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**FACULTÉ DES ÉTUDES SUPÉRIEURES
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**FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND
POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES**

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GRADE / DEGREE

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**Restorative Processes and Zero Tolerance Policies: Can they Co-exist? An Exploratory Case Study of
an Ontario Secondary School**

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**Restorative Processes and Zero Tolerance Policies: Can they co-exist? An
exploratory case study of an Ontario secondary school**

By
Avery Newberry

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Post Doctoral Studies at the University
of Ottawa for fulfilment of the requirements for Masters of Arts in Criminology (M.A)

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Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-34095-0
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-34095-0

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Abstract

School violence is an issue currently generating much policy and research attention. It has become a serious concern, not only because of its damaging effects but also because it is linked to later anti-social and criminal behaviour. Typically, responses to school violence fall into three categories. This thesis explores the feasibility of restorative practices in Canadian schools that have zero tolerance policies towards violence. Hirschi's social bonding theory (1969) is used to support arguments for the need to shift from current punishment orientated responses to more restorative responses. In this inductive case study analysis of an Ontario secondary school it is observed that a peaceful/ restorative culture can thrive, in conjunction with both restorative processes and zero tolerance policy.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank Dr. Brenda Morrison for all her on-going support. Dr. Morrison mentored me through the last year by challenging and encouraging my ideas and providing me with excellent resources and guidance in the field of restorative justice in schools.

Additional thanks are extended to my Thesis Supervisor Dr. Kathryn Campbell for learning with me and for encouraging me along this journey. Dr. Campbell went above and beyond her duties and exceeded my expectations. I appreciate her open-mindedness, patience, and ability to keep me focussed and driven.

A special thanks is extended to YOUCAN Team Ottawa, especially the Executive Director Dave Farthing for being such a tremendous support throughout this process. Your motivation, determination and dedication inspired me to do this research.

Thank you to my close friends and my family for believing in me. Your endless support and tireless encouragement over the years has not gone unnoticed. Thank you especially to my mom and dad for teaching me to follow through on everything and that the more difficult the task is the more rewarding it is in the end.

Without the cooperation and acceptance of the research school and the *Toronto District School Board*, this research would not have been possible. Thank you for sharing and for welcoming me into your school to conduct this important research.

Thank you to Dr. Elizabeth Elliott and Dr. Brenda Morrison for assisting me in articulating the theoretical debate surrounding restorative justice.

Thank you to my friends in the field of restorative justice who gave me the courage, desire, and wisdom to advocate for restorative justice.

Thank you to the staff and volunteers within the Centre for Restorative Justice at Simon Fraser University for assisting me with accessing valuable resources.

A special thanks to Dr. Ross Hastings at the University of Ottawa for all your help and guidance in focusing my research topic in the first stages. Thank you for challenging my ideas and re-teaching me how to write. Thanks for always having your door open.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

With the current inundation of tragic and seemingly random rashes of school violence in the last ten years, international attention has been drawn to the need to control and effectively respond to school violence (Morrison, 2006; Shaw, 2002a).

School-based violence is said to be the most important public education issue in Canada (Harvey, 2006; Jull, 2000). With this, several school boards and Provincial teaching associations report they are witnessing higher levels of violence, conflict and disruptive behaviour in their school classrooms against both students and teachers (Day, Golench, MacDougall & Beals-Gonzales, 1995; Jull, 2000). Although concrete research indicates that school violence has not increased, our awareness and sensitivity to this issue has heightened (Shaw, 2001a).

Schools commonly experience such forms of violence as bullying, aggression, intimidation and exclusion (Morrison, 2002). School violence has an impact not only on those directly affected (victim and offender) but it also takes its toll on the entire school, and the community (Coloroso, 2002; Day et al., 1995). School violence affects the “daily lives of children in schools... it affects where they walk, how they dress, where they go and who their friends are” (Furlong & Morrison, 2000:6).

In a large study of Canadian youth and their parents, one out of five youth report that they rarely or sometimes feel safe at school (Totten and Quigley, 2005). Totten and Quigley (2005) also found that 40% of students in their study who were not directly involved in bullying and victimization reported that they were affected by witnessing or hearing about the incidents. The issue of school violence is a paramount concern due to

the link of school violence and bullying to later criminal and antisocial behaviour (Morrison; 2002; Olweus, 1993; Pepler & Craig 2000; Rigby, 2003).

Three commonly used responses to bullying and violence in schools are: zero tolerance policies, anti-bullying campaigns and the use of restorative practices (Coloroso, 2002; McGrath & Noble, 2006; Rigby, 2003; Shaw, 2003; Wong, 2004; Skiba et al., 2006). With anti-bullying campaigns and zero tolerance policy responses being criticized as limited and resulting in ill-effects, it became important to delve further into exploring restorative processes (Morrison, 2005; Shaw, 2002b, 2003; Wong, 2004; Youth Justice Board, 2004). Further interest into the exploration of restorative processes school came from the awareness of a wealth of knowledge indicating the need to develop school violence responses that are preventative, responsive, inclusive and engage the whole school. Since restorative processes traditionally achieve these goals, I wanted to better understand how they could function as a response to school violence.

Rooted in ancient spiritual and religious teachings, the use of restorative justice (RJ) appears to be on the increase internationally, especially in school environments (Van Ness, 2005). This paradigm challenges people to think differently about conflict, harm and relationships. Through the use of collaborative and inclusive processes as well as an adherence to peace-building values and principles, RJ promotes working together in developing solutions that support growth and healing.

Within the large number of studies that address school violence responses, there appears to be a gap in the research in Canadian schools. While there is some research evidence that demonstrates school violence is a problem in Canadian schools (Pepler & Craig, 2000; Shaw, 2002; Statistics Canada, 2006; Totten and Quigley, 2005), there is

little to no research on the best means to respond to school violence. More specifically, there appears to be few studies conducted in Canadian schools on the use of restorative practices to prevent and respond to school violence. Although there are several schools (64) listed in a National database¹, which have self-identified and registered as avid users of restorative processes, there are few sound Canadian studies that explore the use and impact of such initiatives.

Using an inductive qualitative approach, this thesis will explore whether the use of restorative processes are possible in Canadian schools (specifically one Ontario school) under zero tolerance policies. The purpose of this thesis is to provide more insight into practices aimed at addressing school conflict and violence in Canada (i.e. zero tolerance policies) and perceptions of those in schools around using other ways to respond (i.e. restorative processes). Moreover, this thesis also explores the definitional quandaries within the field of restorative justice. More specifically, I explore the school culture and whether they use restorative processes. It is hypothesized that students, staff and teachers will favour the use of restorative processes over the current zero tolerance policies. Ultimately, the goal of this thesis is to explore if restorative processes and zero tolerances are capable of co-existing in a school environment.

In order to uncover the thoughts and opinions of school staff, teachers and students, I employed a case study analysis of an Ontario Secondary school within the Toronto District School Board. I used focus groups and interviews to explore their thoughts and experiences and to provide a deeper understanding of several factors,

¹ Managed by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Conflict Resolution Network Canada. Available at: <http://www.cnetwork.ca/RJ/SchoolSurvey/>

including responses to conflict in their school, restorative justice and the *Safe Schools Act*, their zero tolerance policy.

This thesis is situated within the framework of restorative justice and social bonding theory. Although restorative justice is its own conceptual framework, as it is a paradigm different than traditional criminological theories, the use of restorative processes in schools can be supported through the application of social bond theory. Hirschi's (1969) theory is premised on the notion that individuals do not engage in anti-social and criminal behaviour when they have a strong bond to society. In the context of schools, those who engage in acts of school violence and bullying have a weak bond to their school and broader community. Moreover, this weak bond and poor connectedness to school is the number one risk factor associated with criminal and antisocial behaviour (Catalano et al., 2004; Libbey, 2004; Morrison, 2006; Surgeon General, 2001; Welsh, 2003).

Since the use of restorative processes (RP) engages and involves the community in supporting those involved in harm, the use of RP in schools can increase and strengthen an individual's bond to their school and community (Bazemore, 2001; McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002; Morrison, 2001, 2006; Schiff and Bazemore, 2005). Although the implementation of a restorative model is ideal, there are considerable challenges with its implementation. Perhaps, one of the greatest challenges and in essence the purpose of this thesis is to explore how restorative processes can be implemented in schools with zero tolerance policies.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

I. Definition of School Violence

Violence is generally defined as “the threat of physical threat or use of physical force with the intention of causing physical injury, damage or intimidation of another person” (Hamburg, 1998: 31). The US Department of Justice (1998) define the ‘school’ in school violence as a “school building, school grounds or on a school bus” (Henry, 2000: 21). More specifically, school violence can be viewed as “the entire spectrum of activities and acts which result in physical and mental pain or injury to individuals operating in the school setting or the aim of which is to damage objects on school premises” (Funk, 2001: 97). School violence is characterized by acts and behaviours such as: weapon use, verbal and physical fighting, aggression, victimization (Furlong & Morrison, 2000), bullying (Morrison, 2002), discrimination, racism (Henry, 2000), verbal abuse sexual harassment, property damage (vandalism) and abuse towards teachers (Funk, 2001).²

Unfortunately, attaining a clear understanding of school violence is difficult as there is a lack of agreement on how it should be defined (Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Henry, 2000; Shaw, 2001a).³ The definitional quandaries emerge from the realization that school violence is a “multidimensional construct” (Furlong & Morrison, 2000: 2) and that the current definitions are misleading and limiting (Henry, 2000). An inaccurate

² This list is inconclusive due to the lack of consistencies on how we define school violence

³ For more detailed information on the debate on how to distinguish school violence from other forms of violence refer to Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Hamburg, 1998; Henry, 2000.

definition of school violence inhibits a complete understanding of the phenomenon and thus renders techniques for its prevention and response inappropriate.

In attempts to define school violence, Furlong and Morrison (2000:2) assert that “school violence is now conceptualized as a multifaceted construct that involves both criminal acts and aggression in schools, which inhibit development and learning, as well as harm the school's climate.” More specifically, Henry (2000) defines it as “the exercise of power over others in a school related setting, some individual, agency, or social process that denies those subject to it their humanity to make a difference either by reducing them from what they are or by limiting them from becoming what they might be.”

As we can see the scope of school violence is large and abstract. Articulating a true definition of school violence far exceeds the confines of this thesis. As such, for the purpose of this thesis school violence will be defined as actual incidences or the threat of any form of harmful or aggressive behaviour to anyone or anything occurring on school grounds.

i. Bullying

Bullying is commonly associated with and often used synonymously with the term school violence. However, it must be clarified that bullying is a form of school violence, but school violence does not only involve bullying.

The most frequently used definition of bullying, written by Dan Olweus (in Bidwell, 1997: para 4), a Norwegian expert and leading researcher on bullying, suggests that “a person is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other person.” Negative actions include

actions intended to cause harm or injure another person. Common conceptions are verbal threats, teasing, slander and non-verbal actions such as physical harm (punching, slapping and kicking) as well as rude gestures and making faces (Bidwell, 1997; Olweus, 1991).

Totten and Quigley (2005: 5) provide a further, inclusive definition of bullying. They have broken down the definition of bullying into four parts: physical, verbal, social and electronic:

- (1) Physical - hitting, shoving, spitting, beating upon others, damaging or stealing property;
- (2) Verbal - name calling, mocking, teasing, humiliating, threatening, making people do things they do not want to;
- (3) Social - excluding others from group, spreading gossip and rumours, making other look foolish, and preventing others from spending time with a certain person; and
- (4) Electronic - using computer, email, or text messages to threaten or hurt someone's feelings, single out or embarrass someone, spread rumours or secrets about someone.

The four markers that distinguish bullying from other forms of aggression and violence are an: imbalance of power, intent to harm, threat of further aggression and terror (repetition of harmful behaviour) (Coloroso, 2002; Morrison, 2001b). Although this is similar to the above definition of school violence, they do have differing features. For example, bullies actions are typically intentional and they derive feelings of personal power from intimidating and harming the bullied. As well, bullying (or the fear of bullying) usually occur over time. Incidents of school violence can be remote and are not necessarily fuelled by the need for power or the intention of harming another.

For the purpose of this thesis, distinctions will not be made between school violence and bullying. It seems that in most research literature there is little distinction between these two terms and that greater focus has been placed on researching bullying.

It is the author's view that regardless of intentional actions, in both these instances, harm is done to individuals and relationships, an imbalance of power exists (whether intended or not) and reparation and solutions are required. As well, both of these behaviours are unwanted and contaminate the health and well-being of the school community. Lastly, they both have negative long term ill effects especially on those directly involved (those who harmed, were harmed and their communities).

II. Prevalence of School Violence in Canada

Despite the perception that school violence has increased, there is no hard evidence to indicate that school violence or even youth violence is on the rise (Harvey, 2006; Shaw, 2001a). However, there has been an international increase in the concerns about school violence (Shaw, 2001a:1). According to Shaw (2001 a), the perception that school violence has risen is due to the increased concern towards school safety along with an increase in the reporting of school violence. Reasons why there appears to be more attention on school violence include: the publicity surrounding rare but very violent acts of school violence; changing attitudes and behaviours towards school violence; and increased research and knowledge about the causes and effective practices to combat school violence (Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Shaw, 2002a: 3).

While it is impossible to know the exact rates of bullying and violence occurring in Canadian schools, Charach, Pepler & Ziegler (1995) reported that 15% of children reported bullying more than twice a term, while 9% of children reported bullying others on a weekly basis. Furthermore, victimization surveys from *Statistics Canada*, also found that 1 out of 5 youth victims aged 14-17 were physically assaulted at school (Statistics

Canada, 2005). Tanner and Wortley (2002)⁴ found that 30% of high school students reported that the location of the worst victimization they experienced was at school.

In their sample of 562 Canadian students from grades four to twelve, Totten and Quigley (2005) found that 45% experienced bully-victim problems, sexual harassment and racial discrimination at least once in a four week period. The types of bullying they experienced (as bullies or victims) were: 61% in verbal bullying; 41% in social bullying; and 13% in electronic bullying.

In *Statistics Canada's* 2005-2006⁵ (school year) online survey entitled "*Census at School*" approximately 32% of students reported they were victims of bullying⁶.

Although 5.7% of boys in elementary school reported they were bullied more than ten times, overall girls in elementary school reported more victimization (Statistics Canada, 2006). In these data, it appears that bullying decreased slightly into secondary school but was still occurring frequently.

Despite a lack of clarity on the exact rates of bullying and school violence, it is evident that a significant number of children in Canada experience bullying and victimization at school (Craig et al., 1998). In sum, Canadian research also indicates that along with the high rates of bullying, victimization increases with age; boys are more likely to engage in bullying than girls, whereas girls are more likely to be victimized than boys (Craig et al., 1998; NCPC, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2006). However, in the context of Canadian society, schools are still relatively safe and students are at a greater risk of victimization outside of school (Shaw, 2001a; Skiba et al., 2006).

⁴ Their data was acquired from the '*Toronto Youth Crime and Victimization Survey*.'

⁵ Census at school for 2005-2006 is available at: http://www.censusatschool.ca/04/04_000d_e.htm. Also available are the results from the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 schools years.

⁶ Students were asked to self report how often they were victims of bullying within the four weeks prior to completing the survey.

III. Effects of Bullying and School Victimizations

A great deal of research indicates that the effects and consequences of school violence and bullying are negative and long term. Those who bully appear to be at an increased risk to bully their own children, fail at interpersonal relationships, lose their jobs and end up in jail (Sandals, Auty, Hughes & Pepler, 2005a; Shaw, 2003). Research has also shown that bullies are prone to mental illness and age with a poor sense of self, lack social skills, and have an aggressive nature (Coloroso, 2002; Craig, et al., 1998; Morrison, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Olweus, 1993; Pepler & Craig, 2000; Rigby, 2003; Sandals et al., 2005a.; Shaw, 2003).

The bullied or victims are more prone to poor physical health and mental illness than their bullies (Craig et al., 1998; Rigby, 2003). They are often socially withdrawn or alienated, depressed, self destructive, have low self esteem, and have troubles in school (Coloroso, 2002; Craig et al., 1998; Morrison, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2006; Olweus, 1993; Pepler & Craig, 2000; Rigby, 2006; Sandals et al., 2005a). Rigby (2006) found that the ill effects of bullying can manifest themselves in adulthood as an inability to trust others and/or displaying false confidence. Victims of school violence or bullying are also susceptible to suicide or violent retaliation (Morrison, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2006; Olweus, 1993).

The above findings must be viewed with caution. Most of these findings result from few rigorous and methodologically sound studies. For example, several researchers and authors cite the work of Olweus (1993). However, his studies have not been successfully replicated outside of Norway, thus limiting the impact and generalizability of his findings (Smith, 2004; Woods & Wolke, 2003). Although these researchers cited

above have found similar results, the methods used feature threats to reliability and validity, thus making them methodologically weak⁷.

Regardless of the methodological flaws of much of this research, the social costs of bullying and school violence are great, particularly with respect to the social and emotional development of the victims. It is therefore important that prevention and intervention begin early on in life and efforts to tackling school violence and bullying be multifaceted/whole school approaches (Morrison, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2006, 2002,2003; Morrison, Blood & Thorsborne, 2005; Pepler & Craig, 2000; Shaw,2001a, 2001b, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2005; Waller, 2006).

IV. Current Responses to School Violence

The three most common responses to bullying and violence in schools are: anti-bullying campaigns, zero tolerance policies and the use of restorative practices (McGrath & Noble, 2006; Rigby, 2003; Shaw, 2001a, 2003, 2005; Skiba et al., 2006; Wong, 2004)⁸. In this section the first two options will be explored in greater detail and the challenges in implementing these responses in Canadian schools will be discussed.

i. Anti-Bullying Campaigns

Many of the anti-bullying initiatives were born from the research and ideologies of Dan Olweus. Developed in the early 1990's, Olweus' *Bullying Prevention Program*

⁷ Some of the methodological concerns are: Limited use of comparison and control groups; issues with sampling; measurements used; lack of longitudinal studies, and a lack of replication.

⁸ There are several other effective responses to school violence implemented Internationally. These three options were chosen based on the literature review that dictated that these options are the most commonly used responses in Canadian schools.

(*BPP*) is designed to be a whole school approach to bullying⁹. Such programs are intended to engage school officials, teachers, school administrators, peers, bullies and victims as well as parents and the wider community.

According to researchers, essential to effective school anti-bullying interventions¹⁰ are: developing a deeper understanding and awareness of bullying; providing support for both bullies and victims; practicing school wide interventions and education; exercising involvement from teachers, administrators, parents and community; addressing gender and age differences; promoting respect, listening, tolerance and empathy; and using interventions that target the early stages of bullying (Sandals et al., 2005a; Shaw, 2002a, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2002b, 2005; Sudermann, Jaffe, Schieck Watson, & Greer, 1996). In reflecting on these requirements, there are several programs that are deemed unsuccessful or classified as “did not work.”

From 1998-2003 the Federal Government’s National Centre for the Prevention of Crime (NCPC) funded and supported 87 bullying prevention initiatives in schools across Canada. These projects were developed and funded in order to increase awareness, education and knowledge on bullying, along with its impact and prevention. They were also intended to mobilize and promote community interventions in addressing the multiple risk factors associated with bullying and victimization (NCPC, 2005).

While laudable as they attempted to address the problem of bullying, the evaluation of these funded projects identified some problems. Specifically, these initiatives neglected to provide age and gender specific approaches or address ethno-cultural issues in bullying (NCPC, 2005). Moreover, these programs were also ineffective

⁹ For additional information on the use of *BPP* in North America visit www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/model/programs/BPP.html

¹⁰ There are several different types or models of anti-bullying initiatives, *BPP* is just one model.

in getting other stakeholders involved and sustaining resources based on the time and money allocated by the Government (NCPC, 2005).

a) Concerns and Limitations with Anti-Bullying Campaigns

The experiences with these NCPC initiatives are not uncommon. Although research on the overall effectiveness of anti-bullying initiatives is limited or unknown (Smith, 2006; Smith, Cousins & Stewart, 2005), new research is highlighting several problems and concerns for sustaining other anti-bullying initiatives such as *BPP* in schools (Greene, 2006; Smith 2004; Smith & Samara, 2003). Some of the problems identified were that: time allocated for such programs was insufficient; there were difficulties in engaging and maintaining support from stakeholders (including parents and community members); and lastly, that specific needs of the school and individuals were not being met (Greene, 2006; Smith & Samara, 2003; Smith 2004).

A major concern is that anti-bullying initiatives are often adopted into a school or environment solely based on their success elsewhere. For example, a Government of Ontario¹¹ website features 37 bullying prevention programs that can be purchased. This website promotes anti-bullying initiatives as solutions that can be easily transplanted into any school environment to deliver desired outcomes. However, it is essential for schools to take ownership and develop their own programs based on their own needs and to involve the students, parents and school staff in planning, implementing, and evaluating their prevention programs (Morrison et al., 2005; Pepler & Craig, 2000; Sandals et al., 2005a; Shaw, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Smith, 2004; Waller, 2006).

¹¹ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/bullyprevention>

International researchers have found that although Olweus' *BPP* reported decreases of 50-70% in bullying in Norwegian schools, other countries such as Canada, USA, Belgium and Germany have found weaker results (Smith, 2004; Morrison, 2006). In an extensive study in Great Britain Woods and Wolke (2003) found that schools who adopted a *BPP* actually experienced no difference in direct bullying but experienced higher rates of relational bullying and victimization¹².

Lastly, most of the current anti-bullying programs at schools are good at raising awareness on bullying, but often fail to address the root causes and rarely equip students with skills and abilities needed to constructively deal with bullying situations (Coloroso, 2002; MCC, 2003). Moreover, these anti-bullying initiatives are typically focused on providing support and resources for bullies and in turn neglect the victims (Sandals et al., 2005a; Shaw, 2001). In conclusion, most of these anti-bullying programs provide guidelines but "lack the sophistication or detail sufficient to provide a meaningful response" (MCC, 2003: para1).

By no means am I suggesting that we should completely abandon the use of anti-bullying initiatives. My concern with these initiatives is that they solely isolate bullying, rather than looking at it as a symptom of a larger problem. These initiatives could be used in collaboration or alongside other initiatives, but should not be used as a stand alone solution. If we are really going to make an impact in reducing school violence and bullying we need to get to the root of the problem and focus our attention and resources on building skills and abilities in students and devising multifaceted whole school initiatives.

¹² Relational bullying includes instances of ostracism, rumouring, and the use of exclusionary tactics (Woods and Wolke, 2003).

ii. Zero Tolerance Policies

There has been a considerable growth in the use of zero tolerance (ZT) policies internationally and particularly in North America (Shaw, 2002a, 2002b, 2005; Karp & Breslin, 2001). In effect, zero tolerance policies clearly define the behaviour that will not be tolerated and explicitly state the consequence or punishment (MacDonald, 1996). Although the definitions of zero tolerance vary greatly; they typically feature, swift, certain and proportionate responses to certain ‘intolerable’ behaviours (Gabor, 1995; MacDonald, 1996; Shannon & McCall, nd).

The most common disciplinary measures exercised through ZT policies are exclusionary tactics such as the use of suspensions¹³ and expulsions¹⁴ (Gabor, 1995; Ierley, Classen-Wilson, 2003; MacDonald, 1996; Skiba et al., 2006). As there are many different protocols and renditions of ZT policies, this thesis will solely focus on the *Safe Schools Act* (zero tolerance policy) incorporated in the *Toronto District School Board (TDSB)*.¹⁵

a) *Ontario Safe Schools Act*

The *Safe Schools Act*¹⁶ was drafted in 2000 and formally introduced in September of 2001. The *Safe Schools Act (SSA)* was introduced as a Provincial code of conduct in Ontario schools as a response to increase the safety, respect and responsibility of students (Ministry of Education, 2000). This act which is designed as a ‘zero tolerance’ policy sets

¹³ Suspensions are short periods of time where the student is not permitted to attend class or enter school property

¹⁴ Expulsions, the more serious of the two can result in the student being removed from the school for a significant amount of time, being permanently removed from the school or in severe situations permanent removal from the school district.

¹⁵ This ZT policy was focused on because the research took place in the *TDSB*.

¹⁶ Legislation (Bill 81) Ontario.

out mandatory consequences for the breaking of certain rules. This act is intended to foster students' development into productive citizens through learning about: respecting laws, honesty and integrity, respecting individual differences, and exercising no racism (Ministry of Education, 2000).

Since the introduction of the *SSA*, it is estimated that there was an approximate 40 percent increase in expulsions and suspensions in Ontario from the year 2001 to 2002 (Kalinowski, 2003). For the 2003-2004 School year provincial data demonstrates that there were 152,626 students suspended and 1909 students expelled (Sandals et al., 2005b). More specifically, in 2002 the *TDSB* issued a total of 100 full expulsions (Kalinowski, 2003). On average 24,000 suspensions are reviewed annually for the *TDSB* (Harvey, 2006)

Behaviours that could lead to suspension under the *SSA* are: swearing at a person in authority; being in possession of or impaired by alcohol or drugs; when the school finds it necessary; conveying any threats of harm; and committing vandalism (Ministry of Education, 2000). Expulsions are undertaken when students are in possession of weapons, found trafficking drugs or weapons, use weapons to inflict harm, commit assault or sexual assault, or at the discretion of the school (Ministry of Education, 2000). These expulsions can be from 21 days to a year, or a full expulsion where the student is no longer able to attend any public schools until they attend a strict discipline program.

Although punishments are pre-determined, the act mandates that mitigating factors be considered in certain situations. Some of the mitigating factors to consider are if the student has an ability to control his/her behaviour and if they can understand the consequences of his/her behaviour (Sandals et al., 2005a). However, the *SSA* procedural

manual dictates that despite the presence of mitigating circumstances a principal can still exercise their discretion and enforce a suspension or expulsion (Bhattacharjee, 2003).

In 2003, Bhattacharjee (a human rights consultant) submitted a report to the Ontario Government's Human Rights Commission which raised serious concerns alleging that the *SSA* facilitates serious discriminatory treatment to certain groups of students. In his report Bhattacharjee (2003) specifically focuses on the *Toronto District School Board (TDSB)*, which he feels has added infractions for which students can face both discretionary and mandatory expulsions and suspensions. As well, even more of a concern is that the *TDSB* designed and implemented the use of a "consequences of inappropriate student behaviour chart" (Bhattacharjee, 2003). This chart features the infractions and the minimum days in which students will be expelled or suspended if guilty of committing an infraction.

Moreover, the *Safe Schools Act* and the *TDSB* state students are required to attend certain programs (such as mandatory anger management in some cases) that are designed to assist students in reintegrating them back into the school environment following a long term suspension or expulsion (Ministry of Education, 2000). However, Bhattacharjee (2003) found that the *TDSB* only runs three support programs for all suspended students in the school district and one program for the expelled students. Ironically, Bhattacharjee's (2003) research indicated that all of these support programs have waiting lists.

Through his interviews with social workers, community workers, mental health experts, and advocates for people with disabilities, Bhattacharjee (2003) articulates

serious concerns about the discriminatory treatment towards certain students.

Bhattacharjee's (2003) claim of discrimination is conceptualized in the following ways:

- (1) Mitigating factors in decision making disqualifies this act from being classified as a traditional zero tolerance policy thus leading to exercise of discretion;
- (2) The discretion exercised by principals and the school board leads to unequal and inconsistent punishment imposed on students;
- (3) Strong perception that students with disabilities, emotional/behaviour disorders, intellectual/learning disabilities, and students from racial minority groups are treated more harshly than others.

To substantiate this claim of discrimination, School Board trustees who adjudicate expulsion and suspension appeals confirmed that they do see a disproportionate number of black students targeted under this Act (Bhattacharjee, 2003). As well, in the 2003-2004 school year 20% (379) of the students expelled and 18% (27,250) of the students suspended in Ontario were students with special needs or disabilities¹⁷ (Sandals et al., 2005b).

Bhattacharjee's (2003) report exposes only one perspective. There is still no formal response from the *TDSB* in defence of this report nor has there been any other research to further support or dismiss Bhattacharjee's (2003) claims. However, this report has contributed to a formal review of the *Safe Schools Act* commissioned by the Ontario Government and conducted by the Safe Schools Action Team (Sandals et al., 2005a).

Lastly, one of the purposes of the act is to encourage non-violent ways to resolve conflict. However, there is a lack of clarity as to how current responses and zero tolerance policies promote this. The *SSA* and other ZT policies are unable to or are uninterested in facilitating the development of students' skills and teaching alternate

¹⁷ According to Sandals et al. (2005b) report, only 8.8% of all the students in the Province are recognized as having special needs or disabilities.

ways to resolve conflict. Nevertheless, doing so would likely prevent the need for zero tolerance policy reactions.

b) Wider Concerns with Zero Tolerance

Zero tolerance policies are highly criticized for several reasons. Not only do ZT policies ignore prevention and prohibit the inclusion of the whole school and community (Gabor, 1995; Shannon & McCall, nd), there is no concrete research or evidence to support the widespread implementation and prolonged use of such policies (Skiba et al., 2006). In fact, the research conducted indicates that these policies have failed to effectively reduce school violence or to improve student discipline (Shannon & McCall, nd; Skiba and Noam, 2002; Skiba et al., 2006). In turn, these short term responses deliver serious negative long term consequences for students, their families and communities (Brendtro et al., 2001:10; Casella, 2003; Shaw, 2001a, 2001b, 2002a, 2002b; Skiba et al., 2006).

The wide implementation of ZT policies has had a large increase on the rates of expulsions in schools. Morrison & D’Incau (1997) cite American and United Kingdom studies which report on average an increase from two to 75 and 83 expulsions over 3 years in a US school district and 32% increase in the UK study.

Research findings indicate strong correlations between suspensions, expulsions and increases in loss of education, school drop out rates and criminality and anti-social behaviour (Bhattacharjee, 2003; Casella, 2003; Morrison, 2001a; Morrison & Skiba, 2001; Skiba & Noam, 2002; Shaw, 2003, 2005). In their study, Skiba & Noam (2002) found that students who were previously suspended were three times more likely than

others to drop out of school. In support of this, it is well established that the risk of criminal behaviour increases with school absences (Farrington, 1989).

Of particular concern is that Morrison & D’Incau (1997) found in their study of expelled students that a majority were low achievers, from minority groups, and 25% had disabilities (Morrison & D’Incau, 1997). Subsequently, only 20% of the students fit the profile the policy is meant to address (Morrison & D’Incau, 1997). This is disturbing as if Morrison & D’Incau (1997) established that the wrong kids are being expelled, and other research states the undesirable outcomes of such actions, then evidence prevails that through the use of ZT policies and exclusions and suspensions, we are failing kids who may otherwise succeed.

Sandals et al. (2005b) reported that in the 2003-2004 school year in Ontario 27, 425 (18% of all¹⁸) students were suspended twice, while 26, 455 (17% of all) were suspended three times or more. Noam & Skiba (2002) also found that rates of re-offending when suspensions or exclusions were used ranged from 35 to 45 percent. These results could indicate that such punishments are fostering negative outcomes such as potentially rewarding negative behaviour (Skager, 2005). For example, suspending a child who does not want to be in school serves as a reinforcement (rather than a deterrent) by providing them with reward for their behaviour and meeting their ends.

Moreover, Smith (2006:45) an educational psychologist asserts that “the more traditional and still common punitive climate is not conducive to effectively resolving bullying problems.” He goes on to explain how such responses merely ignore the causes of the bullying behaviour, the effects on victims, and focus solely on the breaking of certain rules. From this, children learn that rules are made by authority and their role is to

¹⁸ This percentage is based on all the students enrolled in school in the Province of Ontario.

obey those rules or face the consequences (Smith, 2006). In the larger context stunts their moral development and can inhibit them from building positive relationships with adults.

According to the American Psychological Association's (APA) task force on zero tolerance policies, these policy responses breed distrust of authority and nurture poor attitudes which can exacerbate school discipline and behaviour problems (Skiba et al., 2006). According to Brendtro et al. (2002: 89) "trust is the glue that holds teaching and learning together." Without this trust school problems intensify and the learning process of the students could be minimized (Brendtro et al., 2002).

Skiba (2000: 14) asserts that school exclusions and "counter aggressive" or "rejecting means" are intended to "break the bond between students and the school." With this, a student's overall rejection to school discipline also prevents bonding to the school (Brendtro et al., 2001). In order to do well in school and enjoy their experience, students need to feel they belong to their school (MacDonald, 1996; McNeely et al., 2002). With a strong bond and connection to school being a leading protective factor against future criminal and anti-social behaviour, it is therefore imperative that schools work on maintaining a strong and positive bond, especially with those students who have a weak bond at home and in the community (Catalano et al., 2004; Farrington, 1989; Waller, 2006; Welsh, 2003).

iii. Alternatives to Zero Tolerance Policies and Bullying Prevention Programs

Although school environments may unintentionally foster violence and can serve as breeding grounds for trouble and youth crime, they are the 'core of the community' (Farrell, Meyer, Kung, & Sullivan, 2001; Polk, 2001; Shaw, 2002a, 2002b; Welsh, 2003). Schools are therefore prime venues for teaching youth about non-violent interventions

and fostering their development into productive adults (Farrell et al., 2001; Morrison, 2001a, 2001b; 2002; Polk, 2001; Shaw 2002a, 2002b).

Some effective alternatives are to implement prevention programs that: teach and reinforce appropriate behaviour skills and values (Skiba et al., 2006), train youth how to resolve conflicts and mediate each others conflicts (Casella, 2003; Farrell et al., 2001; Harvey, 2006; Hawkins, Pepler & Craig, 2001; Shaw, 2002a, 2002b), develop empathy skills and facilitate moral development (Smith, 2006), and establish peaceful learning environments that tackle the risk factors associated with bullying (Morrison, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2006; Wong, 2004: 549). These opportunities allow children and youth to learn from their mistakes (MCC, 2003; Morrison, 2001a), and learn how to think about conflict differently (Skager, 2005). Such initiatives provide for an opportunity to reconnect with those youth who have been alienated as well a chance to provide social support (Morrison, 2001a, 2001b, 2006; Schiff and Bazemore, 2005). All of these objectives can be mobilized through the use of restorative practices in schools (MCC, 2003; Morrison, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2006). In the following chapter the conceptual framework of restorative justice, along with the use of restorative processes in schools, will be discussed.

CHAPTER III

Theoretical Framework

I. Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice (RJ) is based on the notion of resolving conflict and restoring harms through reparative (inclusive and collaborative) rather than retributive (traditional criminal justice) processes (Zehr, 2002). The goals of RJ are to repair harm, restore relationships and harmony, and to prevent further crime from occurring. Three key elements to restorative practices are: (1) The affected parties are given the opportunity to meet; (2) Parties are allowed to discuss issues that concern them with respect to the harm that has been done; (3) All affected parties involved participate in finding a solution (Van Ness, 2005).

i. History and Developments

Current conceptions of RJ are rooted in both ancient and current spiritual teachings (Johnstone, 2003). Globally, the roots of RJ can be traced back to religious practices of Aboriginal spirituality, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism (Hadley, 2001). In Canada, restorative processes have been greatly influenced by Aboriginal justice practices (Cormier, 2002; Department of Justice, 2000). The increasing interest and movement towards restorative processes have been influenced by other social movements, such as the civil rights' movement, women's and indigenous movements around the world, restitution movements in the 1960's and victim's rights agendas in 1970's (Sullivan and Tift, 2001; Van Ness, 2005).

In his article on the history of RJ, Weitekamp (2003:97) argues that "humans have used forms of RJ for the larger part of their existence" and retributive responses are fairly

new. He further asserts that centuries ago in non-state (acephalous) ancient societies restitution processes were probably the most common method of responding to conflict and the breaking of norms and expected behaviours. Braithwaite (2001) supports that techniques of restorative justice may be more of an innate and natural response to harm as they were exercised in ancient communities before the ruling powers became fascinated with crime and punishment as a means of exerting their power and control. Braithwaite (2001) states that through history, societies have moved from peaceful resolutions and reintegration techniques into practices of punishment, exclusion, confinement, and punishment.

Although exercised by First Nations since time immemorial, the first formal and documented use of restorative processes in Canada was a victim offender reconciliation/mediation process in Waterloo-Kitchener Ontario in 1974 (Cormier, 2002; Department of Justice, 2000). Since then, restorative processes have grown and expanded internationally and across various contexts. Restorative processes can be used to resolve disputes or conflicts (Zehr, 2002) but are also an effective crime prevention tool that can be used to resolve conflicts before they become more serious (Department of Justice, 2000).

ii. Defining Restorative Justice

Among RJ practitioners, advocates, and academics there is a lack of consensus on how RJ is to be defined (Cormier, 2002; Van Ness, 2005; Zehr, 2002). In his address regarding restorative justice around the world at the Eleventh United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, Van Ness (2005:3) stated that “there is no single accepted definition of restorative justice.” Not only is there controversy on the

definition but also debate on whether the term ‘RJ’ is appropriate for the work being done. Other suggested ‘less restrictive’ terms are relational justice; needs’ based justice (Sullivan and Tifft, 2001); community justice; and transformative justice.

Beyond the debate of what it is called, RJ is also difficult to define because it is both a: conception and process (Johnstone, 2003); a sets of principles or values; a paradigm of justice (Zehr, 2002), normative social theory (Sullivan and Tifft, 2001); and a lifestyle or way of living (Alcorn, 2003; Johnstone, 2003; Sullivan & Tifft, 2001). For the sake of this thesis and the ease of argument, RJ will be explored through the lenses of values¹⁹ and then processes (Van Ness, 2005).

a) Values Definitions

Since RJ involves a personal journey, experience and an exploration of the self in relation to others, it is impossible to articulate all the possible restorative values.

According to Roche (2001: 347-348) some values essential to RJ involve:

“Repairing harm or healing is the main value of restorative justice but not the only one. Restorative justice programs also aim to promote democratic values in particular the values of participation and deliberation...Other values prized by restorative justice includes reintegration, mercy, and forgiveness.”

Zehr (2002) contends that the values integral to restorative justice are interconnectedness and respect. Interconnectedness comprises diversity, individuality and each person’s worth (Zehr, 2002). Johnstone (2003) further states that paramount to RJ is healing, democracy, compassion, social support, caring, love, redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation, and respect. As well, Johnstone (2003: 5) states that “when someone

¹⁹ In order to appropriately sort the definitions into these two streams, I used guidance from Van Ness (2005) and through personal communications with Dr. Brenda Morrison (2006).

wrongs, RJ fosters inclusion rather than exclusion, strengthens relationships, exercises patience and love, and treat them as an equal.”

A Healing River, a comprehensive and heartfelt educational documentary on RJ, developed by Heartspeak Productions (2004) brings together leading advocates, practitioners, and believers in RJ to share their conceptions on restorative justice. This documentary highlights the following values of: respect, courage, accountability, humility, honesty, sharing, inclusivity, empathy, forgiveness, compassion, and equality (Douglas & Moore, 2004).

It is evident there is great diversity and disparity within the field as to what values are paramount within restorative justice. This is to be expected given that no two restorative processes are alike despite the presence of models or guiding principles. Zehr (2002) summarizes these definitional quandaries by noting: “Perhaps one of the greatest attributes of restorative justice is the way it encourages us to explore our values together” (Zehr, 2002: 36). Furthermore, such values are indeed meaningless if they are not implemented in practice.

b) Process Definitions

Similar to the debate about the values of RJ, there is a further lack of consensus around defining RJ through process. Below are some of the definitions centered on process, which focus on the ways and methods in which matters are resolved.

For Zehr (2002: 37), RJ as a process would:

“...involve to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offence and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible.”

Similar to this definition is another, “restorative justice is a process whereby all the parties with a stake in a particular offence come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future.” (Marshall, 2003:28)

However, emerging in recent debates is that RJ is not just about values or processes. In order for restorative practice to be authentic, Zehr (2002) and Johnstone (2003) assert that processes must be guided by values. Furthermore, both values and processes are not independent but intertwined. For example, a common value and principle of RJ is accountability, which is commonly interpreted as taking responsibility and making an effort to make amends.

In his United Nations address, Van Ness (2005:3) provided a definition that incorporated both values and processes: “Restorative justice is a theory of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused or revealed by criminal behaviour. It is best accomplished through inclusive and cooperative processes that include all stakeholders.” For the purpose of this thesis, RJ is defined as involving both values and processes.

II. Restorative Justice as a Theoretical Framework?

Although many call RJ a theory of justice (Bazemore, 2001; Bazemore & Schiff, 2001; McCold and Wachtel, 2003; Morrison, 2006; Van Ness, 2005) an important question to explore is whether restorative justice is in itself a criminological theory. It has been argued that RJ is not an individual theory, but rather a paradigm (Marshall, 1999; Morrison, 2007).²⁰ RJ it is too large to be a single theory and also does not support or protect a heuristic set of assumptions that all other criminological theories might share

²⁰ B. Morrison (personal communication, February 21, 2007)

(Elliott, 2007²¹; Morrison, 2007). Moreover, the principles of RJ are derived from experience and practice (inductive) rather than from an academic theory (Marshall, 1999; McCold & Wachtel, 2003).

Pepinsky (2000: 276) asserts that theories of criminal justice and criminology “are negative enterprises, about what not to do, about why we do what we should not, about how to stop us from doing wrong.” Traditionally, criminological theorists are focused on asking questions of what laws have been broken, who broke them, and what punishments do they deserve (Elliott, 2007; Zehr, 2002). However, RJ asks questions based on affective responses- who has been hurt; what are their needs; whose obligations are these; how do we repair the harm? (Zehr, 2002)

Morrison (2002) stated that RJ challenges traditional ways of thinking and adopts its own philosophy through disregarding terms and values inherent to other criminological theories. For example, instead of using terms such as crime, offenders and victims; terms such as harm, those who harmed, and those who were harmed are preferred (Morrison, 2002). Moreover, instead of adopting views of crime, violence, and punitive responses similar to traditional criminological theories, RJ advocates contend that crime has no function in society²² (Elliott, 2007; Morrison, 2002).

Although a proponent of restorative justice, Marshall (1999:30) contends that RJ “lacks a definitive theoretical statement...as the theory of RJ is still in the early stages of development, specifically in the formulation of ethics and philosophy.” Since the publishing of that article, researchers and advocates of RJ are attempting to articulate such requirements (Elliott, 2007; Morrison, 2007).

²¹ E. Elliott (personal communication, February 21, 2007)

²² This also means that in RJ there is no degree of harm or disrespect that is acceptable. All harm against others and oneself is prohibited.

In 2003, McCold and Wachtel attempted to develop a theory of RJ which provided the “how, who, and what of RJ theory” and was allegedly designed to withhold some empirical testing. According to McCold and Wachtel (2003:1) “the foundational postulate of RJ is that crime harms people and relationships and that justice requires the healing of harms as much as possible.” However, their theory of RJ is incoherent and does not seem to clearly reflect the standards necessary to constitute a theory.

Moreover, Marshall (1999:30) states that although “...no other criminological or justice theory can be held to underpin RJ, many academic theories and approaches have been incorporated in and associated with it at different stages.” In support of this, Morrison (2006: 370) states that “restorative justice is theoretically eclectic across a range of disciplines.” Throughout her extensive work in exploring the use of RJ in schools, Morrison (2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2006) relates Braithwaite’s theory of re-integrative shaming, Sherman’s defiance theory, and Tyler’s procedural justice, as well as components of psychological theories of affect, interdependence, labelling and social identity/self-categorization. It would appear that the most compatible traditional criminological theories to RJ are Hirschi’s (1969) social bonding theory (Bazemore, 2001; Marshall, 1999) and Sykes and Matza’s (1960’s) techniques of neutralization (Marshall, 1999). The next section will discuss in more detail Hirschi’s (1969) social bonding theory.

III. Social Bonding Theory

Rather than focusing on why individuals commit crime, in 1969 Hirschi developed a theory to explain why people do not engage in criminal behaviours and instead conform to societal norms. For the purpose of this thesis, social bonding theory is

not used to explain restorative justice but rather to support the shift away from responding to school violence and bullying with the traditional/punitive responses to more restorative and community responses.

The four social bonds which Hirschi (1969) stated were essential to maintaining and ensuring a positive role in society were: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Attachment is based on one's relations to others. The important socializers for attachment are parents, family, school and peers. An individual's strength of the bonds to these attachment figures are based on the depth, quality and time spent on the relationship. Hirschi (1969) found that weak bonds to parents and school precipitated involvement in delinquency and were more important and influential than relationships with peers.

Commitment involves the time, energy and effort put into engaging in pro-social activities. Hirschi's (1969) theory asserts that those who have more of an investment and are committed to positive activities were less likely to be involved in anti-social and criminal activities. The third bond, involvement, incorporates involvement in school, family, recreation activities, and community serves to protect youth from engaging in antisocial activities. For the concept of belief, which is the last bond, Hirschi (1969) felt that individuals become delinquent and anti-social when they break away from the institutions which enforce the moral and legal laws and guidelines. Therefore, in order to maintain this bond, it is essential that youth feel that the laws and the way they are treated is fair.

According to Hirschi (1969), delinquents are those who reject social norms and beliefs due to their weakened bonds to institutions and individuals. Recent studies

indicate that school connectedness is identified as a key element in strengthening health and education and curbing anti-social behaviour (McNeely & Nonnemaker, 2001; Morrison, 2006). Feeling connected to school increases pro-social behaviour through involvement and commitment, and decreases anti-social behaviour (Haines & Case, 2003; McNeely & Nonnemaker, 2001). Moreover, a weak social bond is considered to be one of the strongest predictors of anti-social and criminal behaviour (Catalano et al., 2004; Cernovich & Giordano, 1992; Libbey, 2004; Morrison, 2006; Surgeon General, 2001; Welsh, 2003). For example, Furlong & Morrison (2000: para 21) reported that “students who engage in their schoolwork, are bonded to school, and have multiple opportunities to participate and succeed in academic tasks are less likely to commit acts of violence toward each other, toward school staff, or upon the school itself (vandalism).”

i. Restorative Processes in Schools and Social Bonding

Restorative justice focuses on repairing and strengthening broken social bonds and repairing relationships that are shattered by harmful behaviour (Bazemore, 2001; Morrison, 2001b, 2006; Schiff and Bazemore, 2005). Through engaging the community in collaborative and inclusive processes, RJ can also increase the informal social controls of family, community and schools (Bazemore, 2001; Morrison, 2001; 2006; Schiff and Bazemore, 2005). Through working together and bringing in the community, RJ can facilitate the development of bonds with legitimate roles such as positive role models and peers, which can lead to a decrease in delinquent and deviant behaviour (Bazemore, 2001). Bazemore (2001) asserts that as the number and strength of relationships increase, the access to legitimate roles increases, thus reducing the risks of involvement in deviant behaviour.

As previously discussed, schools are the second most important socializing institution in society after the family (Morrison, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2006; Polk, 2001; Shaw, 2002a; Welsh, 2003). Kenneth Polk (2001) states that for many teens, schools are where most of their socialization, community connection, and legitimate identity are formed, therefore making it a suitable venue to influence more positive bonding.

Restorative processes can provide an important teaching tool through treating harms and conflict as learning experiences that facilitate nurturing and support (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Ierley & Claassen-Wilson, 2003; Skiba et al., 2006). Unlike ZT policy responses, RJ attempts to “re-establish positive relationships with adults” (Skiba et al., 2006:93). These processes provide an opportunity for all those involved to transform negative experiences and relationships and build stronger bonds to their school and larger community (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; MCC, 2003; Morrison, 2006; Skiba et al., 2006).

IV. Restorative Justice in Schools

“Restorative school is a place where everyone feels part of a cohesive, respectful community” (Hopkins, 2006).

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in implementing restorative processes in schools to prevent and respond to school violence. Research has indicated that more effective solutions for dealing with school conflict and violence are for youth to first be provided with the skills necessary to avoid conflict, and second for youth to learn how to respond to conflict in more constructive ways (Morrison, 2001a). Furthermore, it has been advocated that adopting the principles of restorative justice (RJ) in schools may prevent the development of later, more serious problems of crime and violence (Hopkins,

2006; Karp and Breslin, 2001; MCC, 2003; Morrison, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; 2006; Nation, 2003).

Some of the accepted terms used to refer to restorative processes in schools are restorative measures (Riestenberg, 2004), restorative discipline (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005), restorative practices, or restorative action (Morrison, 2006; 2001b; Youth Justice Board, 2004). Although there is a difference in terminology, the values and processes are unified.

Some values engrained in the use of restorative practices in schools are: respect, openness, fairness, responsibility, empowerment, inclusion, tolerance, and integrity (Hopkins 2004:38; Morrison 2002; Smith, 2006). Restorative processes in schools foster inclusion, safety and responsibility (MCC, 2003). They also involve the school, parents and the community. The skills associated with the use of such practices are: remaining impartial and non-judgemental; respecting perspectives of all involved; active and empathetic listening; empowerment and patience (Hopkins, 2004).

Amstutz & Mullet (2005:22) state that restorative discipline “recognizes purpose of misbehaviour; addresses the needs of those harmed; works to put right the harm; aims to improve the future; seeks to heal; and uses collaborative processes.” Although the exercise of restorative practice typically requires a complete paradigm shift, Amstutz & Mullet (2005:17) assert that their conception of restorative discipline is not a practice or program but a new framework that can operate alongside current policies. Moreover, this philosophy can assist in designing and implementing appropriate school practices and policies while encouraging schools to accept full accountability for problems and concerns on a whole school level (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Hopkins, 2004).

When compared with the other responses to school violence and bullying discussed above, restorative processes are more flexible, holistic and capable of getting to the root of a problem. While anti-bullying initiatives solely address bullying and zero tolerance policies only come into play when a specific behaviour takes place, restorative processes can be used in an array of situations and to meet specific needs. Perhaps some of the highlights of using restorative processes in schools are that they are preventive, responsive and foster social and emotional development in children (Smith, 2006).

In addition, instead of concealing problems and issues restorative processes brings them to the forefront. They also engage the school and community to take responsibility, support, and resolve the issues together. Restorative processes in schools require a long term commitment and engagement as it involves supporting individuals through learning about responsibility, accountability, reconciliation, reintegration and healing.

i. Restorative Models and Processes in Schools

Some of the restorative models used in schools include: circles (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Armstrong & Thorsborne, 2006; Ierley & Claassen-Wilson, 2003;); peer mediations (Casella, 2001; Lupton-Smith, 2004; Stevens, 2001); community group conferencing (Armstrong & Thorsborne, 2006, Ierley & Claassen-Wilson, 2003); victim offender mediations (Ierley & Claassen-Wilson, 2003; MCC, 2003); conferencing (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Armstrong & Thorsborne, 2006); mediations (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Armstrong & Thorsborne, 2006; MCC, 2003;); conflict resolution (Girard & Koch, 1996); and community accountability conferencing (Armstrong & Thorsborne, 2006; Morrison, 2001 a,b;2002;2006). The most commonly used and well known models in schools are: victim offender mediation, community group conferencing; circle

processes (Ierley & Claassen-Wilson, 2003) and peer mediation (Casella, 2001; Lupton-Smith, 2003)²³.

a) Restorative Initiatives in Canadian Schools

Restorative models for schools can emerge from a variety of levels: government (federal, provincial or municipal), community, school board, parental and from the students themselves. Although there are likely several restorative initiatives operating in Canadian schools, some examples of federally funded and well documented RJ school programs are the: '*Pacific Path*' in Quebec; '*Outdoor Classroom*' in North West Territories; '*Restitution Peace Project*' in the North West Territories and Nunavut; and '*Together we Light the Way*' in Ontario, Manitoba and New Brunswick (Shaw, 2002b, 2003). As well, school boards and teacher's associations in the provinces of Alberta, BC, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia all openly encourage and promote the use of restorative processes through a variety of means, such as their school policies and procedures (Shaw, 2001a).

An example of a community based restorative initiative in schools is the partnership between a restorative justice community group, Fraser Region Community Justice Initiatives in Langley, BC (CJIBC) and the Langley School District. Through this partnership emerged the implementation of *Conversation Peace* also known as "*Restorative Action in Schools*"²⁴. This initiative brought together students, school board

²³ For a more detailed description of these models see Ierley & Claassen-Wilson (2003) and Armstrong & Thorsborne (2006). For more information on community conferencing refer to Cameron & Thorsborne (2001) and Casella (2001) and Lupton-Smith (2004) for peer mediation models.

²⁴ This information was attained through a brochure entitled "Restorative Action in Schools: A community approach to harm and conflict." The author and date of publication is unknown.

officials, community members, professionals, parents, school staff and teachers to find restorative responses to school violence and conflict.

Conversation Peace is led by groups of students, teachers and parents trained in conflict resolution and restorative values. Their role is to handle conflicts such as (name calling, minor threats, exclusion, interpersonal conflicts, property violation, physical assaults, and vandalisms) within the school community. This initiative is guided by restorative principles and values. It is also an example of a comprehensive grassroots school model as its implementation and operation involves students, teachers and staff and the external community.

One response that emanated from student groups in Winnipeg, Manitoba, was captured in a paper entitled: “*Transformation of a Classroom*” which was featured at the 2006 National Symposium on Restorative Justice hosted by Correctional Service of Canada (2006)²⁵. This student led response was ultimately restorative in nature, without formal guidance or assistance from school practitioners. According to the students, they had serious problems at their school with bullying that were undetected by school authorities. The bullying was mostly boys against girls and included sexual harassment, name-calling, physical abuse, mocking and damaging of personal property.

Once the school authorities became aware of this problem, it moved to suspend the boys involved. However, the girls (as “victims”) were dissatisfied with this response and asked for mediation, feeling as though suspensions would neither stop the problem nor repair the damage done. The mediation process consisted of several small group conferences where issues surrounding the bullying and other problems the students had with each other were discussed. In the end, the small group of students’ presented to their

²⁵ This article is available online at http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/portals/rj/rj2006/pdf/kit_e.pdf

class what they had done and the entire class entered a pact that they would stop all the bullying in the class. The youth stated:

“We would recommend this program for anyone having bullying problems, we feel it is most effective because it gives everybody a chance to speak out and it guarantees that the bullies will not go back to their old ways, due to the regular meetings....we are writing because we feel everyone deserves to know”(Correctional Services of Canada, 2006).

The above examples are demonstrations of programs that were effective in some communities. These initiatives seem to demonstrate that responses to school conflict and violence need to come from within and should be specifically designed to meet the needs of the community, rather than adopting “one-size-fits-all” examples (Shaw, 2002; Waller, 2006). However, important to note is that when determining the success and effectiveness of RJ in schools very few initiatives have been formally evaluated.

ii. Evaluations of Restorative Practices in Schools

In 2001, Morrison commented that overall the evaluations of restorative initiatives in schools had mixed reviews. Morrison (2001) also reported that although these initiatives were promising, some experienced slow and difficult implementations. This was due, in part, to a need for broader institutional support along with a greater understanding of the time commitment involved.

A study conducted by the British Youth Justice Board (2004) appears to be one of the few extensive evaluations on the use of restorative justice in schools. This evaluation involved several schools in the UK where they tested several different restorative models at different stages in implementation. They also employed both qualitative and

quantitative research methods, using control groups and multiple forms of data collection²⁶.

The findings from this study are complex. At first glance, it seems that these restorative programs were all very effective. The raw numbers indicate effectiveness of restorative programs on basically all measures²⁷ in comparison to the non-program control groups. However, through further statistical analysis very few of the findings were found to be statistically significant (Youth Justice Board, 2004). The only findings that were consistently statistically significant across all measures was in the one school which adopted a whole school approach that was already in operation for three years. This school reported reductions in racism, verbal threats, and bullying. As well, the students felt the school was doing a good job at stopping violence and bullying.

Overall, the Youth Justice Board (2004) concluded that the use of restorative processes is promising and shows some effectiveness. The qualitative component provided additional support to the effectiveness of restorative processes in schools as almost all comments were positive. This study therefore supports the importance of using mixed methodology in measuring the effectiveness of restorative processes. As well, it highlights that in order to reach desirable results, restorative programs need to incorporate a whole school approach and to be in operation for a considerable length of time.

Another well orchestrated research study of restorative justice in schools was done in Minnesota. Conducted over three years, in several different schools and school

²⁶ The techniques for data collection consisted of baseline victimization surveys completed by students, interviews with stakeholder, and observations.

²⁷ Some of the measures were levels of racism, verbal threats, bullying, and feeling school is doing good at stopping violence and bullying.

districts, the initial study found an overall decrease in rates of suspensions and expulsions. Specifically, one school experienced a 28% decrease whereas another reported a 50% decrease in the use of suspensions (Riestenberg, 2004). Due to the variation in the school data along with the challenges, the researcher concluded with certainty that the use of restorative processes in schools shows promise (Riestenberg, 2004). Some of the challenges in this research were gathering baseline data, ensuring consistent measurements across the schools and getting administrators to use restorative processes rather than resorting to punitive measures²⁸ (Riestenberg, 2004). Consequently, these findings should be approached with caution, as there is no indication if these results are statistically significant and there is no qualitative research to support the findings.

Studies in Queensland, Australia where community conferencing was used, indicated high degrees of satisfaction from participants (87% to 99%) in terms of the way they were treated²⁹, as well as with the outcome of the process (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). Of those youth who harmed others, 83% did not re-offend, 84% followed through with the agreements made and a large majority felt improvements (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). Although this study and the follow-up studies conducted by Queensland Education showed that RP was a highly effective strategy for dealing with harm in school, Cameron & Thorsborne (2001) did not mention the methodology or any of the limitations of this research. In her interpretation of the same data, Morrison (2001) stated that within this research some schools failed to practise conferencing as principals opted for more traditional mean of dealing with conflict. The results of Cameron &

²⁸ While there was a reduction in suspensions, there were still a significant number of suspensions used.

²⁹ Students felt they were respected, understood, heard, validated, and treated fairly.

Thorsborne's (2001) analysis are likely skewed as it appears their results only reflect the schools which chose conferencing.

At the time of writing there appears to be very limited published Canadian research available on the use of RJ in schools. Three studies of Canadian restorative school programs '*Conversation Peace*' (Kalpatoo, 2006) in Langley, BC; '*Peer Resolution Conferences*' (Whyte, 2006) in Northern BC communities; and '*Calgary Community Conferencing*' (Calhoun, 2000) in Calgary, Alberta were reviewed.

The research conducted by Calhoun (2000) solely provides information and statistics about the type of service they provide. Rather than discussing the implications of their initiatives and how people felt about the restorative processes, this report is essentially a service report which highlights things such as: number of referrals, types of incidents, hours of case work, consequences etc. Lastly, since the initiative delivers several different types of services and the school aspect is only a small part, it appears they have not done much work in different schools.

Whyte's (2006) research study was an anecdotal analysis of a pilot program intended to implement peer resolution conferences in remote Northern BC communities. This study concluded that although the initiative was promising, much work needed to be done in order to facilitate and sustain it. The success of this pilot project was comprised by a lack of support and resources, an underestimation of the time commitment, and that the peer resolution conference program was transplanted into Northern communities that they knew little about (Whyte, 2006). Although the students and school officials were receptive a lack of "buy in" at the school and school board level resulted in these pilot

programs only being implemented in one school in all of the nine communities (Whyte, 2006).

Kalpatoo's (2005) report employed multiple measurements such as: surveys with students, review of program documents, interviews with teachers/staff and consultations with stakeholders. He reported an overall high degree of satisfaction with *Restorative Action* at all levels (school, community, school district). Kalpatoo (2005) concluded that this program successfully met their goals and objectives and demonstrated strength and viability. The results from the study indicated that students have increased their skill levels in listening, questioning, and facilitation. As well their awareness and ability to work within mediation models has also drastically increased. The qualitative interviews with the teachers demonstrated that following the training in restorative practises, the teachers felt better equipped with skills and abilities to more effectively prevent and resolve conflicts in their classrooms. The largest concern with this study is that causal inferences are drawn despite the lack of validity and reliability. The program was thought to be effective and to be an improvement on existing conditions; however, there were no baseline data or comparison groups to validate such conclusions.

Overall, evaluating restorative initiatives is very difficult because RJ is not easily defined nor do all initiatives share the same definitions of RJ (Presser & Van Voorhis, 2002; Riestenberg, 2004; Youth Justice Board, 2004). Although RJ features central values and principles, there are a plethora of processes and models making standard evaluations difficult (Presser & Van Voorhis, 2002; Youth Justice Board, 2004).

In her extensive research on RP in schools, Morrison (2001) found that it was difficult to attain a large enough sample size to draw meaningful conclusions. Generally,

it seems that although these studies demonstrate promising results and are determined effective on their own terms, evaluations of RJ programs³⁰ are usually methodologically flawed and wrought with issues such as: a lack of random sampling, no control groups, few matched comparisons, lack of internal validity and selection bias (Cormier, 20002; Presser & Van Voorhis, 2002).

iii. Challenges with Restorative Practices in Schools

Susan Limber (1998), an American *BPP* advocate, argues that restorative processes and conflict resolution are inappropriate for dealing with problems of bullying and violence in schools given the relational dynamics involved in bullying. More specifically her comments were “peer mediation may be appropriate in resolving conflicts between students with equal power, but bullying is a form of victimization...its more of a ‘conflict’ than child abuse or domestic violence” (as found in Crawford, 2002: 64).

Morrison (2007) refutes this point in stating that restorative processes, when used properly, are designed to account for and reduce the power imbalance and fear surrounding bullying. She states that if restorative values and processes are respected and facilitated by a trained person, it is almost impossible for a power imbalance to exist. For example, no process should ever take place when any of the participants feel unequal or unsafe. Furthermore, restorative processes have also been used in domestic violence situations, including those involving children (Mills, 2003). Lastly, RP in schools is the only response to bullying that addresses the victimization and long term needs associated with bullying (Morrison, 2007).

³⁰ The only methodologically sound study of RJ programs seemed to be the Youth Justice Board report. There may be other rigorous studies conducted but at the time of this research there were none found.

With this, it seems as though the criticisms raised by Limber may be based on a different or incomplete understanding of restorative processes.

Implementing RJ practices in schools is not a simple process. Researchers have articulated five main challenges with implementing and sustaining restorative practices in schools. These are the: intensive time requirements, existing school policies, need for a whole school approach, cost, and the requirement of a paradigm shift.

a) Time consuming

Restorative practices are more time consuming than other alternatives used in situations of conflict and school violence. RP are time consuming due to the training required and that it takes a longer period of time to resolve conflicts. Given that teachers are already swamped with mandatory requirements, it is difficult to convince them to take time out to learn, teach, model and facilitate new ways to resolve conflicts (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001; Hopkins, 2002; Whyte, 2006).

Another obstacle is that measurable effects and results from the use of restorative practices are not immediate. It will take time to see changes in attitudes and the overall school environment (Karp & Breslin, 2001; Stinchcomb et al., 2006; Youth Justice Board, 2004). However, once restorative processes are implemented, there is a drastic reduction in the overall time spent on conflict as restorative processes get to the root of the problem and can be done informally (Hopkins, 2006; Morrison et al., 2005).

b) School policies

Many school personnel worry that existing school policies may inhibit restorative processes and thus have to change in order to implement them. In Riestenberg's (2004)

research she found that restorative processes were less likely in more serious cases as disciplinary and punitive policies would override. Moreover, advocates of restorative justice would assert that it is impossible to holistically incorporate restorative processes in schools that maintain their current punitive policies. Although this thesis is about exploring this question in more detail, there are some existing responses and experience which attest that this challenge can be overcome.

Amstutz & Mullet (2005) believe that school policies do not need to change in order to facilitate restorative processes. They also state that some school policies already reflect a restorative philosophy without using such terminology (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005). For example, school policies which allow for flexibility through the exercise of discretion potentially allow for restorative processes. Moreover, Karp & Breslin (2001) as well as Riestenberg's (2004) research in American schools indicate that some schools have overcome the duelling war between policy and practice.

It would appear that this challenge can be overcome by involving the whole school and stakeholders in the implementation process; especially important is getting those in influential leadership positions to "buy-into" restorative processes, as their involvement in the practice may ease the gap between policy and the new practice (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Cameron and Thorsborne, 2001; Morrison et al., 2005; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Therefore, rather than policy guiding practice, their involvement may facilitate practice led policies.

c) Whole school approach

As discussed above, much research supports the idea that a whole school approach is essential to managing school violence. This is perhaps one of the major

challenges as without everyone, (especially at the school level) contributing to establishing restorative processes, the success and sustainability of initiatives is compromised (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Morrison et al., 2005; Stinchcomb et al., 2006; Whyte, 2006). Means to overcome the challenge of gaining whole school engagement include:

1. Provide statistics that emphasize the rising rates of expulsions and suspensions, attendance records, and other disciplinary measures as well as the research that demonstrates the negative long term consequences of such punitive responses;
2. Conduct surveys of the school environment and ask for suggestions from students and staff as to the best practices to reduce school violence in their school;
3. Ensure a representative cross-section of the school population to begin, which would include representation from students of different grades, gender, cultural groups, and interest groups, new and old teachers, and various members of school staff (Morrison et al., 2005).

Although this sounds simple, it is important to realize that it is not always feasible or realistic to engage the whole school in the beginning and doing so is a slow and methodical process (Morrison et al., 2005).

d) Paradigm shift

As stated above, fully incorporating restorative practices requires a paradigm shift: a complete transformation in how we think, educate, react and respond (Armstrong & Thorsborne, 2006; Zellerer, 2003). It requires a radical shift away from harsh disciplinary zero tolerance policies and authoritarian controls and punishment (Karp & Breslin, 2001). In order to facilitate the shift, there needs to be willingness to change,

which is sometimes difficult to achieve. Morrison et al. (2005) assert that strong “passionate and persistent” leadership is an important aspect of school reform.

Bazemore and Schiff (2005) admit that engaging the teachers and administration in RJ processes is difficult as many are unwilling or unable to consider another way of dealing with conflict and problem solving where they relinquish some control. To resolve this, it might be useful to either start with teaching the students the skills to build community and use restorative decision making or to provide training in restorative discipline and practices while teachers are still education students (Bazemore & Schiff; Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001).

e) Cost

Introducing new programs in schools or making any radical changes to existing programs have large financial costs. The potential costs associated with introducing restorative processes into schools, involves training for staff, teachers and students, providing ongoing support (for professionals or community organizations to facilitate change), and providing space (if new space needs to be allocated) (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001; Casella, 2003; Hopkins, 2002; Ierley & Claassen-Wilson, 2003; Riestenberg, 2004).

Armstrong and Thorsborne (2006) assert that the best way to refute the financial debate is to calculate the financial costs of the current processes. Many believe that if schools analyzed the financial costs incurred for current disciplinary actions, alternatives may be more attractive (Armstrong & Thorsborne, 2006; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Moreover, a plethora of research (as stated above) indicates that the social costs of using

exclusionary and punitive tactics to deal with school violence are large considering the links to later deviance, criminality and psychological trauma.

Lastly, with the wider implementation of restorative processes it is important to ensure that such processes are consistent with the values and principles of the practice (Hopkins, 2002). An inability to do so can exacerbate problems potentially leading to re-victimizations, or causing further harm within the school community (Hopkins, 2002). For example, rushing processes rather than taking time to ensure safety and preparedness or allowing inexperienced people to lead processes can lead to more harm than good. The best solution to increase the chances of success is to ensure there is an external group (familiar with restorative processes and values) that can help to facilitate and support the implementation of processes.

V. Summary of the Reviewed Literature

This review of the literature began with highlighting the current issue of school violence as a central theme to this research. Although the latter part of this thesis does not re-visit the rates, incidences of or effects of bullying and school violence, it was important to discuss this in order to emphasize the immediacy of implementing effective responses to school violence.

In the last two chapters, I reviewed the two most popular initiatives that have been used internationally to respond to school violence; anti-bullying initiatives and zero tolerance policies. Although they are completely different responses, where one is designed to provide education and prevention, while the other emphasizes punishment and discipline, the evidence indicates that it is important to consider other options. We need to place resources and commitments into more long term, holistic initiatives that

engage the whole school, are needs based and begin at the school level. As such, the most reasonable and viable response capable of meeting these requirements seems to be restorative justice.

With an increased interest in the use of restorative practices, these responses are slowly being implemented across various contexts. Bringing together those involved in harm through inclusive and collaborative processes with their community and support systems, and encouraging them to work towards a solution facilitates the healing of relationships and making things right.

RJ is different than the other school violence options as it is not solely a program or model but a way of being in the world. Unlike the other responses, it is not only focussed on preventing or solving the immediate concern but rather on improving relationships and making things better. With the current debate over how to define restorative justice and disagreement over what terms to use, it seems to involve both values and processes.

Moreover, research in the field of restorative justice is typically far from rigorous or methodologically sound. However, through looking at the qualitative research and anecdotal evidence, the use of restorative processes in schools is promising. Restorative justice is not a theory but rather a paradigm. Unlike traditional criminological theories, different assumptions can be made. Although aspects of other theories may be revealed through the practice of RJ, this paradigm is still in the development stages in terms of fulfilling criteria to be recognized as a theory. Social bonding theory highlights the importance of the school as a primary venue for socialization. Thus, it supports that appropriate responses to conflict and aggression need to be supportive of strengthening a

weakened social bond. Actions such as suspending or expelling students for breaking a specific rule should be abandoned as they will likely fuel greater problems, such as severing their bonds to school, peers, and society. It is established that weak bonds to society along with negative school experiences are predictors for later criminal and anti-social behaviour. Through the use of processes that engage the community to support and mentor those involved in situations of harm and wrongdoing, restorative processes can facilitate the strengthening of social bonds.

CHAPTER IV

Methodology

The initial purpose of this study was to examine if the pro-active use of restorative processes in schools also functioned as crime prevention tools. This question was developed through my involvement with a not-for-profit youth organization (YOUCAN) that trains youth in schools and communities in developing conflict resolution strategies. YOUCAN (Youth Organizing to Understand Conflict and Advocate Non-violence) is Ottawa based and delivers national and international training through interactive modules. The nine interactive modules that YOUCAN's youth trainers deliver are: introduction to conflict resolution; peer mediation; negotiation; cross-cultural conflict resolution; peer helping; facilitation; peace circles; youth taking action; and train the trainers³¹. Since 1997, YOUCAN trained over 20,000 youth in schools and communities from across Canada in the skills and abilities to safely prevent and resolve conflict and advocate non-violence. After operating for ten years and vastly expanding in the last few years, YOUCAN is in need of evaluation research. While believing that their initiatives foster crime prevention, there was no research to date to substantiate this claim, thus leading to my interest in this topic.

I. Research Decisions

Through an examination of YOUCAN's goals, training manuals and mission statement it seemed that their practices were consistent with the values and processes of restorative justice. An extensive review of literature also established that training in conflict resolution techniques is generally consistent with restorative justice. From this

³¹ See Appendix B for a detailed description of the training modules.

standpoint, I was motivated to explore whether such trainings in schools had an impact on improving the skills and abilities of youth and decreasing their involvement in criminal and antisocial behaviour.

The research site was a secondary school in the Greater Toronto area that completed school wide training in three of YOUCAN's training modules³². The grade nine classes were trained in '*Introduction to Conflict Resolution*', the grade ten classes were trained in '*Peer Mediation*' and the grade eleven classes were trained in '*Negotiation*.'

i. Initial Research Question

My initial research question was "Can the proactive use of restorative processes act as crime prevention?" This question was to be answered through focussing on the following:

- i. Does conflict resolution training lead to a positive and peaceful school environment?
- ii. Are school staff and students interested in and supportive of a shift to restorative processes to prevent and respond to school conflicts and violence?
- iii. Is the implementation and development of a positive school environment contingent on the administrators and teachers?
- iv. Does conflict resolution training have an effect on the incidence of violence and conflict?
- v. Are the students taking more initiative in resolving conflicts since the training?

It was hypothesized that the proactive use of restorative justice techniques through conflict resolution training would reduce the incidences of conflict, violence and bullying as well as lead to the perception of a more positive and peaceful school environment. It was intended that a mixed methods research model would be employed, where both

³² See Appendix B for a list and brief description of all of YOUCAN's training modules.

quantitative (analysis of school records and surveys) and qualitative methods (use of interviews and focus groups) would be used to explore the relationship between restorative processes and crime prevention in this school. This design was initially chosen in order to increase the validity of the study.

Mixed methods, viewed as the third paradigm in research methods, combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to produce a 'superior product' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). It is more formally defined as "the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative or qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts, or language into a single study" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 17). However, Becker (1996) states that such processes are not new and that qualitative researchers always use whatever methods are required to best answer their research questions.

The quantitative data collection was to contain two components. The first involved reviewing survey data previously collected by YOUCAN before and after the delivery of their training modules in the research school. This data was intended to measure the students' behaviours and attitudes towards conflict and violence (pre and post-training). The second quantitative measure was to examine the records from the school on disciplinary infractions from the years before and during the delivery of YOUCAN's training.

However, upon review of the research data collected by YOUCAN in this school, it was discovered that there was no baseline (before training) or follow-up quantitative data that measured students' attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, the school records were unavailable as the principal noted that there was no such school data despite

previous confirmations³³. It was now evident that it would be implausible to collect the quantitative data that were essential to answer my quantitatively framed research questions and to prove or disprove my hypotheses.

The qualitative data collection, as initially construed, was to enrich the quantitative data. The six qualitative interviews³⁴ with the teachers and staff and the three focus groups with students were intended to provide insights into their thoughts and perspectives on their school environment, restorative justice and whether they felt that the YOUCAN training sessions had a preventative function. Ultimately, the qualitative data collection went forward and the interview and focus group outlines that were constructed to answer the initial research question were loosely followed. With this now being the only two forms of data collection they became even more valuable in guiding the research.

During the data collection, I learned immediately that this school went through some major changes over a period of three years. This school appeared to adopt a different culture. There seemed to be a new acceptance of values and practices despite the presence of the same challenges³⁵ and ZT policies.

Rather than focussing on the outcome of YOUCAN's training and crime prevention, it became important to explore further into this school's culture³⁶. There were indications such as the YOUCAN training in conflict resolution, along with the values and processes exercised in this school that led me to consider if this school culture may

³³ The reason given for this oversight was because the school had only seen a few suspensions and expulsions in the last two years, and office referrals were not routinely documented.

³⁴ The structure of the questions for the interviews is featured in Appendix C, and the outline for the focus groups is in Appendix D.

³⁵ The school's population includes great ethnic diversity, a large proportion of the students were recent immigrants, and the majority of students spoke English as a second language.

³⁶ The elements of the school culture I was interested in were defined by the school and are discussed later in this chapter under "research site."

be related to the implementation of restorative processes. However, I needed to understand how they viewed their school culture and if they felt it was related to restorative processes. Lastly, I needed to understand how this new culture and practices could be possible while the school was still under a ZT policy. This led to the development of a new research question.

ii. Final Research Questions

As mentioned above, with the loss of the quantitative component and the new insight provided from the qualitative inquiries, the dominant research question thus became: “Are restorative practices/processes possible in a Canadian school governed by zero tolerance policies?”

In exploring this question, additional smaller research questions emerged:

- i. How is restorative justice defined in this context?
- ii. What kinds of conflicts exist in the school, and how are they resolved?
- iii. How is the culture in the school characterized?
- iv. What are thoughts and perceptions on the zero tolerance policy?
- v. Are restorative processes evident in the school and how are such processes used?

Although not all of these questions were initially raised by the researcher, they emerged through discussions in all of the focus groups and interviews.

II. Research Site

The research site as mentioned above was a secondary school within the *Toronto District School Board (TDSB)*. This school was chosen partly because in October of 2005, all of the grade nine, ten and eleven students received YOUCAN’s training in conflict resolution. This school was also different from other schools as their vision on

providing this training was not centred solely on making the school a better place. According to the school principal and Executive Director of YOUCAN, Dave Farthing, the focus of training was also on improving the skills and abilities of the youth and empowering them to make positive decisions and take positive actions in their everyday lives. From these statements and the information provided about this school I became additionally interested in learning more about this school.

As stated above, this school openly publicized that they adopted a new school culture, characterized by significant changes. According to a handout created by the school principal, over 4 years, this school went from suspending 124 students to two suspensions this year³⁷ (Anonymous, 2006a). There was an increase in parents attending parent teacher interviews (from approximately 35-45 to 250-300), increased rates of literacy and math skills and increases in students' attendance (Anonymous, 2006a). Moreover, 44% more students were passing Provincial exams and there was a reduction of 40% in students who are failing courses (Bergman et al, 2005: 48). School officials believe that their reaction-based, hectic, chaotic, confrontational and noisy environment school transformed into a positive, proactive, calm, respectful and dignified school (Anonymous, 2006a). According to the school officials this transformation in culture transcended from fostering respect, responsibility and role modelling (Bergman et al., 2005; Anonymous, 2006b). Moreover, the school officials assert that the elements of change in the school culture were: attitudes, discipline/behaviours, academic programs, academic supports, student support programs, parents, community agencies (Anonymous, 2006a).

³⁷ As of April 2006 for the 2005-2006 school year there were only 2 suspensions. However, as of August 2005, in his Maclean's article Bergman (2005: 48) reported suspensions were down from 125 a year to 11.

The student body at this school is approximately 715-720 with a teaching staff of 49. This school was “among one of the city’s most economically disadvantaged schools, and had a rough reputation as the place where kids who weren’t likely to succeed bided their time” (Bergman et al, 2005: 48). Many of the students in this school came from single parent families and receive income assistance (Anonymous, 2006a). This school also “struggles to serve an immigrant population hailing from 54 countries and families who often subsist on welfare” (Bergman et al., 2005:48). This translates into only 58% of the students’ speaking English as their primary language, 13% of the students living in Canada for less than two years, and another 15% for less than five years (Anonymous, 2006a).

With this information in mind, it became important to understand this school culture and to explore if it was representative of restorative processes and how this school culture could exist under the *SSA*.

III. Ethical Considerations

The initial research proposal went to the Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa in February of 2006. Due to the involvement of youth participants, this project required full ethics board approval. The ethical concerns in this study were:

- i. The possible need for support for any students who may disclose any personal experiences or feel uneasy following the focus groups;
- ii. Issues of confidentiality;
- iii. Parental consent;
- iv. Ensuring student’s participation being voluntary.

In response to these concerns, the school counsellor was made aware of the research and was available at the school during and following all of the interviews and

focus groups. Focus group participants were reminded they could withdraw from the study at any time and were notified of the supports available to them. As well, the questions in the interviews and focus groups were designed so that participants were not asked to share any personal victimization or harmful experiences.

The focus group participants were asked to keep the names and comments made by others confidential following the focus groups. Lastly, the youth participants were required to have their parents' complete consent forms (see Appendix E) for participation as well as to complete an assent form³⁸ (see Appendix F) themselves. In order to stress that this study was voluntary and they had nothing to fear or lose through participating, the students were taken aside individually before beginning to ensure their voluntary participation.

Given that this research project was initially done in part within YOUCAN's evaluation of their training in the school, this study did not need to go through formal approval processes at the school and school board level. Permission to conduct the research was granted by the school principal and a representative from the school board both through verbal and written communication.

IV. Data Collection

i. Qualitative Interviews with Staff and Teachers

The participants for the interviews were first recruited through the placement of notices (see Appendix H) in all of the staff and teacher's mailboxes. This random widespread distribution of invitations to participate was conducted to ensure a diversity of teacher and staff interview participants. For this research it was important to have

³⁸ This is a consent form for minors (under the age of 18) to complete before their participation in research.

diverse voices and experiences to develop a more complete understanding of the school environment and perceptions of restorative processes.

On the distributed notices, interested interview participants (teachers and staff) were instructed to contact me to schedule an interview or if they had any questions or concerns. However, there were very few responses (only three) to the initial call for participants. The next step involved a snowballing and purposive sampling technique³⁹. The YOUCAN school coordinator (a teacher volunteer) was asked to help select staff and teachers who would be willing to participate and would also represent diversity in experiences. As well, I directly contacted one of the school administrators to participate as his/her perspective was thought to be valuable.

Upon arrival at the school, I was unaware of which staff and teachers were participating except for the three who had emailed in advance. All of the interviews were arranged and scheduled by the YOUCAN school coordinator and the school secretary. Due to this arrangement, the interview participants were told their participation could not be guaranteed confidential since they delegated someone else to arrange their interview times. However, interviewees were reassured that their identity and comments would be protected in the reports through the use of pseudonyms.

All consent forms for participation in the interviews⁴⁰ (see Appendix G) were completed at the beginning of the interviews. The interviews were all held within the school in private offices and were attended only by myself and the individual respondents. The interviews were conducted informally and more like causal

³⁹ The purpose of this sampling was to get a varied but representative sample that would provide deep insight.

⁴⁰ Different consent forms were used for the interviews with teachers and staff then the consent and assent forms for the student focus groups.

conversations. Since the interviews were tape recorded, I tried to maintain consistent eye contact while taking brief notes.

The interview outline (see Appendix C) was the same for all the staff and teacher interviews but was loosely followed. For example, if the interviewee answered one of the questions in previous discussions the question was not re-asked. As well, several other follow up questions were asked to get respondents to clarify or to explore in greater detail. The interview outline was comprised of all open-ended questions and was an original construction designed to answer the initial research question. The main themes that the participants were asked about were: their understanding of restorative justice; how they perceived their school environment; conflict and how it was resolved in their school; their thoughts on the increased implantation of restorative processes in schools; and their feelings around the YOUCAN training.

There were six interviews with teachers and staff completed over two days. Four interviews were completed by teachers and the other two by school staff. All of the respondents had very different experiences: some were new to the school, others had been there for several years; some had worked or taught in different counties, while others had worked or taught in different school districts. Moreover, all of the respondents assumed different roles in the school: one was an administrator, two were non-academic teachers, one was a support staff; and two were academic teachers. Despite their differences, all of the respondents taught or were exposed to different students.

The interviews lasted approximately one hour with all the interviewees providing a wealth of information. Due to time constraints, one interview was only 45 minutes and another exceeded time availability, so it was continued the following day. Positive

rapport was easily established and maintained throughout the interviews. All of the interviewees, but two, seemed eager and interested in participating.

One interviewee was nervous at the beginning and was uncertain that she had anything of value to offer. I assured her that I had no expectations and that all of her responses and perspectives were very important to the research. Another participant was concerned about her time constraints and at the beginning seemed uptight and uneasy (possibly uncomfortable). However, when I told her she had a choice and no obligation to participate she stated that she really wanted to participate. Once the interview began this participant became very engaged and was passionate about the topics providing profound comments and perspectives. The interviewees were thanked for their meaningful contribution and in return they also thanked me for listening to their perspectives and ideas.

ii. Focus Groups with Students

The sampling method employed for the collection of the focus group participants was a combination of purposive sampling techniques. The first steps involved snowballing/judgment sampling. The teachers were asked to hand out the information and consent forms to twelve students from grades nine, ten and eleven who were representative of the diverse voices and experiences of the students in the school. This meant that 36 students were invited to participate. This over-sampling was done to ensure voluntary participation and to account for attrition, so that in the end each group would have a minimum of six participants.

For the next step, a convenience sampling technique was used. The teachers were instructed to inform the twelve students who were given the form, that the first eight

students to complete and return the assent and parental consent forms would participate in the focus groups. This last step was done as a safeguard to ensure that those students who participated would be doing so voluntarily. Since the focus group required the students to speak in front of others, it was important that all the students wanted to openly contribute and be active participants.

A week before the focus groups occurred there were very few assent and consent forms returned so the school staff made several announcements asking the students to return their forms. The forms were returned to the YOUCAN school coordinator and given to me upon arrival at the school. Before the focus groups began I made sure the participants participation was voluntary and reminded them about confidentiality and respecting others in the group.

The focus group outline was similar to the interview outline (see Appendix D) with open-ended questions designed to facilitate open discussions. I began the focus groups by posing an initial point of discussion of “what is restorative justice” and observed the group’s discussions. I acted primarily as a facilitator and an observer but also posed topics for discussion when the students wandered off topic or were silent. As in the interviews, I would ask additional questions based on what the students said, asking for clarification or more details.

Rapport with the students in all the groups was established quickly as I spoke with each of them before the group discussions began to give them a chance to ask me questions and get comfortable. The first group with the grade nine students had difficulty getting started as this group seemed to be more nervous and reluctant to speak. However, once the discussions began, they appeared to be more relaxed and open.

The focus groups were held over a two day period and each lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. The students were called to attend their appropriate focus groups through an announcement made by the office. The focus groups were hosted in a back room in the school's library. The names of the students who participated were not made public to other teachers, staff or students. The focus groups were tape recorded and attended only by the participants and myself.

a) Grade 9 students

This group contained six students; four boys and two girls and in general this group was quiet. Their responses were brief and they needed encouragement to dialogue. At the beginning, one girl was engaged in the conversations until the group singled her out as being from another school. I discouraged the group from doing this and encouraged the girl to speak by posing questions directly at her. However, she became withdrawn and her further involvement and responses were very brief and limited. Besides this incident, the rest of the group participants regularly participated and were engaged in the discussion.

b) Grade 10 students

This group was also six students but consisted of all girls. In this group, one of the girls pointed out that another girl was new to the school. Unlike with the grade nine group it was done in a very positive and welcoming way which encouraged her to participate. In this group the participants were all active and vocal, resulting in little to no silence during the discussions. Two of the girls were quieter than the others but they still participated by nodding their heads, or using simple yes or no responses to indicate their

agreement or disagreement with the group discussions. When questions were posed directly to these girls, they would respond but appeared to be not as comfortable and outgoing as the others.

Also in this group, the participants generally voiced the same opinions. Rarely was there a dissent in voices. There were two girls who were very outgoing and were usually the first to respond to all the questions and comments made by others. They were both very loud and on several occasions took the discussions off topic. When this occurred, I would address others in the group with questions and they were respectful and mindful to bring the discussion back on topic.

Overall this group was very respectful of others and did not make negative comments. However, it came to my attention at the end of the focus group that these girls may all be close friends. One of the girls was telling a story about one of her friends and everyone else in the group was participating, adding to the story. As such, this group's discussion may not be as diverse in perspectives and opinions but did provide a lot of information to facilitate a greater understanding and insight into the school environment and restorative processes.

c) Grade 11 students

This was the most difficult focus group to facilitate and manage. This group also had six people, five girls and one boy. This group was challenging as they were very loud and outgoing. This was great for participation and discussion, but sometimes it was difficult to follow the conversations. There was one girl in the group who dominated the discussions and demonstrated very strong opinions which made my role as a facilitator difficult. There was also so much chatter, arguing, interruption and talking over each

other that information was missed in the transcriptions as parts were inaudible. I had to remind the group repeatedly about respect, speaking in turn, confidentiality and the privacy of others. As well, it was very hard to keep this group focussed on any related discussion topics. At one point they started talking about the boys and police they thought were good looking. On several occasions I had to re-introduce a topic for discussion.

During the discussion, the group explained the existence of two big cliques within the school. They talked about the dynamics associated with this and how everyone used to all be friends but now they are divided. Some of the comments made lead me to think that perhaps all the members of this focus group may represent this one clique thus providing only one perspective for this grade.

Many of the comments made in this group were very negative. Most of the negativity was introduced by the girl who dominated the discussions. However, although this girl was strongly opinionated and loud, the other group members spoke up when they felt her comments were inappropriate or inconsistent with their perspectives.

At some points I felt as though I was just being used by them to filter their complaints and issues. This indicated that they were very comfortable and trusted me but placed me in a difficult situation. In the end they asked me to share their comments with the school teachers and staff in hopes of addressing their grievances and their desires for change. I explained that the discussion was confidential but that some of their concerns may come up in my final report.

The worst part of this group session was that near the end, the photocopier was turned on in the room next to us. The noise was so loud and disturbing that not only did I leave twice to turn it off but there are sections of the recordings where the conversations

are inaudible. Despite the challenges, the independent discussions that emerged and the group dynamics were very interesting to observe and a lot of great information was shared and uncovered.

V. Limitations

The use of mixed methodology is frowned upon by some of the quantitative and qualitative purists (Becker, 1996). However, others would support my initial methodology as the best way to conduct research as employing both methods can provide a holistic understanding of the issue. Early on in the process, I made a conscious decision to forego the quantitative methodology as it would have been plagued with limitations. Moreover, changing my methodology and research questions during my data collection, while consistent with inductive research, could also be questioned by some as lacking in rigour. However, I felt it necessary to provide insight into the culture and practices in this school rather than pursue a study that would have been ridden with limitations. I feel the information provided by the participants will provide valuable information and make a significant contribution. The specific limitations of this study are discussed more thoroughly in the conclusion chapter.

VI. Trustworthiness

Although reliability and validity are terms used in quantitative research, qualitative research uses terms such as trustworthiness to discuss the “validity” of the findings. In this research, I employed multiple methods of data collection (triangulation) to account for the validity or to ensure the “authenticity” of my data. Although I lost the quantitative component of this research, I used both interviews with teachers and focus

groups with students to ensure that I was getting an accurate understanding and depiction of the truth from multiple perspectives. While analyzing the results, it was evident that using both data collection techniques reduced the presence of biases that may have been presented if I had only interviewed one of these groups. For example, when asking the students and teachers about the same incident, both groups represented different voices. These methods increased the trustworthiness of this data by representing the diverse voices in the school.

In hindsight, I could have used member checking to ensure reliability in my coding technique. However, through working closely with my supervisor and through coding the data more than once, using both manual and N-Vivo coding, I am confident that the data was coded accurately.

VII. Management and Interpretation of Results

All of the focus group and interview tapes were transcribed by the researcher. Following the creation of the written transcriptions, the information was formatted and entered into N-Vivo 2.0. This is a qualitative data analysis program that assisted the researcher in organizing and managing all the results. The information was then reviewed and analyzed for themes that emerged. In the next chapter, the findings from the focus groups and the interviews are presented based on the themes that emerged.

CHAPTER V

Results

In this chapter, the information provided by the research participants will be presented, as retrieved from the interviews with teachers/staff and focus groups held with students. Six themes emerged from the data collected from the participants. They include discussions on:

- i. Feelings about zero tolerance policies
- ii. Resolving of conflict within the school
- iii. Perceptions and thoughts on restorative justice
- iv. Current use of restorative processes
- v. Challenges of restorative processes
- vi. How conflicts should be resolved

I. Feelings about Zero Tolerance Policies (SSA)

i. Students in Focus Groups

Interpretations and opinions regarding zero tolerance (ZT) policies varied greatly. Within the focus group discussions, the grade eleven students did not know what zero tolerance policies were, while the grade ten students thought zero tolerance policies were solely about suspensions. Within the grade nine group, one of the students explained it to the rest of the group as *“Zero tolerance...for fighting...the school has a zero tolerance policy if you are fighting you are suspended right there.”*

Once definitions were provided as to what zero tolerance policies meant the comments from some of the students in all the grades included: *“not fair”*; *“not good at all;”* *“but there is a difference between starting it [a fight] and defending yourself.”* The grade eleven students generally thought ZT policies were good because, *“It teaches you a lesson”*; and it *“Keeps us cautious; we are more afraid to fight because we know the*

consequences.” When asked to explain more about how these reactions are good, one student from grade nine commented that,

“Well, it has small effects...stops people from doing a lot of things...let’s say for example if someone wanted to murder someone they would think twice because they would not want to go to jail, so it’s just like that in a way.”

Another student in grade nine supported ZT as he believed it had stopped a lot of fights from happening in the school.

ii. Staff and Teacher Interviewees

The interviewees provided more detailed responses, likely based on their greater understanding of the *Safe Schools Act (SSA)*. The majority of the interviewees did not agree with the overall imposition of zero tolerance policies. Two teachers felt that the *SSA* was too harsh, and failed to address both the root of the problem and individual situations.

One teacher blatantly stated *“I don’t agree with it... I think that every circumstance is different and you can’t make a sweeping generalized rule about something when every circumstance is different.”* Another staff interviewee supported these comments:

“You have to look at the individual situation...for example you may have a student whose parent is dying or something at home and they are all upset and they may end up getting in a fight and well you can understand what happened. And usually with something like that we will get a social worker in and get extra counselling as that kid does not deserve to be sent home for 5 days.” (Interview 2)

One teacher was specifically concerned with how ZT policies prevented the school from dealing with conflict in their own way and also from resolving issues at the school level.

He was further concerned with the *“harshness”* of the *SSA*:

“The Safe Schools Act and zero tolerance came into effect and what that came down to is when there are problems in schools, it is suspend or call the police. You know get the kids out of the schools, and very little leeway on part of administration. For example, if there was fight, police had to be called, whereas when I was in high school if you got in to a fight you weren’t sent home, weren’t suspended, police weren’t called and you were dealt with on the school level. Whether that was a detention or something like that but the punishments were meted out by school rather than justice system. I think it is a good idea to go back and get rid of zero tolerance policies. I think these zero tolerance policies are very heavy handed...I can see calling police for more like drugs, serious assaults and weapons but not for things like regular fights between two kids and to me that is a bit heavy handed.” (Interview 1)

One of the administrators believed that the *Safe Schools Act* was like a “*Chinese food menu*” in that particular consequences follow specific behaviours. This administrator did not believe in randomly suspending students and described it as “*one of the most inane things we do*” as most often the “*kids who are most at risk are the ones most getting suspended.*” He believed that suspending these kids denies them education and prevents the school from dealing with the problem immediately. Moreover he felt that not all students who get in a fight or break certain rules deserve to be sent home for a pre-determined period of time. In one of the examples he provided, he makes the distinction between someone who is being perpetually harassed and finally strikes out by hitting the culprit. From this, he strikes back and a fight erupts:

“You hit him, he hit you and what do we do? According to the act they are both out for 3 days. Well not according to me. You might go for an afternoon to chill out because your behaviour was inappropriate. Pushed or not you had the option of walking away or going to the office or talking to a teacher... His (the other youth) behaviour, because he is constantly in people’s faces, consequences have to be different.” (Interview 5)

While most of the interviewees expressed disdain for the *SSA* and ZT policies, two of the interviewees supported them in principle. Based on her experience with one student who was expelled from another school on teacher believed:

“The Safe Schools Act, in that they move students away from the potentials of hot spots is a good idea. It gets them away from their friends and puts them in a new environment...bringing them into this school where the kids won’t put up with that sort of attitude and the mentality that ‘I am a big guy’ and ‘in charge’ sort of attitude they just won’t put up with. They will wear them down, I don’t know how but they do it peacefully. (Interview 3)

Another teacher stated that she supports zero tolerance, but with some clarification of exactly what the policy is designed to do, it seemed she was confused between the use of suspensions and the imposition of zero tolerance responses.

II. Resolving Conflict within the School

i. Students in Focus Groups

The grade nine students believed that verbal disagreements are the first stage of conflict and can lead to more serious violence. They stated that more serious conflict seemed to be prevented as students usually talk out their problems and issues before they escalate. The group was in agreement that most often *“if it’s a disagreement that can be solved...you find a solution for the problem right there.”* However, some of the students in this group said that they first try to ignore the problem. Once the other group members alerted them that it is not always an option, the students listened to each other and worked together in discussing a more appropriate response. It became agreed upon that attempts should always be made to work things out rather than walking away.

The grade ten students believed that in their school, conflicts are “*sort of like mediated, if its major we don’t deal with it by ourselves.*” They explained that they first talk to either a principal, guidance counsellor, or a teacher to get help. Moreover,

“if a teacher notices something is happening they will tell the guidance counsellor and make an appointment with you and sit down and talk with both the people who have a problem and if it gets really bad I guess you would go to Mr. Thomas.”⁴¹

The grade eleven students expressed that they agreed with the way that conflicts were dealt with and felt that it is usually done fairly. However, one voice stood out, explaining what she believes happens when a fight occurs:

“The school doesn’t like that... they put us in separate rooms and they say ‘you sorry, you sorry’ they put you together or you get suspended or they call the cops they never do anything.”

During this part of the discussion, most of the responses came from a dominant female voice in the group. Later in discussions she further stated that:

“the police were called in, the school did not want to solve anything it was not fair they would not even let us talk....when something happens they do not let us do anything, they won’t even let us talk.”

This opinion is likely biased by her personal experience; she viewed conflict as only being dealt with in this manner. Given that the only voice heard in this discussion was hers, a diverse opinion from all others was not represented. However, I suspect that this opinion is based on an isolated bad experience as this female respondent and others in the grade eleven discussion group spoke openly and candidly about various points about more inclusive and participatory ways that conflicts are usually resolved in the school.

⁴¹ Use of a pseudonym for the principal.

ii. Staff and Teacher Interviewees

There was common agreement amongst the staff in how conflicts are generally resolved. It was corroborated by the interviewees that students usually try to work things out and settle their disputes and conflicts on their own first. The administrator stated:

“Conflict...the kids deal with it a lot. [for example] I was in the cafeteria a 2 or 3 weeks ago and there were two guys sitting at a table across from each other... and they starting getting in an argument and they jumped up and started going for each other. I was like 10 - 12 feet away and before I got there, 6 - 8 kids had already intervened and said ‘this is really stupid guys like we don’t do that’. We are hearing a lot of that now that ‘we don’t do that here’ coming out of our kids.” (Interview 5)

Another interviewee mentioned that:

“Kids try to sort things out themselves a lot and if it gets beyond that, the staff or the Vice-Principal will get involved. They do get the kids together to talk about their problems... I know there was an instance with girls falling out in the hallway just before March break. I know one of the girls in the group said to the others ‘this is not the way to resolve it’ and she was trying to stop it and sort it out herself saying ‘look this is not the way to do this, there is no point in getting into a fight and arguing about it we can sort this out another way’ They do try to sort it out themselves.” (Interview 3)

In situations when students are incapable of resolving their own conflicts, two interviewees stated that disagreements that are not physical are usually dealt with in student services or by the teachers. Three interviewees stated that any incidents of physical violence or fighting are usually dealt with by the administration. One interviewee who handles a lot of the conflicts in the school commented that the issues and problems as well as solutions and circumstances are talked over with the students, the counsellor, an administrator, and sometimes the parents.

One teacher interviewee felt that conflicts were dealt with in a very low key manner and are rarely blown out of proportion. Moreover she asserted that “*Peter*⁴² is really good at hearing both sides of the conflict.” Another teacher feels that conflicts are resolved with “*flexibility... within individuality*”. Although the conflicts are kept on the “*down low*”, the administrator insisted that “*conflict is taken seriously but dealt with fairly and equitably.*”

The majority of interviewees were in agreement as to how conflicts were resolved, except for one teacher interviewee. This teacher felt that the way things are resolved was usually acceptable, however, there are some instances where she believed that “*there needs to be broader consequences and more consistency.*” More specifically, she was concerned with the disparity and lack of fairness between how conflicts are dealt with in the school under study, in comparison to other schools in the district:

“The thing is, the consistency goes beyond your own school, and if a kid is being suspended and having their parents phoned and being made to write a letter to explain why they did what they did, whereas a kid down the road at Princeford⁴³ Collegiate would be suspended for 5 days and that goes on his record for the same thing then that is also a lack of consistency. Sometimes I think that at this school, the dealing with it in a respectful way and calling the parents and having everyone resolve everything together stops working at a certain point where there needs to be bigger consequences.” (Interview 6)

This teacher’s concerns are valid as she is concerned with issues of fairness and perhaps discrimination. She emphasized that she was supportive and liked the way things are generally resolved in the school but worries about how students in other schools feel.

⁴² Use of pseudonym for the school principal

⁴³ Use of pseudonym for a neighbouring secondary school.

III. Perceptions and Thoughts on Restorative Justice

When all of the research participants were asked to share their thoughts about restorative justice (RJ), a great diversity in responses was presented. For example, in the focus groups, one group's dialogue centred on it as a *"fixing justice,"* to *"fix what is wrong"* as well as to *"maintain order."* Another group immediately responded that they had no idea about restorative justice. After suggesting that they take a guess, they commented that it was *"like criminals and then you give them education....I think like restoring their character"*, and *"maybe justice that has been held back."* Once a definition was provided to this group, one member asked if it was like therapy. The youngest focus group (the grade nines) had extensive dialogue on the meaning of restorative justice. Some of their ideas were: *"a proper form of justice...not revengeful"*; *"people get equal rights they have lost during a conflict;"* and *"used to stop a crime."*

All of the interviewees shared their interpretations of RJ, although three of the interviewees immediately commented that they had never heard the term *"restorative justice."* One interviewee mentioned it was related to Indian culture and circle processes. Another interviewee used specific examples of conflict resolution and negotiation as RJ.

Restitution in the form of giving back to the school or to those who were harmed was mentioned the most. Instead of defining RJ as restitution as the others did, one interviewee believed that restitution was a likely outcome of restorative processes. Another interviewee stated that RJ is the opposite of suspensions and other punitive responses. Lastly, two respondents spoke about RJ as equalling things out or returning them to their original state and finding a peaceful balance when an injustice has been done.

One interviewee felt strongly that RJ is responsive and reactive,

“I think it [RJ] is trying to fix the problem after the problem has occurred and there is nothing wrong with that and making sure that it does not happen again. I guess for me in this school, we are more into how are we going to address the problems before they happen.” (Interview 5)

Whereas another teacher stated that *“maybe it is crime prevention.”* It is evident that amongst this group there are many different interpretations as to what restorative justice exactly means. However, everyone agrees that it is different than punitive forms of discipline such as suspensions or expulsion.

i. Additional Thoughts on Restorative Processes

Following the opening question on restorative justice, a widely accepted definition⁴⁴ was provided to those who inquired:

“RJ is a process that brings together those who have been harmed by a conflict or incident and their communities to talk about how they were harmed and the feelings associated with that harm. The intention of RJ is to help individuals involved in conflict work together to find a solution and to be able to overcome and move on with their lives. Lastly, common restorative models include circles, mediations, reconciliation and conferencing.”

Following this definition, all of the research participants (from interviews and focus groups) stated they believed in RJ and agreed with the use of such processes for addressing conflict.

a) Students in Focus Groups

The focus group participants believed that RJ provides people with an opportunity to air issues openly. The students felt it was also important for victims, as it allowed

⁴⁴ This definition was derived from Zehr (2002) and Van Ness (2005).

them the opportunity to share their feelings, be supported; and further understand what happened to them. One grade ten student thought RP were important as:

“Sometimes you feel so horrible that someone would do that to you and sometimes you can’t go to certain people or anyone and it feels good that when you are in a circle with people you can say anything and it will stay there in the circle.”

According to the grade eleven students, RP allows the person who committed the wrong to view the implications of their actions. One student added that *“if they see the pain that people are going through they will feel the pain and you say I don’t want to do this anymore it’s another human being.”* The grade nine students engaged in further discussion about how they thought restorative processes would work better than court. They believed people would feel more comfortable talking about their problem in the group as others would be more likely to listen. Moreover, they felt that this opportunity would also allow the causes of people’s problems to get more attention than they would in a court room.

b) Staff and Teacher Interviewees

Similarly, the teachers and staff felt that restorative processes have a place in schools. Specifically, three interviewees thought such options were very effective, especially in comparison to suspensions. One respondent commented that such practices can alter the tone in a school to be more positive. Another interviewee believed in how restorative processes involved and engaged the parents. She felt that in such situations when parents are involved, students tend to be more honest and it *“makes it more real and [the student] understand[s] better.”*

Two interviewees believed that the experience of getting to hear and understand how behaviour has affected and harmed others is an effective and valuable experience to the student. One teacher said it was great for students to see how their actions affected others,

“If the kids know what effects they are having on people it makes it more effective ...they realize that, ‘oh wait I did not know I was doing that.’ And maybe they did not understand what the consequences of their actions were on other people. In theory they should be able to take that out of the classroom as well and think before they act outside of school.” (Interview 3)

One interviewee felt that restorative processes are “*one of the biggest factors driving success in this school.*” This interviewee cited that using such practices and training youth in using the skills and abilities to resolve conflict pays off academically. In his opinion, as behaviour improves in the school, academic success also increases.

IV. Current Use of Restorative Processes

i. Students in Focus Groups

In the focus groups, four students, two in grade eleven and two in grade ten, provided examples of when they were involved in processes that they interpreted as restorative. One grade eleven said:

“I got in a fight with a friend and it was really a teacher he was there, the neutral kind of the bystander and he was not involved in the situation so he and my friend and I kind of solved our problem and it worked...we solved our issues and we are still friends and we talk to each other a lot still.”

Another of the students mentioned her experience where a mutual friend was the neutral third party who brought herself and her arguing friend together to talk. This grade eleven girl admitted she hated confrontation and usually runs away during such situations.

However, she stated that since that meeting where they were able to talk and settle their differences, they are all still friends.

One girl in the grade ten focus group provided a description of her experience where she would call up her friends and they would help her work through her problems and to respond in better ways. Another girl in this group shared a similar experience:

“My friend would actually come to me and start crying and we went in a corner and talked about it and I felt like crying because she just broke down, everything was so bad for her: her family, her boyfriend everything. I just told her everything was going to be okay”.

When I asked the group, *“restorative processes... those who have been affected get together with a neutral third party and talk about it and work out a solution. Have any of you been involved?”* Another girl commented *“yes.”* When I asked how it felt to be involved in such processes, she stated that it

“Felt good in a way because I could help her [a friend] because she did not know what to do and she kept asking me and the other person what should I do... and I told her to follow her heart and to think about whose most important and what she did wrong and what she can do better and make it better.”

Through clarification it seemed that this group may have misinterpreted what I explained when defining RJ. They viewed restorative processes as helping friends find solutions and being there to listen. Although traditionally these qualities are not representative of RP, the skills and values (listening, validation, empathy and support) are present in their examples.

The grade nine students all stated that they had not seen or had any experience in using RP both inside and outside of their school.

ii. Staff and Teacher Interviewees

On the other hand, all of the interviewees provided rich and diverse experiences and interpretations of how restorative processes were used. One teacher, who has taught at the school for several years, provided the following example of how RP are used in the school:

“Yeah I think we do it all the time. Kids get to clean lockers or scrub desktops. Like if we catch a kid littering in the hallway and the principal gets involved he will have the kids cleaning something or giving back to the school in some way.”
(Interview 1)

He also provided an example of a student who lost a school laptop which was suspected to be due to negligence. Since the student would not have the money to repay the school for the loss the student was able to work in the school towards paying it off. Although this sounds like restitution, in the context of his interview and his later comments, he clearly understood the difference between restorative and punitive practices (restitution). This teacher (who also considers himself involved in school affairs) stated the use of RP is very informal and is used instead of “*official sanctions.*” He feels there is little discussion on the formal use of RP. Instead he thinks that the school principal and vice-principal use such processes informally in place of suspending and punishing students.

The following section is broken into smaller sections, which demonstrates the different ways restorative processes were being used in the school. According to the interviews, restorative processes are used in a variety of ways: by students seeking assistance in preventing incidents; to mediate disputes between students as well as teachers and students; in classrooms; and for settling disputes between teachers.

a) Students Seeking Assistance for Preventing Incidents

One staff member stated that since the students have been more educated and encouraged to use restorative processes she is seeing more students seeking assistance and guidance with their problems rather than fighting. She commented,

“I have had a number of students from grade nine come to me and say ‘Miss, I am going to get into trouble I am just ready to pound this person out and I know I don’t want to do that, I really need some help.’ I had quite a few this year and a couple last week came in and said. ‘Miss, I am going to get into a fight and I really don’t want to can you please do something?’ And we will calm them down and talk things out, it works quite nicely.” (Interview 2)

In this example, students are coming to student services where the counsellor is trained in mediation and conflict resolution in order to get assistance in preventing fights and problems from escalating. The interviewee also stated that these students are interested in talking things out and using mediations rather than fighting or ignoring the problem.

Two of the interviewees commented that they have observed youth in the school hallways actively self-monitoring each other’s behaviours and *“talking out their issues.”* As mentioned above, interviewees said that they often hear kids telling other kids that they cannot behave in certain ways in this school.

b) Use of Mediation

One of the staff interviewees mentioned that she received referrals about conflicts from other staff and teachers and facilitated the use of restorative processes with students. She feels that using peer mediation models, where the older students act as mediators for disputes and issues among younger students, works *“wonderfully and beautifully.”* In one example, the process involved four people: two peer mediators (older students) and two disputants (younger students). She commented that it was amazing to watch as the peer

mediators were able to effectively get to the underlying issues and say things that teachers or staff would not be able to.

A further example was provided by one of the teacher interviewees where she specifically asked for mediation with a student following an incident that troubled her:

“Last year I had a student take off on me on a field trip and I did not really want to punish the student but it was really important to me that he understand how afraid I had been and understood that I was responsible and he understood how I felt. So we went into Peter’s office and yeah I was able to get across how I felt and the student was able to try to explain why he left and why he thought it was okay.”(Interview 4)

Another teacher interviewee stated the only time she experienced restorative processes was when a student was offended by her. She met with the principal about it and they decided to meet together with the student and his parent to further discuss the issue. She felt that both she and the student were satisfied and felt better following the meeting.

Another teacher mentioned that she regularly sends students to student services to seek assistance in getting their conflicts resolved peacefully. As well, she stated that mediated meetings are used in the school for incidents involving fighting or conflicts but also for stealing and vandalism. She stated that these meetings are usually hosted by the administrators and involve the students and their parents.

Similarly, the administrator stated that when there are disagreements that result in disciplinary action, the stakeholders (parents, affected staff or students) are always involved. As well, in rare situations where a student is sent home, he stated that the student must return back to the school with a parent, so they can *“all sit together and work things out.”*

c) Use of Restorative Processes in the Classroom

One teacher found that she uses so called restorative processes in her classroom all the time. She provided an example of two students who were debating and arguing in her class. While things were escalating, this teacher said she promptly took both these students aside, asked them to speak one at a time and to listen to what each other was saying. She said these students were able to work things out and it happened so *“naturally and quickly.”* Before the students re-joined the class she checked in with them individually to make sure that they were both okay.

d) Use of Restorative Processes for Problems among Teachers and Staff

One teacher spoke of an incident that occurred when she was new to the school and was accused of saying rude remarks about another teacher. Very upset and scared as no one knew her in the school she went to the administrator for support. The principal responded by arranging and facilitating a mediation between the teachers involved. The interviewee stated she liked the process as it was a controlled environment where she could speak and get things out without being cut off or interrupted.

Despite the interviewees and students testimonies that RP occur in the school, the administrator (although he is supportive) is reluctant to call the school’s practices restorative justice. He supports his position with the following comments:

“I have sat at this table many times with 2 kids and their parents to look at a solution to the problem and that type of stuff and ... do I say we are going to do Restorative Justice, no. We are going to sit down and come up with some way that we can co-exist together in this building... We talk about why one person is upset what they feel has happened. This makes it clear to the other person. I operate with the kids on one person speaking at a time initially... I have [also] done it on occasion when staff had disagreements with each other... Lets sit down and work together towards a solution and we can all walk out of the room feeling good. Also [used RP] between staff and kids, where a teacher and student are having a

difficult time and there has been an incident... put it back together so everyone is comfortable with that kid being back in the classroom and they are working on their credit again, there is no point in having the student back in the classroom if there has not been some sort of resolution to the problem... This is who we are and where we are going here. I have never been trained in it. So I don't know if what I am doing is Restorative Justice.” (Interview 5)

Through reflecting on the comments made by the administrator, it is clear he is describing, through values and process, restorative processes. However, we can see how through the way these initiatives were developed in this school, in that they were not designed to be restorative processes, how he is reluctant to state a resemblance. It just so happens that the practices and values used in this school are consistent with RJ. This issue is discussed in more detail throughout Chapter VI.

V. Challenges of Restorative Processes

A further theme discussed was whether or not teachers, staff, administrators and students were willing to make the shift from zero tolerance to the use of restorative processes. All of the participants in the focus groups and interviews stated that they wanted to see the use of more restorative processes in their school and in other schools.

The grade nine students felt that RP should be used more in schools as people need to learn how to solve their problems by themselves. One student commented that, *“It's not like later on in life somebody's always going to be there to help you.”* The grade ten students believed that RP would assist people in being more successful adults *“more than just criminals and drug addicts.”*

Although all the respondents supported the implementation of more restorative processes in their school and others, all participants except two (staff interviewees) stated

that they had concerns or thought there were obstacles in the way of more restorative processes.

i. Bringing People Together

In the grade ten focus group almost all the students had initial concerns of bringing together those involved in harm. Some of their comments were: *“don’t know if it would work or not;”* *“don’t think its really good to put the person who was hurt and the person who did it to them together;”* *“I don’t think they can fix it;”* and *“maybe if you did something to a person like beat them up it is a good combination.”*

One teacher interviewee also felt that it may be difficult for the victim and the offender to face each other in RP. As well, she is concerned about the hard work involved in encouraging affected parties to participate.

ii. Not for all Situations

One of the staff interviewees stated, *“If you have a group of students, some will not buy into the situation at all no matter what you try, you are not going to get them around to your way of thinking.”* Moreover, the grade ten students felt that people will not participate for the following reasons: they are too shy, think such practices are of no use; or simply they just do not want to do it.

Students in both the grade nine and ten focus groups felt that with wider implementation of RP people would not take the processes as seriously or that students would take advantage of the processes. However, other students countered these concerns stating that some students do not even take suspension seriously and that not everyone who gets in conflict even cares.

Two of the teachers felt that restorative processes cannot be used for every situation, particularly alluding to cases involving drugs or weapons or when students have broken the law. More specifically, one teacher sees RP as more lenient than traditional responses. However, both interviewees also stated that these are not really problems in this school and that they can see the benefits if processes were to work for more serious incidents. .

The students in the grade nine group agreed that the biggest problems in the school are verbal disagreements. One girl stated that restorative processes cannot be used in these kinds of incidents as verbal disputes happen all the time. As such, people would not get involved in formal processes as they usually ignore, do not talk about these incidents, or resolve them as they occur. Contrary to the teachers, this group felt that RP should be used in more serious situations such as fighting. The grade nine students thought that people would want to engage in these processes if they felt threatened either physically or violently.

iii. Confidentiality

Issues with privacy and confidentiality were raised by one of the interviewees who regularly facilitates restorative processes. She stated that specifically with peer mediation models there is a concern about peers talking about people's issues outside of confidential circles. Although intentions may not be untoward, news in the school spreads fast and confidential matters could be discussed publicly, causing further harm and exacerbating problems. To counter this, she recommended that disputes and conflicts among students be mediated by a neutral counsellor or administrator.

iv. Involvement and Commitment

Some of the interviewees stressed their concerns about how everyone needs to “*buy into*” restorative processes and get actively involved in order for them to be successful. The largest concern mentioned was that the processes are time consuming. Several teachers mentioned they were supportive of this process, but given the existing time constraints on their jobs they felt that it was impossible to be involved to the extent that they wished. Furthermore, one teacher felt it was essential to have commitment and involvement from all the staff, teachers and students to implement more restorative processes successfully.

As stated above, the grade ten students felt that there will be some students who do not want to get involved. Rather than thinking the students would not choose to participate, the older students felt that the lack of commitment and involvement from staff and teachers would hinder successful and sustainable restorative initiatives in their school.

v. Zero Tolerance Policy

Two teachers believed that the *Safe Schools Act* prevented and inhibited the use of restorative processes. Specifically one commented that it is the rigidity of the *SSA* that prevents RP as it sets out what has to be done and the particular protocol that needs to be followed in certain situations. The other teachers felt that the *SSA* prevents RP through promoting quick decisions and neglecting to uncover the circumstances surrounding the incident.

Although there are considerable obstacles in the way of fully implementing restorative processes, the insight provided by all the participants indicates that they are

aware of and familiar with restorative processes being used in their school and that they feel they should continue. However, it is important to highlight that all of the participants also mentioned that in some situations, punitive methods or zero tolerance policy type responses such as suspensions or expulsions may be necessary.

VI. How Conflicts should be Resolved

The school administrator supported a system whereby there are incentives for good behaviour and that students must be reminded that their good behaviour does not go unnoticed. From this perspective, students are treated individually and the key is to practice “*equitable consequences not necessarily equal consequences.*”

With this, it seems unanimous among the participants that restorative processes should always be used or at least attempted in all situations. However, everyone was realistic in stating that due to individual situations, there may be incidents where zero tolerance responses are required. One student mentioned that if the same student keeps making the same error, perhaps suspending them right away may send the message. Although this sounds harsh and “non-restorative,” all of the participants understood that suspensions would not solve the problem.

One teacher felt that following incidents of violence such as fighting, students still may need to be sent home for a “cooling off period.” However, she firmly stated that everyone affected should get together before re-entering the school and classroom. The grade nine students had an extensive discussion surrounding how conflicts should be resolved. Although they wanted more RP to be used, they were concerned that people would take advantage of such processes. As a result they felt that the school may need to exercise some punishment to act as a threat and deterrent

These students agreed that suspensions may be necessary based on certain behaviours, but they felt strongly that people should have to get together with those who were affected before coming back to school. As well, they also believed that everyone should be entitled to give their side of the story and to explain their situation. Through more group discussion, the group came to the consensus that it was more appropriate to “talk it out first then to decide who should get suspended.” The grade eleven students concurred, expressing that RP should be done first before suspensions, “restorative processes should be the first priority.”

From these data it became clear that this school had found a way to practice restorative processes within the zero-tolerance framework. In the next chapter, I will use theory and relevant research to demonstrate the significance of this unique school culture, and how restorative processes exist in this context.

CHAPTER VI

Discussion

Although mentioned in the above result section, this difficult research question of whether restorative processes and zero tolerance policies can co-exist needs to be further conceptualized. In the first part of this section I discuss the significance of the participants' definitions of restorative justice and the implications to the field of RJ. Secondly, I explain how this school culture is peaceful/restorative and in turn could facilitate the use of restorative processes in this school. Thirdly, through using Morrison et al's (2005) "Hierarchy of restorative response" pyramid I demonstrate how this school's use of RP is indicative of an ideal school model. Following this, I discuss how their use of RP is consistent with the literature in the field of crime prevention. Next, I reiterate the participants' attitudes towards the *SSA* and the use of RP. Subsequently, I use Hirschi's (1969) social bonding theory to theoretically support how this school uses restorative processes in conjunction with the zero tolerance policy. Lastly, I discuss some of challenges in this school and summarize how these two paradigms (zero tolerance and restorative processes) may co-exist in this school.

I. Defining Restorative Justice

As emphasized in the literature review chapter there is much debate around not only defining restorative justice (RJ), but also on the term itself. Although this theme slightly deviates away from answering the dominant research question, it is important to understand the significance and relevance of how the participants defined restorative justice before establishing whether they were using such processes.

While diverse and abstract conceptions were presented, most agreed it was a non-punitive and peaceful way to resolve conflicts. Furthermore, in defining RJ, the students looked more at the word “restorative justice” and attempted to break the word down in providing their definition. For example, some of the students thought it meant “*fixing justice;*” “*to fix what is wrong;*” “*restoring character;*” “*people get equal rights they lost during a conflict.*” Specifically, for the grade nine students RJ meant “*justice is restored,*” while another student in this group defined ‘justice’ as “*solving the problem.*” Three of the teacher interviewees stated that they had never heard the term of restorative justice. However, these interviewees asked if it was similar to circle, conflict resolution and mediation processes. Moreover, the fact that the participants stated they did not know what RJ meant but provided some accurate conceptions, reveals how the term “restorative justice” could perhaps be limiting and thus restricting a more generalized understanding of restorative practices.

i. Defining Processes

In later points during the interviews, the teachers/staff explained RJ more as a process. Several interviewees communicated that RJ was a process where a peaceful outcome or balance was achieved. During the interviews, at times, there was a confounding of terms. For example, one of the teachers defined RJ as restitution while two others stated restitution could be an outcome of RJ. However, in one specific instance, when the interviewee explained what he thought RJ was, how it was done, and what it looked like, his understanding of restitution was not negative or punishment orientated but rather restorative. He understood RJ as Aboriginal “*circle processes*” or “*justice circles*” and instances when people are giving back and making amends. Along

with other teachers who mentioned restitution they understood it more as reparation, a resolution that achieves balance or makes things better. Through asking more questions and listening intently, it became apparent that the term the participants were using was inconsistent with our criminological conception of restitution. Just relying solely on the term they used, rather than understanding how they used the term and the processes would have led to misinterpretation. This example shows how the use of terms can be misleading and limiting.

Emerging from the students' discussions were definitions of RJ as processes that attempted to: make things right, talk through things to find a solution, move on, and restore broken relationships. All teachers and staff agreed that restorative processes involved bringing those who were harmed or affected by a wrongdoing together to work through finding a solution in order to improve relationships. None of the respondents mentioned that a rule or law needed to be broken in order for restorative processes to occur but rather they used the terms "*wrongdoing*" or "*harm*."

Asking the participants their thoughts on restorative justice provided valuable insight into the debates occurring in the field over how restorative justice is defined and understood. Initially, it seemed that the participants attempted to define RJ with a focus on process. However, after I provided a definition of RJ (as mentioned above) several participants (specifically the students) emphasized the importance of specific values.

ii. Defining Values

The teachers and staff stated that values of respect, fairness, equality, individuality, inclusivity and responsibility are very important to restorative processes. Some of the values that the students considered important were empathy, feeling

validated, listening, safety, honesty, feeling comfortable, individuality, truth, voluntariness, and responsibility. Ironically, despite their stated limited understanding of RJ, the values and processes that the respondents alluded to were all considered part of restorative justice practices. This research demonstrates that when asking people about RJ it is important to break it down into processes AND values. This is consistent with Van Ness (2005) and Johnstone (2003) who emphasize that while RJ can be called many things (Sullivan and Tift, 2001), it must involve both values and process.

These findings also demonstrated that RJ is not a foreign concept to most people (Braithwaite, 2001; Hadley, 2001; Weitekamp, 2003). One student stated that the values she attributed to RJ were things she learned from her parents. Moreover, many students inadvertently linked the values and processes they used to define restorative justice as being consistent with YOUCAN's conflict resolution training they received. Although this conflict resolution training is not being analyzed as part of this thesis, it had a considerable presence in this school and has likely had an impact on the current school climate (see Chapter V). These comments made by students also support that conflict resolution training can be considered a restorative practice (Casella, 2003; Farrell et al., 2001; Harvey, 2006; Hawkins et al., 2001; Shaw, 2002a, 2002b).

While it could be argued that their individual understandings of RJ were rather vague and perhaps not demonstrative of a true understanding of RJ, their collective understanding was solid. In terms of practice, the individuals in this school indicated that they had overcome one of the major challenges in adopting a restorative culture and philosophy. This challenge was adopting a new way of thinking about harm and wrongdoing, and the ability to make a distinction between punitive and restorative

practices (Armstrong & Thorsborne, 2006; Karp & Breslin, 2001; Morrison et al., 2005; Zellerer, 2003). It seems that this school uses restorative processes although many have never heard the term restorative justice.

II. School Culture

In order for a school to facilitate a change in their response to conflict, and especially for a restorative philosophy to be properly implemented it needs to be reflected in the school's culture (Morrison et al., 2005; Welsh, 2003). School culture is the defining feature of the school climate which in turn affects people's attitudes, values, beliefs and the style of interaction (Welsh, 2003: 349). In this school it is possible that given that the school culture is peaceful and restorative this may have facilitated the acceptance and use of restorative processes.

Some of the elements considered in establishing that the school culture was peaceful or restorative are the: relationships between teachers and administrators (i.e. How they communicate to and about each other); relationships between the school and the parents/community (i.e. Is there cooperation and communication between these groups?); defining the needs of staff and students; shift in values; messages communicated (i.e. Do the staff practice the behaviour and attitudes they want the students to practice?); and the empowerment of staff and students. In the following sections, I will provide examples which demonstrate that this school's culture facilitated the use of restorative practices.

i. Relationships Between Teachers and Administrators

All the interviewees stated that they felt safe and enjoyed their work environment. As well, all the interviewees expressed respect and positive feelings towards the administration and other staff in the school. The principal stated that he also had a great deal of respect for his staff and attributed positive changes in the school to their motivation and willingness to make the school a better place.

When disputes arose between the teaching staff, the principal resolved the issues by means of facilitating mediation. One interviewee gave an example of a disagreement that was resolved in a non-confrontational and respectful way, allowing everyone the opportunity to be heard. Other interviewees discussed how the administrators involved them in conflicts that arose with their students. For example, another interviewee spoke about an incident when a student ran away while on a field trip. The principal encouraged her and the student to discuss how they were affected by the incident and to work out a solution.

The students stated that for the most part the teachers and administrators dealt with conflict in the same manner. For example, the grade ten students felt that the teachers along with the administrators encouraged them to first work their problems out among themselves. As well, if the students did seek assistance from the teachers or staff they stated that things were always discussed and all sides of the conflict were heard.

Interviewees three, four and six mentioned how the administrators encouraged and empowered the teachers to resolve conflicts in their classroom. Moreover, the teachers expressed that they never hesitated to bring in the principal to assist them with resolving a conflict or dealing with any behavioural concerns. This is important as

Morrison et al. (2005) stated that when teachers feel as though conflict is being taken away from them, it can lead to feelings of disempowerment.

ii. Relationship with Parents and the Community

The principal stated that he operates an open door policy in the school. With this, any teacher, staff, student, parent or community member are welcome to come in and talk to him for any reason. In order to open communication and to bridge the gap between community and school activities the school also created a community council. The principal felt that the school environment is greatly affected by things that happen in the community, especially outside school hours. Involving the community allows the school to be better prepared to address the students' needs especially when they involve outside matters. This open relationship also gives the school the opportunity to share the student's achievements with the community and to establish a peaceful relationship.

The interviewees stated that there was an increased presence and involvement of parents in the school over the last few years. The teachers explained that they really liked how the administrators encourage parents to come into the school and involve them.

iii. Needs of Staff and Students

The teachers in the school did not like the high rate of suspensions. Many of them mentioned that suspensions led to more work for them. They felt that suspensions were typically delivered to those students who really needed to be in school and were already behind. Given that the teachers expressed that they were tired of always disciplining, being disrespected, and having their students suspended, it was realized change needed to occur.

Tired of always being in “*reactive mode*” the principal observed that the problem with the students’ behaviour was that they did not have the skills or abilities to meet the school expectations. Particularly in this school with a large diverse cultural population and many recent immigrants, assuming these kids knew how to behave was setting them up for failure. The principal decided that the first step was to equip these students with the skills and abilities they needed to meet and exceed the school’s behavioural expectations. The delivery of the training in conflict resolution was implemented in order to meet the needs of both the students and staff (see Chapter IV). Although this training is not being evaluated in this thesis, the implementation of this training seemed to assist in fostering a more peaceful school culture that facilitated the use of restorative processes.

iv. Values

Respect appears central to the operation of this school. The principal firmly believes that “*respect is not earned but is given to you and all of you have to do is maintain this respect.*” The students indirectly echoed these feelings of respect when discussing how conflicts are dealt with in this school as students typically felt they are done so fairly⁴⁵. The teachers also stated that when responding to conflicts there is always “*flexibility...within individuality*” and things “*are done fairly and equitably.*” Moreover, they stated that they always make sure to hear and validate both sides of the conflict.

Other values the principal spoke of are those of respect, responsibility, accountability, safety, inclusion, listening, empathy, empowerment and fairness. These values guide the use of many restorative processes undertaken at the school which feature

⁴⁵ The grade ten students said the teachers always hear both sides of the stories. However, the grade nine students felt the opposite that teachers did not want to talk about conflict, but instead used their authority in dealing with conflict. They contradicted themselves, as they later mentioned that during conflict people in the school always come and work together to find a solution.

the circle format, where one person speaks at a time and all affected and their supporters are included in the process. The teachers discussed how they use similar processes that look at individual situations (such as their needs) and get to the root of the issue before making decisions on any matters.

v. Messages Communicated

In situations when a student was sent home for a serious matter, the staff/teachers all consistently referred to this as a time for “*cooling off*” rather than using the word “*suspension*.” Students were aware of this and knew that suspensions were rare. As well, the school’s motto is the “*three R’s*”: “*respect, responsibility and role modelling*.” Along with this philosophy, almost all (especially the grade ten students) spoke of the phrase “*respond and not react*⁴⁶” and how it is commonly referred to in the school by students and teachers/staff.

The students are also encouraged to celebrate the school’s achievements. At the beginning of the school year, the students were given half a day off for a celebration of the school’s successes. The principal stated that almost all of the students (90%) voluntarily participated in this event. Moreover, he stated that their students are commonly seen wearing their school “brag shirts⁴⁷”. Some of the students in the focus groups openly spoke of how their school was known as a “*peace school*” and mentioned the multiple publications about their achievements and successes.

⁴⁶ This phrase was introduced by YOUCAN and is now part of the school’s rhetoric.

⁴⁷ T-shirts that were given to the students and staff that state all the achievements the school has made over the last few years such as reducing suspensions and expulsions, increasing literacy, and being recognized as an International school of peace.

vi. Empowerment and Involvement

Upon arrival at the school in 2003, the principal brought a group of students together to revise the student handbook which featured all the unacceptable school conduct, the consequences and a synopsis of the *Safe Schools Act (SSA)*. The students were given the manuals and were instructed to remove whatever they felt did not belong. Along with the principal, these students removed all the consequences, all references to the *SSA* and instead laid out expectations, values and goals. The entire planner was reduced from 45 to 18 pages. This responsibility involved these students directly and may have empowered them to alter the school culture.

In this school it seems that the shift in culture was built from the ground up. As stated above, the school personnel looked at the issues, challenges and concerns and devised a plan to specifically meet their needs and goals. The administrators worked very closely with the students, teachers/staff, school board and the community in order to change the school culture to one of peace. This involvement may have also empowered the students and teachers/staff to take ownership, to be part of something and to adopt a more peaceful culture. While ensuring all the students were trained by YOUCAN in conflict resolution (CR), the students and interviewees stated that they are encouraged to use the training to resolve their differences on their own first. Along with the CR training, the school also brought in several different speakers and presenters to better educate and train the students with the tools they need to succeed in life and also meet the school's expectations.

The anecdotes provided by both the students and staff seem to suggest that the school culture changed in recent years. Although the intention of this thesis is not to

discuss the causes of this change but rather to understand this school's culture. It seems that through the process of re-defining the school culture, the students may be more connected to the school and perhaps take more initiative in preserving harmony in their relationships through doing such as things as resolving their conflicts in more peace orientated ways.

III. Restorative Processes

The testimonies and experiences articulated by the interviewees and students demonstrated that based on the values, processes and the school culture that they articulated, they are exercising restorative processes. Despite the principal's reluctance in stating they are "doing" RJ⁴⁸, the following section explains how not only are they engaging in restorative processes, but how their actions and responses are consistent with an ideal model for the implementation and sustainability of RP in schools.

In conjunction with a restorative/peaceful culture in this school, a practical application of Morrison et al.'s (2005) "Hierarchy of restorative response" pyramid appears to have emerged. This pyramid demonstrates an idealistic, whole school implementation of restorative justice. Similar to the elements requisite to a restorative culture, this school seems to have fulfilled this model through the steps of: involving everyone in implementation; designing responses based on needs and challenges of the school; gaining support from leadership figures; and involving staff and students in all stages.

Morrison et al's (2005) pyramid is constructed of three different levels where both pro-active and responsive restorative responses take place. The first and foundational

⁴⁸ The principal stated that his reluctance in promoting that this school was 'doing' RJ was based on his lack of formal training in such processes.

level is “*universal*,” which grounds the initiative and is also the preventative element; the second is “*targeted*” where conflicts are resolved; and the third is “*intensive*” which features more structured conferences involving support and a focus on reconciliation. These three levels form a pyramid, as the bottom level involves the whole school population, the second level involves less, and the third level is for a very small percentage of the population (Morrison et al., 2005).

i. Universal level

In this school, the first level “universal” was accomplished by all the students receiving training in conflict resolution (see Chapter IV). Also contributing to this was the school's commitment to bringing in the different motivational speakers and other organizations to assist the school in fostering a more peaceful environment. All these initiatives ensured that the students had the skills and abilities to address conflict and respond to it through constructive and peaceful means.

ii. Targeted level

The second level is where conflicts are resolved and was achieved in this school through the use of RP: informally by students, in classrooms whereby teachers are facilitating or mediating processes, and in the office, or in student services. Further, the students were observed dealing with problems and issues themselves during the earlier stages of conflict. The students were saying things such as “*you can't behave like that here*” or “*this is stupid, there are better ways to work this out.*” The students in grade ten described how some of their peers are taking more initiative to deal with things in pro-social and pro-active ways, such as seeking assistance from the counsellor. Moreover, the

interviewees agreed with the students that instead of fighting someone, in many instances the students seem to prefer resolving issues in constructive ways.

In the two places where conflicts and problems are usually dealt with (the office and in student services) the staff felt strongly about restorative justice. In student services, the school counsellor is trained in mediation models and regularly engages in peer mediation and conferencing style processes. In both of these offices, the fair and peaceful resolution of conflicts is promoted. In the student focus groups, the grade ten students even used the word “*mediated*” as to how they feel major issues are addressed. Moreover, they stated that the teachers and staff always talk to everyone who was involved in a non-confrontational and non-threatening matter.

iii. Intensive level

This level of response addresses more serious conflict and seemed to rarely occur in this school. One teacher stated that she observed more intensive mediation processes where parents, students and teachers were brought in only when serious fights or disagreements occurred. As well, the principal stated that more intensive processes are used in situations when students were suspended. The purpose of these processes are to reconcile and reintegrate the student and devise a solution that allows for “all the affected parties to be able to co-exist” (interview 5) safely within the school⁴⁹.

By understanding Morrison et al.’s (2005) pyramid within this school context, it becomes evident that they are engaging in forms of restorative justice. In spite of not explicitly defining it as such, in practice they implement a theoretical model of idealistic

⁴⁹ The principal stated that he always holds a process following a students’ suspension involving parents, teachers and other affected to accept the student back into the school and to ensure that it is safe for everyone.

restorative processes in schools. Another development that is evident through their approach is that they have been able to independently establish a holistic (whole school) response to school violence and conflict. As previously mentioned, the most successful initiatives to reduce school violence and bullying are those which adopt a whole school approach (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Hopkins, 2006; Morrison, 2001ab; 2002; 2006; Morrison et al., 2005).

This school appears to have modelled how to make a school's culture more peaceful and foster restorative responses within the confines of zero tolerance policies. Perhaps another significant contribution of these research findings is the demonstration that change cannot be achieved by one person, one program, or through one idea, but requires a significant contribution from many and a radical overhaul in attitudes and behaviour (Morrison et al., 2005).

IV. Restorative Justice as Crime Prevention?

A key question in the initial conception of this thesis was to explore if RJ could be understood as crime prevention. Crime prevention is defined by the *Institute for the Prevention of Crime*⁵⁰ as “an initiative or policy which reduces, avoids or eliminates victimization by crime or violence⁵¹”. More specifically, it can be considered an initiative that also encourages pro-social behaviour. One of the principal's concerns with RJ was that he felt it did not foster prevention, but rather functioned solely on a reactionary basis. However, beyond establishing that this school uses restorative processes, there are

⁵⁰ The *Institute for the Prevention of Crime* (IPC) is established through the University of Ottawa and provides guidance and consulting to communities, governments and other agencies on crime prevention.

⁵¹ Definition provided by the *Institute for Crime Prevention* (IPC) and can be located at: http://www.socialsciences.uottawa.ca/ipc/eng/what_is_cp.asp.

several examples of how individuals in this school engaged in restorative type processes or techniques in order to prevent larger problems from occurring.

Interviewee four provided an example of how she informally uses mediations to work through her student's problems. She stated that the reason for doing this was to prevent the problem from getting out of control. Another example was provided by the principal; two boys were arguing in the cafeteria and other students peacefully intervened in order to encourage and support these students to find better ways to deal with their conflict. According to the principal, this prevented the argument from escalating. Interviewees two and three also spoke about students going to teachers or the school counsellor to obtain support and assistance in resolving their problems.

The grade nine students agreed that working out verbal disagreements right away prevented bigger fights from erupting. As well, some of the students felt that the training in conflict resolution skills such as mediation and negotiation prevented further problems in their relationships. For example, one grade nine student felt that gaining the skills in conflict resolution and the reinforcement to use such techniques at school has helped prevent more problems at home with her siblings.

The students and teachers/staff agreed that they felt there were less incidences of serious conflict in this school because people try to work things out and get support if they need before things get out of control. Therefore, through practicing certain values (respect, responsibility and listening) and processes that are inclusive, it seems as though the staff and students are using restorative processes to prevent more serious problems.

V. *Safe Schools Act*- Ontario's Zero Tolerance Policy

It has been already established that Ontario's *Safe School Act* is a zero tolerance policy (Sandals et al., 2005b). As was demonstrated through this research, the students and the interviewees agreed that a zero tolerance policy plays a limited role in their school.

Once the ZT policy was explained to the grade ten students they expressed fear around the effects these types of responses (suspensions, expulsions and police involvement) could have on their later education options. All of the respondents agreed that ZT policies were unfair. The students felt that in all situations people should be listened to and have a chance to give their own perspective before any consequences are delivered. The grade nine students also believed that zero tolerance policy responses prevent students from learning how to solve their own problems.

Many interviewees believed that those who get suspended (those who commit the behaviours punishable by suspension under the *Act*) are those who actually need to be in the school. They felt that suspending them based solely on their actions, exacerbates the students' problems and results in more problems in the school⁵². Moreover, if there is a potential relationship between those who have a weak bond to school and poor attitudes and behaviours in school, suspending them could only make things worse (Skiba, 2000; Skiba et al, 2006). However, it is important to remember that most of the participants stated that ZT policy responses may play a role in some situations. There was no agreement upon whether the ZT policies should be completely disregarded. Some

⁵² Some of the problems the teachers and staff mentioned were catching the student up on missed work, reintegrating the student back into the school, explaining to parents why their child is sent home, etc.

believed that such policies need to exist in order to send a deterrent message of threat and fear of punishment in order to curb behaviour.

In spite of the fact that the *SSA* is in existence and there is some support for it, it seems as though it is not a central tenet in this school. Very few students were suspended and no students were expelled over the school year. It seems that the *SSA* was not a focal point for two possible reasons. One reason could be that the focus here appears to be on creating a culture of peace and not one of law and order or discipline. When this is done, discipline and the threat of discipline seemingly could become less of a focus.

Another reason could be that by fostering a culture of peace, and exercising restorative processes and values in a preventative fashion (dealing with problems early and providing pro-active training) may have prevented larger problems. As such, the *SSA* would have played, at best, a minimal role in this school culture (Stinchcomb et al., 2006).

VI. Application of Social Bonding Theory

As discussed in a previous chapter, the focus of this thesis was not on theorizing how restorative justice was part of Hirschi's social bonding theory. Rather, in attempting to situate restorative justice within a theoretical framework it appears that it is in fact independent of mainstream criminological theories and represents its own paradigm. However, social bonding theory was introduced for explanatory purposes as it can support the need to shift from traditional and punitive responses (such as ZT policy responses) to more restorative responses towards school violence and conflict. It has been well documented in the literature that one of the best defences against future criminal or anti-social behaviour is for children/youth to feel connected and have a strong bond to

their school (Catalano et al., 2004; Haines & Case, 2003; Hawkins et al., 2000; Jenkins, 1997; Morrison, 2006; Morrison et al., 2005; Waller, 2006; Welsh, 2003).

i. Skill Development and Bond to School

Providing students with skills development training such as conflict resolution increases their conformity to school and in turn their overall bond to their school (Welsh, 2003). Although the training in conflict resolution is not being evaluated in this thesis, it is an important part of the overall culture change and use of restorative processes. Therefore it can be assumed that those who found the CR training useful would likely feel more connected and bonded to their school thus engaging in less anti-social and unacceptable behaviours.

ii. School Pride and Bond

When asked if they are proud of their school⁵³, all of the grade nine students and some of the grade ten and eleven students said they are proud of their school⁵⁴. All of the students were well aware of their schools successes and achievements and seemed to share some ownership and pride over them. Morrison (2006) asserts that there is a strong correlation between pride, respect, bonds to school, and bullying. Based on Hirschi's (1969) components to bonding, pride is likely most associated to the element of belief. In her research, Morrison (2006) found that bullies and victims report low pride, low respect and the weakest bonds to school. Catalano et al. (2004) found that a strong bond to school promoted healthy development and prevented problem behaviours. This is due in part to

⁵³ The students participants in this research who were not proud of their school stated it was because the school athletic teams do not win often or they felt the school was boring due to a lack of social activities.

⁵⁴ The principal stated that several students wear their school shirts and voluntary engaged in celebrating the school achievements.

the fact that the positive relationship with the school inhibits behaviour that is inconsistent with the norms and values of the school (Catalano et al., 2004).

Through observations and information provided from the respondents, one reason that could explain their beliefs that there are low incidences of serious violence and bullying in their school may be because these students feel respected, express pride towards their school, and feel a strong connection or bond to their school. Moreover, it could be that these students may intervene and resolve conflicts as they feel ownership of their school and they want to maintain the safety of their school⁵⁵. The following two examples taken from the interview and focus group discussions, further demonstrate how these speculations were derived.

iii. The New Student

Interviewee three spoke about a new student who arrived in her class following an expulsion at another school. She felt as though his approach towards school was negative and he had a real “*gangster style*” attitude. As the other students in the class accepted, included and respected this new student, she noted a change in his attitude. This student seemed to enjoy his school experience more and showed improvements in his overall performance and outlook towards everything. This student, who previously caused problems in his other schools, appeared to raise no issues or concerns in this school. Moreover, when the student was transferred out of the school, this student who once hated school expressed to the teacher that he did not want to leave.

It is possible that the respect and acceptance this student was given from the teachers and students, may have encouraged him to develop a stronger connection and

⁵⁵ All of the interviewees and students stated that they feel safe in their school and most indicated it was important to maintain this sense of security.

bond to the school, which may have facilitated his change in attitude and influenced positive behaviour. However, although this conclusion is plausible there is no hard evidence to demonstrate this. There are other theories and factors (not considered in this thesis) that may have also been at play.

iv. Grade Eleven Girl's Negative Experience

The second example is the one female student who had a very dominant voice in the grade eleven focus group. She clearly expressed her opinion that the way conflict was dealt with in the school was unfair. Her comments seemed to stem from one isolated experience where she was involved in a fight that resulted in the police getting involved⁵⁶. This student was very upset that she was not given the opportunity to explain her side of the story⁵⁷.

The comments this student made about the school through the duration of the focus group discussions continued to be mainly negative, and indicated that she did not feel very connected. She indicated that she had a low involvement, low attachment and low belief. This girl strongly asserted that she was not proud of the school and showed great disrespect for the school. It can be speculated based on her attitude and disposition towards school that this girl may have had a weak bond to the school.

The difference between this student and all the other students in the focus groups seemed to be their strength of bond or feelings of connectedness to the school. This student also spoke about her desire and attempts to get more involved, but said she was

⁵⁶ This type of response is punitive and an example of a response mandated under the SSA.

⁵⁷ The specifics of this incident were not discussed by the student or any other respondents. As well it is unclear if she was directly involved or was speaking about her friend's experience.

defeated and this left her discouraged. Her experience with the zero tolerance type response appeared to be the catalyst for her to detach from the school.

While it is impossible to conclude unequivocally, research has indicated that when students are dealt with in negative and punitive ways, they seem to develop volatile attitudes towards school (Brendtro et al., 2001; Jenkins, 1997; Morrison, 2006). These types of attitudes are also indicative of weak bonds and a lack of connection to the school. From this, it seems to make sense that in order to decrease the prevalence of school conflict and violence and later criminal behaviours that we encourage schools to foster more restorative type processes which can facilitate the strengthening of an individual's social bonds to schools and communities.

VII. The Potential Challenges

Although this school has conquered tremendous obstacles, while celebrating great achievements with respect to establishing a peaceful school culture and implementing restorative processes, some challenges continue to exist. One challenge for this school is likely going to be getting new students, staff and stakeholders to “*buy into*” their way of doing things. An example provided by one of the teacher interviewees demonstrated that this year they have already addressed this challenge. According to this interviewee the school was warned from the middle school that the incoming group of grade nine students were a troublesome group. However, the teachers and staff mentioned that they have had no problems or incidences as of yet with this group. One explanation (among others) could be that the accepting culture of this school may have allowed these students to assume a more positive attitude, thus influencing their behaviour (Welsh, 2003).

Another concern that has emerged from other case study analyses of schools where RP have been implemented is that upon the departure of the staff who were instrumental in such initiatives, the projects failed (Youth Justice Board, 2004). In this case, it is obvious that the principal led the change. However, due to early involvement, engagement and empowerment of all stakeholders it is possible that this initiative will likely be sustained regardless of the departure of the administrator. Moreover, the participants' eagerness to implement more restorative processes and their understanding of such processes indicates that a large proportion of the school (both students and staff) have "*bought into*" and internalized these practices. These above mentioned elements along with the seemingly healthy school culture and that this initiative was designed specifically to meet the needs of the school, it is possible that these changes may be sustained throughout various changes (Morrison et al., 2005; Riestenberg, 2004; Welsh, 2003).

A few of the teachers and students spoke of the need to sometimes resort to punitive means. This could be alarming to some advocates of RJ as punishment has no place in restorative justice (Elliott, 2003). However, one important point that emerged from the discussion with students and teachers/staff was that restorative processes will not work for everyone, and that at times, other means are necessary. The staff and students were realistic in understanding that if restorative processes require voluntariness and responsibility, then RP may not always be feasible. The overwhelming sentiment in this school was that they should always first respond in a restorative way- bringing all those affected together to discuss what happened and exploring what needs to be done to

make things right. However, they understood that in some situations other more punitive responses may be necessary.

Clearly, the need for punitive responses at times does not preclude or inhibit the holistic and widespread adoption of true restorative processes across schools and other contexts (Ierley & Classen-Wilson, 2003; Stinchomb et al., 2006). However, to some advocates and practitioners of RJ, the mere existence of the *SSA* in this school prohibits the practice of “real” RJ. Some would argue that the confines of the institution of a school, combined with punishment strategies and power hierarchies, make RJ impossible.

VIII. Can Restorative Processes and Zero Tolerance Co-exist?

This leads to answering the dominant research question of whether restorative processes and ZT can co-exist. It is important to remember that these two paradigms are theoretically and philosophically opposed. As well, I can only answer this question based on the testimonies provided in this research. Therefore, the conclusions and observations are solely based on this school’s practices and as such cannot be generalized and applied in other situations.

Based on my observations in this school, it appears that ZT and restorative processes can function within the school culture and environment. This conclusion can be explained by re-iterating the following points. First, the school seemed to adopt a practice in which RP were used in a preventative fashion in the school. For example, all the students were trained in restorative values and processes. As well, the school actively encouraged students to use mediation and circle (restorative processes) for incidents before they developed into more serious situations. While ZT policies are designed to

respond to more serious behaviours, it seemed that since most problems were diverted and resolved early on, such punitive practices were rarely used.

Research supporting these findings appears common when schools are undergoing shifts in how they respond to school problems (Amstutz & Stutzman, 2005; Karp & Breslin, 2001; Riestenberg 2004; and Stinchcomb et al., 2006) These researchers also assert that a restorative school environment or culture along with the proactive use of restorative processes may prevent more serious incidents and the need for ZT policy responses.

Second, this school appears to have reconstructed the nature and practice of ZT both linguistically and discursively. For example, when situations arose that required a student to be suspended, the school kept these incidents private and dealt with them on a personal level. They always gave the student an opportunity to give their side of the situation and made sure they knew all the facts before taking a final action to suspend. Moreover, instead of using the word suspension, everyone in the schools referred to them as “cooling off periods” and stated they were used to ensure the safety of the school and students rather than to punish. Lastly, students who were suspended were re-integrated safely back into the school by use of formal or informal circle and or mediation processes where the parents and those affected (staff, students, community etc.) would get together and discuss the incident and solutions.

The ZT policy in this school also clearly dictated that all disciplinary actions were subject to the principal’s discretion. As such, it is not the case in this school that they flouted the law or ignored its existence, on the contrary, the *SSA* was taken very seriously. It is possible that this school’s philosophy and culture to use restorative

processes (both proactively and for reintegration) may have mitigated potential problems. In practice, the use of both these responses together can be interpreted as a type of “co-existence”.

In the following section I will discuss the limitations of these findings along with the implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusions

This thesis began by drawing attention to the issue of school violence and bullying and how it has become the subject of much research attention and intervention practice in recent years. While rates of school violence do not appear to be increasing (Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Harvey, 2006; Shaw, 2001a) attention and preoccupation with the issue has increased. It is argued that traditional ways of responding, through punitive and immediate short-term methods (zero tolerance policies), and treating the remote symptoms (anti-bullying initiatives) fall short of actually getting to the root of the issue in ensuring that schools and communities are safe (MCC, 2003; Skiba et al., 2006; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). One realistic and attainable response would be to encourage schools to design and implement less punitive responses to conflict, which meet their specific needs.

In this case study, it was demonstrated how one school addressed this problem. The school examined their specific needs and issues, included and empowered all stakeholders, adopted different values, ways of doing things and culture. This involved an overhaul of attitudes, beliefs, and practices. This all occurred without changing the punitive policy that governed them. As a result, they created an environment that fostered restorative processes and values within a school system that has a strict zero tolerance policy. In doing this, this school appears to provide additional support for how these divergent paradigms can function together.

I. Limitations

As mentioned above, in the methods section, several limitations to this study exist. The areas to discuss that reduce the degree of confidence, trustworthiness and generalizability of these findings are: the structure of the focus group outlines; use of the focus groups; selection of participants and confidentiality.

i. Structure of Interview and Focus Group Outlines

It is possible that a different layout of the interview and the focus group questions could have influenced the research results. For example, the first question asked of the respondents was to define restorative justice. In hindsight, since very few respondents knew what RJ was, this question could have been asked later on in the interview as it placed me in the situation of providing my definition of RJ to the participants. Thus, my definition may have contaminated the interview and focus group discussions. However, in the end, the respondents' initial comments about RJ became significant in answering the research questions. Another problem which emerged from the order of questions was that the participants may have thought that the whole interview was based on RJ and thus provided responses based on these assumptions. In order to compensate for this I asked questions about the other ways in which conflicts were resolved.

ii. Use of Focus Groups

An additional limitation could be the use of focus groups and the way in which they were facilitated. Although I intended to use circle processes and have each student speak in turn to each question, this is not what happened. Instead, a discussion group took place where participants answered when they felt comfortable and wanted to speak. The

downfall with this was that the groups were dominated by some individuals. Also, this style of engagement may have catered to those who were more vocal and in turn prevented other voices from being heard. This means that some of the perspective may not have provided a complete and holistic understanding. However, I attempted to minimize the effects of this by directing some questions to specific individuals. As well using the two data collection methods would have accounted for this sampling limitation.

The positive aspects of this format were that I was able to observe how these students actually engaged with each other. As well, it seemed that the groups were able to provide more insight and gain a collective understanding of each other's perspectives. In the end I think that having the students work together to answer questions and building on each other's ideas provided more reflective and authentic responses.

iii. Selection of Participants

Despite controls put in place, the selection of focus groups and interview participants may have been biased and non-representative. The fact that the participants were initially selected by teachers raises some concern with respect to representation of voices. Although I gave clear instructions on how to select the focus group participants, the lack of diversity and difference of opinions on certain topics led me to think that perhaps the group selection was biased. This concern was raised through the comments and dialogue in the grade ten and eleven focus groups. Perhaps this sample represented some of the interviewees titled "the good kids" in the school, thus skewing a true understanding of the school environment⁵⁸.

⁵⁸ This limitation was discussed more in the Methods chapter.

Following the receipt of the notices for participations, the administrators took it upon themselves to get the school secretary to coordinate and organize the interview schedule. Therefore, rather than receiving a representative voice and hearing from those who really wanted to participate, the participants may have been chosen solely based on their availability during a specific time period. Although the safeguards were put in place to avoid a convenience sample, in the end this may have facilitated a greater diversity in voices.

iv. Confidentiality

Although this limitation does not comprise validity it raises an ethical concern. I asked that the identity of the research participants be kept confidential, students were called over the school intercom to attend their designated focus groups⁵⁹ and the school secretary arranged the interviews with staff and teachers, it was difficult for me to insure confidentiality. I advised all of the research participants that there was no way to protect other's knowledge of their participation. However, I could guarantee from this point on that there would be no use of their names or identifiers in the discussion of results, findings and within written reports. All of the participants understood this and confirmed their understanding through the completion of their consent and assent forms.

Despite these limitations, the observation that restorative processes do exist in some capacity in this school with the ZT policy still prevails. Moreover, the connection to social bonding theory also resounds as it would explain that these "good" or "involved" participants may not be engaging in school conflict and bullying because they are more

⁵⁹ An example of an announcement made was "will all the students from Grade nine who signed up for the research study please proceed to the back of the library." Although no names were announced, it would have been apparent who was participating.

connected. Since this research was solely exploratory and no intentions were made to generalize to other schools, but rather to get a better understanding of the school environment and culture, these limitations do not detract from the general observations and conclusions.

II. Implications

The implications of this research are significant. For the school involved in the study, this research could assist them in identifying as a school which practices restorative justice. This recognition could introduce more options and possibilities with respect to access to resources and funding to continue and expand their practices. As well, this research allows them to reflect upon their successes and provides a record of the challenges they overcame and their successes. For example, adopting a peaceful school culture in combination with values and processes consistent with an ideal whole school approach of restorative practices is encouraging.

Within the practice of restorative justice, this research brought clarity to the issue surrounding the use of the term RJ and how it is defined. It provided some dialogue to support that RJ is about both values *and* processes. As well, it demonstrated that RJ is not a foreign concept but perhaps more natural and innate than punitive responses. As well, it emphasized how social bonding may be used to support the expansion of restorative justice in schools. Furthermore, for the traditional field of criminology this research could renew discussion around the utility of social bonding theory in understanding school conflict and violence.

In the field of school violence, perhaps this research may encourage schools in similar situations (governed by ZT policies but motivated to use less punitive responses)

to explore and develop their own initiatives. This case study, in collaboration with similar research on this topic may assist or persuade other schools and institutions to think differently about how they currently respond to school violence. From a policy perspective, perhaps this research could provide support for an inquiry into the widespread use of ZT policies or assist in the re-designing of appropriate school violence policies. Lastly, the findings from this research demonstrate another example of a school which developed and sustained a grassroots, needs- based, whole school approach to prevent and respond to school conflict in a Canadian school.

III. Future Research

This case study analysis expands possibilities to further explore the specific use of restorative processes in schools with zero tolerance policies. The first recommendation would be to conduct a more thorough quantitative and qualitative (mixed methods) analysis that looks at the effects of implementing restorative processes in this type of environment. Although research has been done on RJ in schools, there are few quantitative investigations as to how these practices can exist in schools under zero tolerance policies.

Another avenue to explore more intensively would be how restorative justice advocates can use theories such as social bonding, social control, attachment and affect to support the use of more restorative processes, not only in schools but also in other contexts.

Lastly, it is important for rigorous quantitative research to be conducted in analyzing the relationship and connections between crime prevention and restorative justice. This thesis provided a small glimpse into the possibility of a relationship existing

between these two, often separated paradigms. Exploring this area more extensively could provide some important information for the fields of crime prevention, restorative justice and perhaps school violence.

Importantly, on April 11, 2007, the Ontario Government decided the *SSA* will be drastically modified in time for the start of the new 2007-2008 school year (CBC News, 2007; Faulkner, 2007). The findings from the report done by the *Safe Schools Action Team*, commissioned by the Ontario Government confirmed allegations of unfair and discriminatory treatment of certain groups of students. Eric Roher, a lawyer speaking for the *Toronto District School Board* stated, "The emphasis will be steering away from suspensions and expulsions and promoting alternatives" (CBC News, 2007:1). The new changes are expected to include progressive discipline alternatives such as counselling, mediation and restorative justice (CBC News, 2007). This change in policy underscores the importance of constantly examining and re-examining these types of policies in light of practice and research findings.

Research in the field of school violence, conflict and how we respond to it is crucial. This update demonstrates how Ontario schools are at a critical point where administrators are ready to think differently about school conflict, violence and bullying. Before another school tragedy strikes and time is spent theorizing about what went wrong, and how to make laws and responses tougher, it is essential to examine how more restorative practices, perhaps in collaboration with other methods, can make schools safer.

APPENDIX B- YOUCAN Training Modules

Module	Sections within the Modules
1- Introduction to Conflict Resolution	Values and Principles, Problem Solving, Feelings Check, Anger Management
2- Negotiation	Values and Principles, Agree to Disagree, Confront, Seek Win Win
3- Peer Helping	Values and Principles, Encourage and Validate, Re-state, Clarify and Paraphrase, Questioning.
4- Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution	Values and Principles, Your Culture, Deep-Rooted Conflict, Cultural Processes
5- Mediation	Values and Principles, Impartiality and Neutral, Confidentiality, Safe Environment,
6- Facilitation	Values and Principles, Group Dialogue and Process, Difficult People, Action Planning, Consensus and Voting
7- Peace Circles	Values and Principles, Restorative Justice, Circle Process and Talking Piece

APPENDIX C- Interview Outline

- 1) Could you please tell me what you think restorative justice is
 - a. What do you think about it?
 - b. Have you ever used it?
 - c. Have you seen it used at your school?
 - d. In what ways has it been used?
 - e. What are your thoughts on this?

- 2) Could you tell me about the school environment that you work in
 - a. How do you feel at this school?
 - b. Have you noticed any changes in your school?
 - i. What kind of changes?
 - c. What factors have affected these changes in your school?

- 3) What kind of concerns or problems exist at your school?

- 4) How is conflict dealt with in your school?
 - a. Has it always been dealt with that way?
 - b. Do you feel there is more or less conflict and violence in your school?
 - i. What factors have affected did this?
 - ii. What do you think should be done?

- 5) What do you think should change in your school?

- 6) Do you think restorative processes are a good practice in schools?
 - a. Would you support such initiatives and why or why not?
 - b. What are your reservations or concerns about the use of restorative justice in schools?
 - c. Do you think they will be supported in schools?
 - d. What do you think is in the way of using more restorative processes?

- 7) How do you feel about the conflict resolution training your school received in the fall?
 - a. What kind of impact do you think it had on your students?
 - b. What kind of impact do you think it had on your school?
 - c. What did the students say to you about the training?
 - d. How do you feel about this kind of initiative in your school?

APPENDIX D- Focus Group Outline**Discussion Topics:**

- Could you please tell me what you think restorative justice is
 - What do you think about it?
 - Have you ever experienced or participated in such processes?

- Could you tell me about your school environment
 - How do you feel at school?
 - How do you feel about your school?
 - Have you noticed any changes in your school?
 - What kind of changes?
 - Why do you think there were changes in your school?

- What do you think led to these changes in your school?

- How is conflict dealt in your school?
 - Has it always been dealt with that way?

- What do you think should change in your school?

- How do think others feel about implementing restorative processes?

- What do you think about the conflict resolution training you received in the fall?
 - What kind of impact do you think it had on you?
 - What kind of impact do you think it had on your school?

APPENDIX E- Parental Consent

Restorative Justice as Crime Prevention?: An exploratory study of conflict resolution training in schools

Dr. Kathryn Campbell (supervisor)
Avery Newberry (Masters student researcher)
Department of Criminology
University of Ottawa
613-562-5800 ext 1818

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the above mentioned research study supervised by Dr. Kathryn Campbell and conducted by Masters student Avery Newberry for the completion of a Masters thesis project.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to explore if the proactive use of restorative justice techniques can act as crime prevention. This study will provide information regarding the use of conflict resolution training in schools to reduce and prevent violence and conflict and to foster more positive and peaceful school environments.

This study is independent of the school and the Toronto District School Board. I will assume no favours or losses as a result of participating in this research.

Participation: My participation will consist of participating in a 30-40 minute interview. I will be asked to discuss my understanding of restorative justice and my perceptions of our school environment. These interviews will take place April 24-26th at a time that is convenient for me.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I discuss my own thoughts and perceptions. I am not expected to feel any discomfort, however in the unlikely event that I do, information about counseling services in my area will be made available.

Benefits: My participation in this study will contribute to the advancement of knowledge with the proactive use of restorative justice and crime prevention. More specifically I will provide insight into the use of conflict resolution in schools.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for a Masters thesis and related publishing, and that my confidentiality will be protected.

My confidentiality will be protected as no one will know that I participated and only the researcher will attend the interview and have access to the data. The data from my

interview will be coded by a number and my name will not appear on the interview. As well, this consent form will be kept separate from my interview.

My **Anonymity** will be protected through no use of my real name or any personal identifiers. I will be referred to by a pseudonym in the publishing of the results. For example, if I am quoted in the research, my real name will not be used.

Conservation of data: The data collected from this interview (tape recording and written notes) will be kept in the supervisors locked office. Any electronic copies of the data will be stored on the researchers laptop protected by a password. This data will be destroyed (shredded and deleted) five years following the publication of this research.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Avery Newberry of the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Dr. Kathryn Campbell.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher Avery Newberry (anewb059@uottawa.ca) or her supervisor Dr. Kathryn Campbell (katcamp@uottawa.ca) or 613-562-5800 (1818).

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, (613) 562-5841 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX F- Assent Form

Restorative Justice as Crime Prevention?: An exploratory study of conflict resolution training in schools

Dr. Kathryn Campbell (Supervisor)
Avery Newberry (Master student researcher)
Department of Criminology
University of Ottawa
613-562-5800 ext 1818

This letter explains what the study is about and what I will be doing during the focus group.

The study is supervised by Dr. Kathryn Campbell and conducted by Avery Newberry a Masters student from the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa.

THIS STUDY is to understand if the proactive use of restorative justice techniques acts as crime prevention. This study will provide information regarding the use of conflict resolution training in schools to reduce and prevent violence and conflict, and to foster more positive and peaceful school environments. You have been asked to participate in this study as the researcher feels that your thoughts and feelings on this subject are valuable.

The research is not associated with my school or the Toronto District School Board. No one besides the researcher and the group participants will know that I am participating in this research. I will not receive any favors or loses for participating in this research.

WHAT WILL I NEED TO DO? I will need to attend a 30-45 minute discussion group (focus group) with 6-8 other students in my grade on a designated date. The focus group will be held outside of class time from April 24th-26th . I will be asked to contribute to the discussion and participate by talking to the other students in this small group about the questions asked by the researcher. I will not be asked to do anything outside of this except to meet with the researcher before the focus group to confirm my participation.

If I want to participate in this discussion, I will sign this letter. Signing does not mean that I can't stop participating. If I want to stop or leave, I can let the researcher know and she will let me leave without asking any questions. I will face no consequences for leaving and if I need the school counselor is available to immediately meet with me if I feel uncomfortable.

The researcher is going to tape record me and a research assistant will be taking notes during our group discussion. I understand that this tape will not be shown to anyone other than the researcher, and no one will know my name.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I understand that there are some limits to confidentiality as I will be participating with other students. I understand that the only people who will know about me participating in the focus groups are the researchers and the group participants. No one else will know that I took part in the study. No one else will know my name except for possibly the other group participants. During the focus group I will not be referred to by my real name. My real name will be kept private by the researcher and will not appear in the research results. I do understand that I may know other participants in the group but that we will not discuss who was present or what was said during the group discussion.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

I understand that it is not expected that I will feel uncomfortable during the discussion group. However, if I do the school counselor will be immediately available to talk with me if I need.

I MAY STOP THE RESEARCH AT ANY TIME. I may stop participating in the discussion at any time simply by telling the researcher that I want to stop. I have nothing to fear by not completing the discussion group.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I can keep.

If I have any questions about the study or about my participation, I may contact the researchers, Dr. Kathryn Campbell (katcamp@uottawa.ca) or Avery Newberry (anewb059@uottawa.ca) at 613-562-5800 ext 1818. If I have questions about my rights I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research at the University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, room 159, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, tel.: 613-562-5841, email: ethics@uottawa.ca

CONSENT

I have read and understood all of the information in this letter. Before signing, I have been allowed to ask any questions I had and these were answered clearly.

My name: _____

My signature: _____ Date _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date _____

APPENDIX G- Interview Consent Form

Restorative Justice as Crime Prevention?: An exploratory study of conflict resolution training in schools

Dr. Kathryn Campbell (supervisor)
Avery Newberry (Masters student researcher)
Department of Criminology
University of Ottawa
613-562-5800 ext 1818

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the above mentioned research study supervised by Dr. Kathryn Campbell and conducted by Masters student Avery Newberry for the completion of a Masters thesis project.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to explore if the proactive use of restorative justice techniques can act as crime prevention. This study will provide information regarding the use of conflict resolution training in schools to reduce and prevent violence and conflict and to foster more positive and peaceful school environments.

This study is independent of the school and the Toronto District School Board. I will assume no favours or losses as a result of participating in this research.

Participation: My participation will consist of participating in a 30-40 minute interview. I will be asked to discuss my understanding of restorative justice and my perceptions of our school environment. These interviews will take place April 24-26th at a time that is convenient for me.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I discuss my own thoughts and perceptions. I am not expected to feel any discomfort, however in the unlikely event that I do, information about counseling services in my area will be made available.

Benefits: My participation in this study will contribute to the advancement of knowledge with the proactive use of restorative justice and crime prevention. More specifically I will provide insight into the use of conflict resolution in schools.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for a Masters thesis and related publishing, and that my confidentiality will be protected.

My confidentiality will be protected as no one will know that I participated and only the researcher will attend the interview and have access to the data. The data from my interview will be coded by a number and my name will not appear on the interview. As well, this consent form will be kept separate from my interview.

My **Anonymity** will be protected through no use of my real name or any personal identifiers. I will be referred to by a pseudonym in the publishing of the results. For example, if I am quoted in the research, my real name will not be used.

Conservation of data: The data collected from this interview (tape recording and written notes) will be kept in the supervisors locked office. Any electronic copies of the data will be stored on the researchers laptop protected by a password. This data will be destroyed (shredded and deleted) five years following the publication of this research.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Avery Newberry of the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Dr. Kathryn Campbell.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher Avery Newberry (anewb059@uottawa.ca) or her supervisor Dr. Kathryn Campbell (katcamp@uottawa.ca) or 613-562-5800 (1818).

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, (613) 562-5841 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX H- Recruitment Notices

CALL FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

I am a Graduate student at the University of Ottawa in the Department of Criminology supervised by Dr. Kathryn Campbell, and I am looking for participants from Kipling Collegiate for my Masters thesis entitled:

Restorative Justice as Crime Prevention? : An exploratory study of conflict resolution training in schools

Purpose: To explore if the proactive use of restorative justice techniques can act as crime prevention

Objective: To examine whether restorative justice techniques, generally used as means of *reacting* to crime, can be understood as a means of *preventing* crime from occurring

Method: To interview teachers and administrators in Kipling Secondary school about the use of conflict resolution training

- To facilitate 3 focus groups with 6-8 students from each grade(9, 10 and 11) who received YOUCAN's conflict resolution training

Participation: Volunteer to complete a 30-40 minute one on one interview with researcher about your perceptions of restorative justice and your school environment

- Recommend 12 students from each grade who would represent school diversity and willing to discuss their perceptions of their school to your school principal
- Research will be conducted from April 24th-26th

Participation is voluntary and consent can be withdrawn at any time during the interview. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. This research is done in collaboration with YOUCAN for the fulfilment of the requirements for my Masters degree.

For More Information and to Confirm your Participation, Please contact:

Researcher: Avery Newberry

Anewb059@uottawa.ca

613-562-5303

Supervisor: Dr. Kathryn Campbell

katcamp@uottawa.ca

613-562-5800 ext 1818

Thank you in advance for your cooperation

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