged out of a national conversation which raised questions similar to those referred to by Raby (2012), fundamental questions about the organization of schools. In a similar vein, in Alberta, individual teachers raised questions about power relations on an individual level: one

BLA teacher used circles to discuss what the co-researchers were noting and make their observations explicit; educators used learning circles to attend to their own lack of restorative behaviour rather than that of their students; and educators initiated the staff circle that I ran on the last day to bring to light issues with how adults treated one another.

It is clear from my research that students were experiencing relationships of control and relationships of engagement in both schools. In line with Morrison & Vaandering's (2012) perspective on school ecologies, adults viewed students as humans to be engaged as well as objects to be controlled. Mirroring experiences of affirmative and transformative RJ, the Scottish students tended to experience more relationships of control than the Albertan students who tended to experience more relationships of engagement.

Conclusion: RJ as Window

Schools are constituted by relationships. Yet relationships are, to borrow from Marshall McLuhan's idea about culture, "as imperceptible to us as water is to fish" (McLuhan & Parker, 1969, p. 5). We simply exist in relationship. Relationships, however, as has been pointed out, are not innately good. They can both empower and dominate. They can be about both social control and social engagement.

RJ is a window into the character of school relationships since it reflects those relationships. RJ can be affirmative and used for the purpose of social control; RJ can also be transformative and used for the purpose of social engagement. Understanding RJ in schools, however, is only meaningful if viewed as a window into the actual core of the school: relationships. RJ is used in the service of predominant relational objectives in the school. A school in which relationships are ones of social control – based on compliance, rules, behaviour, punishment and seeing students as isolated individuals – will utilize RJ to strengthen that control.

A school in which relationships are ones of social engagement – based on relationships of equality and mutuality, with a broad focus that encourages the realignment of power – will utilize RJ to strengthen that engagement.

Scotland, with aspirations of systemic coherence and student-centred learning, is still marked by a historic authoritarian, punishment-based approach. Although the school was rife with individual examples of transformation and indeed the school itself had transformed itself from one of violence to an “oasis of calm”, many adults still saw themselves as separate from students, needing to control and manage them. Social engagement was interwoven with social control.

Although Alberta did not have the benefit of systemic cohesion, most individuals in the school were personally committed to engaging with students in relationships of mutuality. Many educators acknowledged their own relational weaknesses and, in so doing, allowed for identification with students. Student voice was both sought and leveraged. Social control did surface, though it was often tempered by social engagement.

The power in viewing RJ as a window into the character of school relationships is that it helps make relationships visible. It makes perceptible, going back to McLuhan, the water in which the students are swimming. It can be used to ask questions about those relationships and, if the intention exists, potentially assist in fostering a different relational context.

My study reveals that both transformative and affirmative versions of RJ exist in differing amounts in both Scotland and Alberta; which, in turn, moves the consequential and meaningful analysis to the quality and character of the relationships in these schools. Relationships in the two schools are used to both control and engage students. As evidenced in the study, when educators choose to control students through any method, schooling becomes fragmented, confusing and

inconsequential. When educators choose to consistently and genuinely engage students, school becomes relevant, transformational, coherent and empowering.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

I began this study by suggesting that RJ was a concept whose time may have finally arrived (Hopkins, 2004; McCluskey, 2011). Attending to the increasing interest in RJ, I, along with other RJ advocates (including: Bargen, 2011; Elliott, 2011; Lockhart & Zammit, 2005; McCluskey et al., 2008a; Sullivan & Tifft, 2001; Vaandering, 2009; Woolford, 2009; Zehr & Toews, 2004) wondered whether the understanding of RJ being applied in mainstream society – including schools – was as transformative as we understood it to be. If RJ's time had, indeed, arrived, was RJ disrupting mainstream structures and systems, that is, being transformative; or, conversely, was RJ propagating the status quo, that is, being affirmative?

To better understand RJ's current role in the school system – whether that of a transformative disruptive force or of an affirmative supporting player – I conducted a multi-site case study of one Scottish and one Canadian school. Since RJ in schools is intended to primarily affect students, I decided to focus my attention on their experience. My research was guided by three central questions: How do students in Scotland and Canada perceive RJ in schools? What do students' perspectives reveal about the politics of RJ in Scottish and Canadian schools? How are discourses of transformation and discourses of affirmation evident in Scottish and Canadian school contexts? To attend to the research questions, I engaged students as my co-researchers, asking them to take note of their schools and their experience, and report on whatever they deemed significant. Their answers were both simpler and more complicated than what I had anticipated.

Summary of Study

Building on an understanding of RJ as a diverse, multi-layered and contested concept (Aertsen et al., 2013; Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007; Woolford, 2009), my study was generally

aligned with RJ scholar, Woolford (2009), who built upon Fraser's (1997, 2000) theory of justice to suggest that all responses to injustice can be understood as either affirmative or transformative. I expanded on this theory with my own interpretation of a continuum, with affirmative RJ on one side and transformative RJ on the other. A transformative understanding of RJ views RJ as a way of life or a worldview, a radical paradigm shift with the potential to challenge societal injustices and power imbalances (Hendry, 2009; Llewellyn, 2011a; Lyons, 2011; Sullivan & Tifft, 2001; Vaandering, 2009; Zehr, 1990). An affirmative understanding of RJ focuses on addressing isolated incidents of harm and on challenging individual behaviour, an approach that improves upon – rather than dismantles – existing systems (Daly, 2000; Duff, 2003; London, 2011; MacAllister, 2013; Tonry, 2011; Wheeldon, 2009).

My research suggests that the affirmative-transformative RJ continuum represented more of a starting point than an ending point for understanding the application of RJ within schools. The continuum in isolation did not clearly parse the context, goals and purposes of the application of RJ in the schools studied. I needed further tools to delve deeper and examine the underlying purposes. For this I turned to Morrison and Vaandering (2012) who, building on Elliott (2011), Morrison (2011) and Zehr (2005), write that institutions embracing RJ experience a paradigm shift from being rule-based institutions whose purpose is social control to relationship-based institutions that nurture social engagement. I argue institutions that embrace RJ do not necessarily nurture social engagement, but that these different purposes – social control and social engagement – underpin affirmative RJ and transformative RJ, respectively.

Attending directly to the research questions, how do students in Scotland and Canada perceive RJ in schools? They experience RJ in both affirmative and transformative ways, with contextual differences resulting in the Scottish experience leaning more toward affirmation and

the Canadian experience learning more toward transformation. They revealed how context shapes schooling experiences and thus experiences of RJ. What do students' perspectives reveal about the politics of RJ in Scottish and Canadian schools? Students reveal that it is not RJ, but relationships to which we must attend if we are to understand how schooling is both about engagement and control. How are discourses of transformation and discourses of affirmation evident in Scottish and Canadian school contexts? They are evident in the national, regional and school contexts and, ultimately, in the character of school relationships.

RJ can be a window into the character of these school relationships. A school in which relationships tend toward social control – based on compliance, rules, behaviour, punishment and seeing students as isolated individuals – will utilize RJ to strengthen that control. A school in which relationships tend toward social engagement – based on relationships of equality and mutuality, with a broad focus that encourages the realignment of power – will utilize RJ to strengthen that engagement. Perhaps this is sufficient: for schools to recognize and name the relational objectives that exist within their body. I would assert, however, that schools genuinely interested in supporting *human flourishing* (Llewellyn and Llewellyn, forthcoming) would then seek to move beyond mere recognition of the character of school relationships to intentionally work toward relationships of social engagement, using RJ and/or other approaches as a framework to foster such a relational context.

RJ provides the ways and means to analyze the nature or quality of the relationships in a school environment. While RJ can be utilized to be transformative, RJ is neither necessary nor sufficient to achieve such an outcome. Such an outcome is instead dependent upon the quality of the relationships, qualities that foster engagement versus those of control.

The Lens and the Window

Howard Zehr's (1990) book *Changing Lenses* is often credited as being one of the first articulations of a comprehensive RJ theory (Gavrieldes, 2007; Vaandering, 2011; Van Ness & Strong, 2010). In it, Zehr suggests that a new lens is needed for viewing crime and justice; he advocates for a shift from a retributive lens to a restorative lens. Through the restorative lens, crime is viewed as a violation of people, relationships, and community, rather than as an individual offence against the state.

RJ, in its original articulation, was a lens through which one focused on the nature of relationships and, in so doing, reframed our perception of crime and justice issues. The metaphor was – and is – powerful. *Changing Lenses* is a radical paradigm shift; seeing crime and justice issues as rooted in relationships and community entirely changes the focus from individual retribution and punishment to restoring communal equanimity where, in the instance of crime, the victims, perpetrators and community identify needs and find collective solutions.

Put in context beside this original, fundamental conception of RJ, I, and, I believe, many others in the RJ field, are guilty of conceptual conflation. RJ has drifted from being a lens into the quality and character of relationships, where the object is the analysis of understanding and working with relationships, to becoming an object of its own, where it has become something we look *at* rather than *through*, where we assume it will foster quality relationships, where we have conflated the mechanisms of practicing RJ with the desired outcomes. It has become a practice, a technique, a method; a concrete object. In my study, I discovered that looking *at* RJ produced a limited view and did not allow for the complexity of the school experience. It was only when I took a step back and looked *through* RJ at the schools that the centrality, quality and character of relationships came into focus.

My study, seen in this light, is a return to RJ as it was originally intended: something to look through. I describe RJ as a *window* in this study. In part, I shy away from using *lens* in deference to Zehr's original and groundbreaking use; in part, I believe that *window* more accurately describes the current state of RJ. Twenty-five years after first proposing a *restorative lens*, RJ has grown and morphed through theorizing, practice and application. RJ, however, as it is understood and practiced, has expanded into many other relationship-based fields, including education. RJ is understood much more broadly and has a much greater reach than in its early days. The use of the continuum – from affirmative to transformative – is witness to this expansion. An RJ lens focuses attention within set parameters; an RJ window allows much broader panorama.

Parsing that which has been conceptually and in practice conflated, RJ, as a window, becomes a powerful way to identify or isolate what might otherwise remain implicit and unexamined. By itself, RJ does not guarantee certain qualities of relationship, but it does allow us to examine those qualities. It bounds and brings rigor to understanding relationships. If I were to have set out to directly study relationships in schools – the water, as I have described, in which members of the school community swim – it would have been too amorphous and all encompassing to grasp. RJ provided focused space to attend to relationships. RJ in my study is a window through which to view the quality and character of relationships.

Contributions and Implications

Listening to the students in my study, in both Scotland and Alberta, brought me back to first principles. School, for students, is constituted of relationships and equated with relationships. They intimately understand Bingham and Sidorkin's (2004) assertion that education is primarily about humans who are in relation with one another, that "meeting and

learning are inseparable” (p. 5). The focus my student co-researchers placed on relationships provided clear evidence of the ultimate centrality of relationships, not only for RJ, but also for education in general. Relationships are the essence of education. They mediate and animate any and all other curricular objectives (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Cavanagh, 2011). By using RJ as a window to make school relationships explicit, we are able to examine the quality and character of relationships and, with this, ask questions of how they are used to control and/or engage.

Contributions to education. My study, in making relationships explicit, calls for a return to first principles, in schools and in teacher education.

Return to first principles in schools. It is easy to lose sight of that in which we are immersed. This is, I believe, the case of schools and relationships. My study sheds light on the essence of schools – relationships – serving as a reminder of that to which we must attend if schools wish to be relevant, engaging and meaningful to students.

This is where the idea becomes both simple and profound. Most humans can relate to the simple fact that we exist in relation. Systems, structures and institutions – governments, justice system, and schools, to name a few – were organized by humans to attend to human needs. Yet, as those systems become entrenched, the simple and essential focus on people and relationships becomes obscured. “The needs of these institutions,” Elliot (2011) charges, “are viewed as more important than the needs of the people they were meant to serve” (p. 169). Sullivan and Tifft (2001) go further, referencing the taken-for-granted structural violence that occurs when, to meet systems’ needs, systems are organized to deny the voice and active participation of some (p. 120). When this occurs – when the needs of the school, for instance, are deemed more important than the needs of the student, or when school is organized to deny student voice – relationships do not cease to exist; they simply become relationships of social control rather than social

engagement, with largely unexamined consequences for other objectives, pedagogic, curricular, social or cultural.

A return to first principles in schools calls, first, for recognition that relationships are the essence of schools and, second, for an examination of the character of those relationships. I would suggest that schools interested in attending to relationships conduct a form of *relationship audit*, honestly assessing the nature of existing relationships. While the term *audit* might be fraught with connotations of faux accountability, where measurement can be mistaken with accountability, it would focus attention on relationships and their primacy in our societal interactions. Suggesting as much, a quick Google search turns up relationship audits as an emerging trend in the business world. Many of these audits seem to be undertaken to help companies “maximize their commercial potential” (Relationship Audits and Management, 2015, About section, para. 1). A relationship audit in schools, undertaken to maximize engagement potential, could utilize the identified components of social control and social engagement to genuinely assess the relational health of schools. For example, the student-teacher relationship scale (STRS) could be built upon for such an audit. STRS (Pianta, 2001) is a self-report measure of teacher-perceived conflict and closeness with individual students. Such a self-report could be a first step in examining the character of school relationships, from the teacher point of view. The student point of view would need to be considered equally for the audit to be complete.

Return to first principles in teacher education. As evidenced in my study, personal commitment on the part of educators to relationships of equality and mutuality is immensely influential on the student experience of school. Students in both Alberta and Scotland referenced teachers whom they trusted and named such teachers as part of their positive assessments of

school. Students in both sites also wished for more relationships with educators based on mutual trust.

Although all educators in the study expressed feelings of care toward their students, it was clear that many educators – in both sites – did not identify with students and their social contexts. This was evidenced in how educators from both sites lamented that restorative values were alien to students, their families and cultures. Teaching is often described as a helping profession and good teachers are described as ones who care about children (Brown, Morehead & Smith, 2008). Yet McCuaig (2012), in identifying a proliferation of discourses of care in education, suggests that the notion of *caring teachers* needs to be deconstructed. Moving beyond care to identification, one of the components of social engagement I named was mutuality, or, what Llewellyn (2011b) terms “equality of relationships” (p. 91), which is not relational “sameness” but are relationships characterized by mutual respect, concern and dignity. In schools, equality of relationships is experienced when adults view students as humans to be engaged with rather than as objects to be controlled (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Yet, how do teachers learn to engage with students as humans, through relationships of equality? As Garvis (2012) observes, care and relationality rarely appear in teacher education outcomes, professional standards for teachers or assessment criteria. Although teacher candidates may hold the mainstream view that teaching is a caring profession, teacher education does little to interrogate this view or to offer insight into the character of student-teacher relationships. Although it surely happens, it is difficult to know how often teacher educators raise the topic of relationships in particular courses; what is clear is that there are few courses offered in teacher education programs that focus specifically on relationships. Western University Centre for School-Based Mental Health conducted a study in 2014 for Physical and Health Education (PHE)

Canada that included a scan of all courses available to pre-service teachers enrolled in Bachelor of Education programs in Canada to locate those related to mental health. One of the four elements they used as criteria for such courses was a focus on relationships. The scan found that teacher education programs provide “very little” in the way of mental-health related courses (Teach Resiliency, Mental health education did not come to school today section, para. 1). In terms of relationships specifically, the study found that while most programs offer courses on classroom management, those courses routinely discuss using behavioural techniques to increase student motivation rather than other aspects, such as relationships.

In order for schools to be places characterized by relationships of equality, such relationships need to be at the forefront of teacher education. My study shows that teacher candidates need to be engaged in an exploration of student-teacher relationships, moving beyond the notion of caring to one of mutuality and equality. Vaandering (2014) describes a professional development program on a relational understanding of RJ, designed so that participants both learn about RJ and experience it. In this case, RJ was both the window and the object. The program began with the concept of relationship to self and rippled outwards. Although the course was centred on RJ, such a relational approach could be applied to any teacher education course, or to a course specifically on fostering relationships of equality. Teacher candidates must both discuss and experience mutuality if they are to engage their students similarly.

Contributions to RJ in schools. This study utilized RJ as a window into relationships. Yet RJ in schools is both window and object; we need to think through both what RJ shows us about schools (the character of relationships) and how RJ is being used in schools (affirmatively or transformatively) to control and/or engage. Making school relationships explicit in my study

allows for the identification of three lessons in terms of RJ in schools: continual reflection; school cohesion; and building on natural inclinations.

Continual reflection. Transformative RJ, as outlined in this study, insists that school relationships are grounded in mutuality, encompass all aspects of schooling and attend to structural and power imbalances. Transformative RJ seeks to disrupt the usual discourses that value individuals, order, compliance, rules, behaviour and social control. Disrupting these discourses is much more difficult than aligning oneself with them, as affirmative RJ often does. Thus, perhaps, transformative RJ advocates will need to be content with, as McCluskey (2013) writes, continually insisting that the system or the school is not restorative enough, seeing this as a sign that transformative RJ is beginning to, or might eventually, take root.

Such continual insistence requires continual reflection. This study revealed that if RJ is to be brought into a school in a transformative manner, reflection is required both before RJ is implemented and throughout its use. The Scottish school exemplified the idea of reflecting prior to bringing RJ into the school. Nationally and regionally, in particular, the application of RJ was part of a broader conversation in which there was reflection about how RJ aligned with systemic priorities. The region created a unique tool with which schools were assessed as to how prepared they were to implement RJ, based on adherence to restorative values. Although there was discussion of initial commitment to school-wide reflection, many admitted that the current state of RJ in the school teetered between being embedded and being lost. Most participants were not sure which it was. Although the senior management team and those in Pupil Support were committed to RJ and were open to reflection, this was not representative of the staff as a whole. In Alberta, staff also went through a reflective process before selecting RJ as an approach, albeit less systematic than that of Scotland. During the maintenance stage, staff as a whole exhibited an

openness to honest reflection on the state of RJ in the school. In some ways, staff were leading the management in this conversation, as reflected in the request that I run a staff circle. Building on the strengths exhibited in both cases, I believe that reflection conducted both before implementation – to determine if values are in place to bring about relationships of mutuality and equality – and during all stages of implementation and maintenance – to continually be insisting the school work harder on those relationships – is crucial to ensuring that such an approach leans more toward transformation than affirmation.

School cohesion. This study reveals that RJ is not self-sufficient in ensuring that schools are based on relationships of social engagement. They are one piece of the puzzle. RJ both reflects and affects the character of relationships in schools. In both the Scottish and the Canadian school, there were other approaches that worked together with RJ to cohesively bring about relationships of engagement. In Scotland, Pupil Support, the senior management team and, to a lesser extent, RRS, combined with RJ to ensure that students felt that there was at least one adult they could trust; students characterized the school as family. In Alberta, the frequent use of circles – either restorative or other – and the all-encompassing focus on RRS, combined with RJ to ensure that students felt listened to, safe and respected. Strengthening the links between these approaches could make for more consistent experiences of social engagement. On the other hand, linking RJ more with the idea of punishment, consequences, and affirmative understandings of rights (as something to be lost if responsibilities are not upheld) makes for more consistent experiences of social control.

Building on natural inclinations. RJ is, as Hendry (2009) writes, about building, maintaining and repairing relationships. Since relationships are, in the eyes of students, the essence of education, an approach such as RJ that attends to relationships makes sense to students. Despite students' intimate knowledge of the core of RJ – relationships – if not its terminology, adults in both schools felt that restorative values were remote to students, concepts that were difficult to impart. This is, I believe, an example of adults complicating, as Bingham and Sidorkin (2004) write, simple, straightforward ideas. If students' natural interest in and inclination toward relationship were to be built upon, within the framework of RJ, relationships of equality and mutuality would be better placed to flourish in schools.

Yet, as we have seen, relationships are not a good in and of themselves, and those very relationships that RJ seeks to build, maintain and repair could be relationships that control. Thus, prior to RJ being implemented and introduced to students as a relational approach, schools must, themselves, return to first principles, as discussed in the previous section.

Contributions to research methodology. For this study, intentional engagement with students as co-researchers was critical both in terms of the contributions students made to research and as a pedagogical approach to qualitative research. Viewing students as experts of their own realities and providing opportunities for them not only to share that expertise but also to engage in an inquiry into it, enriches both our body of knowledge as researchers and, potentially, the knowledge gained by those individuals who participated in the study. As a product, the research community gains a crucial layer of perspective in understanding the complexities of school; as a process, the students involved have their voices validated and the activity becomes an important learning tool for what it means to be both expert and researcher of their own realities. This engagement of students as co-researchers has the potential to challenge

both adults and students to, in the words of Fletcher (2004), “re-examine the long-held view that students should be passive recipients of teaching” (p. 13).

Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2000), in an examination of the social construction of childhood and the implications for researching children’s perspectives, declared, “the reality experienced by children and young people in educational settings cannot be fully comprehended by inference and assumption” (p. 61). If we accept this observation to be true, it follows that we should find substantive ways to bring the student perspective to the forefront of research, as unmediated by our own perspective as is possible. Engaging student co-researchers serves both current educational purposes – to improve current practice – and future ones – to empower students as subjects of their learning. Significant for research, my study offers an example of a methodology that prioritizes student voice and merges product with process.

Limitations

The limitations of this study fall into four categories: student voice; comparative studies; researcher perspective and unintended consequences.

Student voice. In this project, student co-researchers were invaluable to the study of student experience of RJ. Understanding the actual student experience of RJ – rather than the one intended by adults – assists educators in considering more deliberately how to translate their intended message into student experience. Yet, even in the research described in this paper, my adult voice appeared dominant, both in the study’s design and in its implementation. To better understand the student experience of RJ, and to better engage students pedagogically, student perspectives should be included in the design of such a study and in the analysis of the results, not only in the implementation of what I had already designed. At a minimum, I could have planned to bring students together several weeks after the end of my time in the school, to present

my initial findings. Although I sent students a report, doing this in person would have elicited actual feedback that could have enriched my analysis of their school experience. This project valued students as active partners and co-creators of knowledge; yet more could have been done to ensure that they were “equal agents of change” in the study (Fletcher, 2004).

Comparative studies. I have hesitated to name this study as a comparative one, although I hold the sites side by side. My hesitation stems, in part, from an acknowledgement that the contexts in which the student experience is situated are so layered and nuanced as to make it impossible to claim that “units of comparison have sufficient in common to make comparison meaningful” (Adamson, 2012, p. 647). Yet, according to Adamson (2012), educational researchers who carry out studies of two or more cultures, even if sometimes hesitating to label themselves comparativists, use comparative methods to “bring their findings into sharper relief” (p. 647). So, in reality, my study, even if not named comparative, cannot but make comparisons. I tried to describe two stories, one in Scotland and one in Alberta, yet, in the final analysis, I claim that the students in Alberta experienced more relationships of transformation than the students in Scotland; this claim is comparative. As a pseudo-comparative study, one potential criticism is that I did not account for the differences in the level of schooling. Although the students were of similar ages, the Alberta students were the oldest in their school; the Scottish students were the youngest. This difference in status could make for profoundly different student experiences, as could the differing structures of the schools, elementary and secondary. For these reasons, I return to my initial claim that the study is of two schools and what we can learn from each, rather than a direct comparison of the two.

Researcher perspective. My own perspective, as an advocate of transformative RJ, informs how I designed, implemented and analyzed the study. It is possible that a researcher with a less personal connection to RJ would approach the study and its findings differently. Indeed, my own evolution in thinking, explained in the discussion chapter, reveals the theoretical blinders that my perspective placed on me as the researcher: I initially sought only indicators of affirmative and transformative RJ. A researcher without my bias may have realized sooner the significance of the quality of relationships, or may have emerged with an entirely different conclusion.

A related limitation are my self-designed questionnaires and interview protocols. Although building on theoretical constructs, they are of my own design and thus reflect my personal biases and perspective. It is entirely possible that my data collection instruments imposed inferential limits on my data, influencing the data I was able to collect and thus the conclusions I was able to draw.

Unintended consequence. As has been pointed out, when studying schools, it is difficult to separate one factor from another. In the 2009 report on the Scottish RJ pilot project, among schools that felt they had been most successful at embedding RJ, it was also more difficult to “isolate it as a distinctive practice and as the identifying characteristic of success in developing a positive ethos” (Lloyd & McCluskey, 2009, p. 4). The difficulty for my study, attending to the student perspective, was compounded by the fact that almost none of the students were familiar with the term RJ. Thus, I needed to learn from their broad experiences, in the hopes that I would discover the implicit, rather than explicit, effects of RJ. This limitation, however, turned into a strength of the study: rather than look *at* RJ, I began to look *through* RJ at the student experience;

as an unintended consequence, this new view brought the centrality of relationships and the quality of relationships into sharper focus.

Further Research

This study identified the centrality of relationships in schools and the existence of relationships used to control and to engage. There are a variety of studies that could build on these findings.

Relationship audit. As identified in the contributions section of this chapter, if schools wish to return their focus to their essence, relationships, there needs to be a way to assess the current character of existing relationships. A relationship audit tool for schools could be developed and applied, based on the identified components of social control and social engagement. This tool would need to be developed through further research as to specific behaviours and attitudes that would characterize such relationships.

Impact of relationships. My study has suggested that relationships can be used to control and/or to engage. The impact of such relationships, however, is purely speculative. The questions need to be asked: What is the impact on students when relationships are used as tools of social control? What is the impact on students when relationships are used as tools of social engagement? Impact on such areas as academics, self-identity and future capacity could be examined.

Teacher education. Building on PHE Canada's 2014 scan of mental health-related courses in teacher education programs, a scan could be conducted on all courses that claim to attend to teacher-student relationships. Course outlines could be explored to discover the inherent relationship discourses – social control, social engagement, or other – and teacher candidates

could be interviewed to ascertain their views on relationships and their plans for enacting those views.

Final Words

The students in this study were generous, open and complex, revealing – through their words and observations – layers of experiences, dynamics and relationships. The educators in this study were sincere, nuanced and professional, providing insight into what it means to be both supportive and effective. Both schools in the study, in many ways, had evolved from punishment-based institutions to ones characterized by trusting relationships. I am grateful to all participants for what they taught me.

Using RJ as a window into the experience of students in the Scottish and Alberta school clarified the centrality of relationships. The RJ window also explained how those relationships were used to control students and how they were used to engage students. Relationships are the essence of schools. If RJ brings those relationships to light, allowing us to view their character, then, indeed, RJ is an idea whose time has finally arrived. RJ's time, however, has not arrived for its own sake, to promulgate expressions of RJ, whether affirmative or transformative; RJ's time has arrived to mobilize relationships of social engagement – in schools, in the justice system, in society at large.

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Appendix A: Glossary of Scottish Terms and Slang

cheeky – to be impertinent, rude

to chuck in the bin – to throw in the garbage

depute headteacher – assistant principal

disnae – don't

exclusion – suspension

football – soccer

headteacher – principal

indiscipline – lack of discipline

it wizny me – it wasn't me

to ken – to know

to kick off – to get upset or to start a fight

local authority – municipality

pigeonholes – mailboxes

punnies or punishment exercises – the writing of lines or other repetitive tasks

pupil – elementary or secondary student

reggie teacher – registration or homeroom teacher

a row – a quarrel or fight

swag – from swagger, a confident way to speak

willnae – won't

wouldnae – wouldn't

to wrongfoot – to discombobulate or confuse

**Appendix B: Interview with Headteacher/Principal
or Depute Headteacher/Assistant Principal**

1. Please tell me about your own background/history as an educator and in this school.
2. How did it come to be that RA has been adopted by your school?
3. How do you feel it was initially received? (By staff, students, parents, community) And now, has there been a change in attitude about it?
4. How would you describe your own role in regards to RA in the school? Please tell me a bit about that experience.
5. How do you define RA? In your opinion, what are some of its main values or ideas?
6. What are your goals in bringing RA into your school? What do you hope to achieve? What do you feel you are achieving? Any concerns?
7. Talk a bit about how (or if) you feel restorative approaches have impacted students. How about the whole school community?
8. What do you hope is being communicated to students through the use of restorative approaches? What do you hope they are teaching students?
9. What do you hope is being communicated to teachers through the use of restorative approaches?
10. What written documents/policies have been prepared or used by the school regarding restorative approaches? How effective do you find them? Would you mind sharing copies with me?
11. Anything else you'd like to add? Anything you hope that research such as mine might offer your school?

Appendix C: Interview with other people related to RJ

(Please note that interviews will be semi-structured and as such the conversation may not adhere strictly to these questions)

1. Please tell me about your own background/history as an educator.
2. What is your experience with restorative approaches?
3. How would you describe your own role in regards to restorative approaches in schools? Please tell me a bit about that experience.
4. Thinking of the educational communities of which you are/were apart, how do you feel restorative approaches were initially received by staff, pupils, parents, and the community?
5. How do you define restorative approaches? In your opinion, what are some of its main values or ideas?
6. How would you describe the state of restorative approaches in schools in Scotland now?
7. Anything else you'd like to add? Anything you hope that research such as mine might reveal or offer?

Appendix D: Questionnaire: Educators' Views of Restorative Approaches

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

It should only take about ten minutes.

All responses will be kept confidential.

1. Your Thoughts.

How would you define / describe restorative approaches?

(In as few or as many words as you would like!)

I have received some restorative approaches training: ☐ Yes ☐ No

I primarily work as a classroom teacher: ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. Your Use.

Thinking of your own experience with restorative approaches in your classroom and school, rate your response as:

1 (never) **2** (hardly ever) **3** (sometimes) **4** (often) **5** (always) **N/A** (Not Applicable)

- a. I use restorative approaches in my classroom and/or school

Never ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Always*

- b. I use restorative approaches to build relationships in my classroom and/or school

Never ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Always*

- c. I use restorative approaches to give students a voice in class decision-making

Never ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Always* ☐ N/A

- d. I integrate restorative approaches in the way that I teach the curriculum

Never ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Always* ☐ N/A

- e. I use restorative approaches to discuss systemic issues (racism, sexism, sectarianism, homophobia, classism, etc.)

Never ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Always*

- f. I use restorative approaches to address incidents of conflict between students

Never ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Always*

- g. I use restorative approaches to address incidents of harm between students

Never ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Always*

- h. Restorative approaches are used to address issues among adults in my school

Never ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Always*

3. Your Beliefs.

Now please rate your responses as:

1 (strongly disagree) **2** (disagree) **3** (neutral) **4** (agree) **5** (strongly agree)

- a. In our school, restorative approaches help to teach students communication skills

Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*

- b. In our school, restorative approaches help to teach students social skills

Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*

- c. In our school, restorative approaches help to empower students to deal with their own conflicts

Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*

- d. In our school, restorative approaches help to empower students to fight systemic injustice

- Strongly Disagree* ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*
- e. In our school, restorative approaches help to teach students to follow school rules
Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*
- f. I believe restorative approaches fit well with our school's values
Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*
- g. I believe restorative approaches have impacted our school significantly
Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*
- h. I believe restorative approaches help to empower adults to deal with their own conflicts
Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*

4. Your Goals.

Please check all that apply.

I believe restorative approaches should be used in our school to:

- ☐ Deal with incidents of conflict
- ☐ Deal with incidents of harm
- ☐ Teach communication skills
- ☐ Teach the following of school rules
- ☐ Teach social skills
- ☐ Empower students to deal with their own conflicts
- ☐ Empower adults to deal with their own conflicts
- ☐ Empower students to fight systemic injustice
- ☐ Bring about change in our school
- ☐ Other: _____

5. Follow-up Meeting.

Are you willing to be contacted for a follow-up learning circle? ☐ Yes ☐ No

I would like to conduct a learning circle with 4-6 teachers in which you teach me about your experience with restorative approaches. The circle will last roughly one hour and will be scheduled at your convenience. The circle discussion will be confidential. I welcome a wide range of opinions!

If yes, please provide your contact information.

Name: _____

Email Address: _____

Thank you!

Other comments:

Appendix E: Student Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

It should only take about five or so minutes.

All responses will be kept confidential.

- 6. Your Thoughts.** Thinking of your own experience in your school, rate your response to each statement as:

1 (strongly disagree), **2** (disagree), **3** (neither agree nor disagree), **4** (agree), **5** (strongly agree)

- i. Most students in our school respect one another
Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*
- j. Most students in our school feel like they belong
Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*
- k. Students in our school are respected by the adults in the school
Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*
- l. It's easy for students to talk to adults in the school about their opinions
Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*
- m. When a student misbehaves, adults in the school want to hear his/her side of the story
Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*
- n. When a student is hurt, adults in the school want to hear his/her side of the story
Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*
- o. When a student misbehaves, he/she is given a chance to fix things with anyone who has been hurt
Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*
- p. When there's a conflict between students, they usually fix it by themselves
Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*
- q. If students can't fix their own conflicts, the school makes sure that someone (adult or pupil) helps them sort things out
Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*
- r. When something happens that affects the whole class, the whole class discusses how to make things better
Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*
- s. Students help to make decisions in most classrooms

Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*

- t. If something is unfair in the school, students can help change things for the better

Strongly Disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 *Strongly Agree*

- u. Have you heard of restorative approaches?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how would you describe restorative approaches?

7. Your Information.

Age: _____

Gender: _____

What languages do you speak? _____

8. Follow-up Meeting.

Would you like to be part of a follow-up learning circle? ☐ Yes ☐ No

I will run learning circles with 4-6 students in each circle where I want you to teach me about your school. You are the expert! The circle will last about half an hour to one hour and will be scheduled when it works for everyone. The circle discussion will be confidential. I will also ask if you want to be a co-researcher, which means being like a reporter (or a detective or a scientist!) for a few days. Thanks for helping me learn!!

If yes, please provide your information. I will then send home a permission letter to your parents or guardians, explaining the activity.

Name (Please print clearly): _____

Class: _____

Thank you!

Other Comments:

Appendix F: Learning Circles for Educators

Introduction: Learning circles are similar to classroom circles. In this learning circle, I want to learn from you about your experience with restorative approaches here in your school. You are the experts and together you hold a great deal of knowledge and experience about how restorative approaches actually work. We'll do several rounds of questions. I'll pose a question or topic and then we'll move around the circle sequentially. Each person is asked to answer the question for themselves. You can add to what a previous person has said or start with a new line of thinking. After each round is finished, we'll have time where people can respond to what someone else said, ask questions, add to what they said, etc. I'll ask you to keep your initial comments to a few minutes so that there's time to expand on everything in the end. The guidelines are probably familiar to you: Respect for all; One person speaks at a time; Listen actively; Everyone has the right to pass; and Everyone has the right to contribute equally to the work of the circle. Hopefully what emerges today not only has benefit for me and my research but also for you and your own understanding of restorative approaches in your school. Everything that is said in the circle, stays in the circle. Can everyone agree to that? Any questions?

Round 1: Please tell me a bit about your own experience with restorative approaches in your school. How do you use it or see it being used? What has your experience been like?

Round 2: How do you feel RA are different from other ways of acting in your school?

Round 3: What do you feel are the goals in bringing RA into your school?

Round 4: What do you believe is being communicated to (or teaching) students through the use of restorative approaches?

Round 5: Talk a bit about how (or if) you feel restorative approaches have impacted students. How about the whole school community? Do you have any concerns?

Round 6: Anything else you'd like to add? Anything you hope that research such as mine might offer your school?

Appendix G: Learning Circles for Students: Communication

Introduction: Learning circles are similar to classroom circles that you might be familiar with. In this learning circle, I want to learn from you about your experience here in your school. You are the experts about that! We'll do several rounds of questions. I'll pose a question or topic and then we'll move around the circle one by one. Each person is asked to answer the question for himself or herself. You can add to what a previous person has said or start with a new line of thinking. After each round is finished, we'll have time where people can respond to what someone else said, ask questions, add to what they said, etc. I'll ask you to keep your initial comments to a few minutes so that there's time to expand on everything in the end. The guidelines are probably familiar to you: Respect for all; One person speaks at a time; Listen actively; Everyone has the right to pass; and Everyone has the right to contribute equally to the work of the circle. Everything that is said in the circle, stays in the circle. Can everyone agree to that? You can also make up names for yourself to use during this circle. Any questions?

Round 1: Tell me what you like about your school.

Round 2: What would you change about it if you could?

Round 3: Tell me a bit about how people get along in your school.

Round 4: How do people talk to each other here?

Round 5: How do you talk about things that are difficult?

Round 6: Who gets listened to the most here? How are pupils listened to?

Round 7: How do adults and pupils talk to each other? How comfortable do you feel approaching adults in the school about really important things?

Round 8: When there's a fight or a conflict, how do pupils handle it?

Round 9: How do teachers handle it?

Round 10: How is what happens here different from other schools that you know?

Appendix H: Learning Circles for Students: Rules

Introduction: Learning circles are similar to classroom circles that you might be familiar with. In this learning circle, I want to learn from you about your experience here in your school. You are the experts about that! We'll do several rounds of questions. I'll pose a question or topic and then we'll move around the circle one by one. Each person is asked to answer the question for himself or herself. You can add to what a previous person has said or start with a new line of thinking. After each round is finished, we'll have time where people can respond to what someone else said, ask questions, add to what they said, etc. I'll ask you to keep your initial comments to a few minutes so that there's time to expand on everything in the end. The guidelines are probably familiar to you: Respect for all; One person speaks at a time; Listen actively; Everyone has the right to pass; and Everyone has the right to contribute equally to the work of the circle. Everything that is said in the circle, stays in the circle. Can everyone agree to that? You can also make up names for yourself to use during this circle. Any questions?

Round 1: Tell me what you like about your school.

Round 2: What would you change about it if you could?

Round 3: Tell me a bit about how people get along in your school.

Round 4: What are the most important rules here? How do you know they're important?

Round 5: How are rules viewed by pupils?

Round 6: How are rules viewed by teachers?

Round 7: How is the breaking of rules handled here?

Round 8: What happens if you think a rule is unfair?

Round 9: What happens if someone is treated unfairly?

Round 10: How is what happens here different from other schools that you know?

Appendix I: Learning Circles for Students: Community

Introduction: Learning circles are similar to classroom circles that you might be familiar with. In this learning circle, I want to learn from you about your experience here in your school. You are the experts about that! We'll do several rounds of questions. I'll pose a question or topic and then we'll move around the circle one by one. Each person is asked to answer the question for himself or herself. You can add to what a previous person has said or start with a new line of thinking. After each round is finished, we'll have time where people can respond to what someone else said, ask questions, add to what they said, etc. I'll ask you to keep your initial comments to a few minutes so that there's time to expand on everything in the end. The guidelines are probably familiar to you: Respect for all; One person speaks at a time; Listen actively; Everyone has the right to pass; and Everyone has the right to contribute equally to the work of the circle. Everything that is said in the circle, stays in the circle. Can everyone agree to that? You can also make up names for yourself to use during this circle. Any questions?

Round 1: Tell me what you like about your school.

Round 2: What would you change about it if you could?

Round 3: Tell me a bit about how people get along in your school.

Round 4: What do you think it means to be a good friend?

Round 5: What do you think it means to be a good community member?

Round 6: What sorts of things do you learn in school that help you to be a good friend? How about a good community member?

Round 7: How do you think your school is like a community?

Round 8: What kinds of decisions in your school do pupils help make?

Round 9: Are pupils able to make a difference in your school? How do they do that?

Round 10: How is what happens here different from other schools that you know?