In the summer of 2014, the New Haven Federation of Teachers was awarded an AFT Innovation Fund Grant for $300,000 over two years to train teachers in Restorative Practices. Under the direction of Billy Johnson, The Institute for Restorative Practices was contracted to train teachers to be trainers in restorative circles for classroom use. Thirty-seven teachers attended the two day introductory training and 19 of that number completed three more days and became licensed trainers which certified them to train others. These workshops focused on the use of circles specifically, but also included an overview of restorative practices. The objective of the grant is to provide at least one teacher trainer for each of the 48 New Haven Public Schools. “New Haven’s future depends upon an effective public education system, and I’m proud of the way the Board of Ed, the City, and the NHFT consistently work together for fresh solutions to challenging problems. When student discipline is under consideration, solutions to address underlying causes of the behavior – poverty, stress, trauma, or another cause – must be included so the behavior doesn’t spill over into other classrooms or onto the streets.” – Toni Harp, Mayor New Haven

Restorative practices are processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrong doing. This can include the use of circles to build and strengthen a community by

“When student discipline is under consideration, solutions to address underlying causes of the behavior – poverty, stress, trauma, or another cause – must be included so the behavior doesn’t spill over into other classrooms or onto the streets.” – Toni Harp, Mayor New Haven

“My hope is that over time all of our educators come to see every interaction, even interactions over discipline, as an opportunity for learning and coaching of students – and learning and coaching of each other.” – Superintendent Garth Harries

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improving the quality of relationships, informal circles to repair minor harms, formal restorative conferences, and group family decision making. Formal conferences are designed to repair more serious harms and develop consequences for the offender that are guided by two central principles: how does this consequence repair the harm that has been done, and how does this consequence restore the community to a sense of balance? There are many actions that can become a restorative practice for a community. For example, New Haven has identified trauma informed training as a restorative practice meant to restore the balance in our community concerning the students’ reactions to violence within their neighborhoods.

“Restorative practices, for me, captures the essential truth that education is about far more than simply academics – it is instead about helping *all* our students engage and grow as humans. My hope is that over time all of our educators come to see every interaction, even interactions over discipline, as an opportunity for learning and coaching of students – and learning and coaching of each other.” – Superintendent Garth Harries

In year two of the grant, Billy Johnson moved on to become a Director of Instruction for New Haven Public Schools, and Cameo Thorne was named the new Project Director. In year two, 18 more teachers completed the training and became licensed trainers. Thirty-three trained trainers in 25 schools began the work of training the members of their individual schools. Gloria Riley-Rodriguez and Rochelle Cobb of Wilbur Cross High School solved the problem of finding professional development time by offering full day trainings to their colleagues on Saturdays. Eleven staff members at Wilbur Cross volunteered two Saturdays and completed the introductory training. Eftyia Theodoropoulos of Conte School and Glenda Perez of James Hillhouse offered two Saturdays in the fall to any teachers who wanted to sign up and another 18 teachers completed the two day introduction. Cameo Thorne is also offering introductory professional development opportunities. Fourteen teachers recently donated their Saturday to attend day one of the two day introductory workshops.

Jen Dubin, a journalist from American Educator visited New Haven and toured ESUMS and Brennan Rogers. She wrote an important article about the restorative work being done at Brennan Rogers and was able to witness a formal restorative conference facilitated by Amy Migliore at ESUMS. Ms. Dubin was very impressed with what she saw happening in New Haven. If you missed it, you can view it electronically at http://www.aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/dubin. In early 2016, Steven Hernandez Director of Public Policy & Research, Commission on Children; Senior Legislative Attorney, CT General Assembly, visited ESUMS and watched Amy Migliore apply restorative principles. Attorney Hernandez shared that the research indicates restorative practices is an effective and humane way to address the needs of all students.

If anyone is interested in attending the upcoming introductory trainings contact Cameo Thorne. The following date is available.

**Introduction to Circles – June 4**

Upon request, Cameo will also visit your school and offer whole school or small group workshops to introduce, further, and/or deepen the restorative shift in your community. Cameo has visited several schools: Augusta Lewis Troup, Barnard, Cooperative Arts and Humanities, East Rock, Hyde, James Hillhouse, John C. Daniels, New Horizons, and Roberto Clemente. Please feel free to reach out to her with any questions or concerns at Cameo. Thorne@new-haven.k12.ct.us
So let’s talk about the elephant in the room. It’s pretty hard to ignore him after all, elephants take up all the room and they often smell bad. So here are two that keep showing up when people talk about restorative practices. Restorative practice (1) means that children will suffer because they won’t be prepared for the real world where their bosses won’t put up with their behavior and (2) since we can’t expel or suspend anymore and the students won’t change their behavior because there are no consequences. There are other smaller calves, like, with everything I do, I don’t have time for this and his twin, another initiative no one will remember in three years.

I completely understand these concerns. I spent the last 16 years as a classroom teacher in New Haven. Like a person suffering from PTSD, I know the pressure, the stress, and the smell of complete burnout threatening to fry what’s left of my once fertile brain, as well as the disrespect I professionally’ need to tolerate that bombards me from just about every possible direction including the occasionally misguided NPR show at 5 a.m.. Believe me, I get it.

So back to the elephants. First I need to say this, WE WILL STILL, unfortunately, NEED TO EXPEL and SUSPEND sometimes; hopefully less and less as we apply restorative principles. The safety of our schools will inform the rationale for those decisions. To suspend or expel will be guided by two questions; does this suspension/expulsion repair the harm that was done to the community and does it restore the community to a state of balance? What alternative consequences will achieve those two objectives? If we can’t keep the school safe, then we can’t restore the balance within the school community, so sometimes we will most definitely need to suspend. A restorative lens will shift the focus from strictly punishment to consequences that repair harm and restore balance to the community.

I agree that our students’ future bosses will be less tolerant of unwanted behaviors. However, I also know that children, like all human beings, need to feel like they can succeed, even when they don’t know how. Children like all human beings have different challenges. They need to know, like we all need to know, that our failures at being as proficient as everyone else don’t define us. We all understand that when it comes to reading or math. But when the skill that needs to be developed is behavioral, there is a tendency to interpret the student’s action as a conscious choice. If I am 12 or 15 years old and I am frustrated to the point of anger, do I know why? Do I know what I could have done or said to share that frustration without anger? Do I know what to do for myself to lessen my frustrations in the future? These are very specific questions and the answers to those questions are restorative in nature because they seek to discover solutions that will bring the community back into balance.

Restorative practices require that we take the time to listen to the members of the community we serve.

Think about the students who seem to have the most difficult time in school. Many of them have been punished, over and over again.

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Restorative Practice Teacher Leaders

Teachers leaders:
Amy Adkins
Casey Ajello
Caroline Apgar
Jennifer Blemings
Tiffany Brown
Florence Crisci
Olga-Lynn D’Ambrosca
Katherine Denaples
Christopher Fry
Stacey Gachi
Kristen Ianniello
Michael Kuszpa
Judith Leach
Karen Lorde
Jennifer MacAuley
Cristina Martins
Amy Migliore
Hector Negron
Nikkina Osei-Holden
Michelle Paulishen
Glenda Perez
Victoria Raucci
Gloria Rodriguez
Teachers who have received two days of Saturday trainings:

Ariella Iancu
Bauman Jennifer
Bogart Michelle
Fran Businaro
Lisa Davis-Rucinski
Maia Demasi
Stephanie Esposito
Rachel Forsa
Laurie Gracy
Lashante James
Sandy Jolon
Douglas Jones
Amy Kaminski
Jenna Mcdermit
Scott Meikle
Lauren Mikulak
Michael Naples

...continued on next page
Teachers who have received two days of Saturday trainings cont.:

Kelly Nestor
Alexandra Novak
Comfort Parker
Jessica Perez-Vega
Tracey Peterson
Kimberly Phillips
Charlie Pickett
Randi Petersen
Kelly Ross
Haresha Samaranayake
Amy Schlank
Katie Taylor
Foster Vancardi
Susan Wade
David Weinreb
Kimberly Wilson
Karina Woltke
Andrea Zullo
Humans have a psychological desire to live in community. While we could spend a great deal of time and space writing about the psychology that supports that statement, the history of the development of civilization supports this claim. Civilization as we know it could not have been developed without a mechanism that allowed basic needs to be met and the emotions that are driven by those needs to be addressed. A key emotion that is necessary for humanity to care about meeting each other’s needs and responding to each other’s emotions is empathy.

Empathy is the foundation for restorative practices. How do individuals within a society learn to be empathetic? What drives that mechanism in the individual? In restorative practices, affect is used, modeled, and taught to help members of a community express their individual needs and their emotional responses to their experiences. This is how community is built. I may not care about you until I know you, but how do I get to know you and how do I deepen that connection between us?

This is accomplished by explicitly teaching people to express affect or emotions in a non-confrontational way that promotes empathy. For example, a student is repeatedly late to your class. You might say, “I am very discouraged and frustrated when you are late to class, because I want you to be here so you can learn and I am afraid you will become discouraged if you miss something important and fall behind.” This statement tells the student how you feel and why you feel that way. It also conveys your concern for his or her well being. All of these steps build empathy and deepen your relationship with the student.

The next restorative step involves actively planning to extend this relationship building work with your entire class. This is accomplished by using circles. Members of the community (classroom or staff) sit in a circle, ideally with nothing to hide behind, and share their feelings, values, and ideas about a topic. In this way, the community begins to learn about each other. This practice respects everyone’s feelings and empathy grows. Members of the community are taught to use affect when expressing their needs or values. The conversation looks more like, “I feel respected when I am heard and my feelings are treated as important,” as opposed to, the more impersonal argument, “I think everyone should be heard.” The difference here is not subtle. The first statement will bring people together and the second has the potential to divide them.

Once community is established in a group, the group can begin to repair minor harms that occur. This cannot happen until the members of the group have done enough community enhancing work so that empathy for one another has been developed. This is accomplished in circle or in informal conferences. These conferences and their bigger brother the formal conference rely on affect and empathy. Those who have been harmed will share how they have been affected by the actions of another. The offender will also share how s/he was affected. I won’t go into the whole process here, but the group, both the offender and the victim will come to an agreement concerning what must happen to repair the harm and restore the community to balance.

Empathy is the foundation for restorative practices.
The Elephant in the Room...continued from page 3

Our children are members of that community. Once we understand how they see the world, we can begin to build stronger ties. By explicitly talking about how our choices affect others and reflecting upon the results of those choices the students are better able to understand how their actions affect their community. A 12 year old student recently shared his values regarding respect. He said, “Miss I respect everybody, until they disrespect me and then I punch ‘em in the head.” I now understand one reason why this particular student keeps getting into trouble at school. If I simply tell this student he’s wrong or that behavior is unacceptable, Will he agree? Will he understand why? Will he have the behavioral tools to make a different choice? Only when I take the time to help that student understand these things, will the student be able to succeed as an adult.

What about punishment you ask. Doesn’t that teach students to do the right thing? It actually doesn’t. It may or may not result in temporary compliance. Think about the students who seem to have the most difficult time in school. Many of them have been punished, over and over again. In his book, Lost in School; Why Our Kids with Behavioral Challenges are Falling Through the Cracks and How can We Help Them, Dr. Greene shares this from the American Psychological Association, “A review of ten years of research found that these (zero tolerance) policies not only failed to make schools safe or more effective in handling student behavior, but actually increased behavioral problems and dropout rates. Yet public elementary and secondary schools in the United States continue to dole out a whopping 203,000 paddlings, 110,000 expulsions, and 3 million suspensions each year, along with countless tens of millions of detentions.” (p. x-xii) The statistics couldn’t be clearer; punishment in the form of detentions, suspensions, and expulsions does not make kids behave better. The statistics show that the very behaviors we wish to diminish are made worse.

As the community grows stronger, when more serious harms occur, a formal conference can be held. A formal conference also includes the person or persons who have been harmed and the offender as well as the offender’s family and/ or support person. The victim(s) may bring a support person as well. The facilitator of either conference is not there to lecture, judge, or decide on the consequences. The facilitator follows the process and supports the group as it comes to a decision about what must happen in order to repair the harm and restore the balance within the community.

All of these processes are rooted in the principles of fair process. Fair process requires everyone’s voice to be heard. What happened? What did you think when you realized what had happened? How were you affected? Who has been affected by what has happened? In what way have they been affected? What do you need to do to make this right? The answers to these questions allow everyone to be heard and it supports a clear understanding of everyone’s feelings and ideas.

The other two principles of fair process are explanation and expectation clarity. Once everyone has weighed in and been heard, the explanation for what happened is followed by a group consensus regarding the next steps. Once the decisions about next steps are reached, this becomes a formal agreement. In service to expectation clarity, the actions that support repair and restoration for the community should be formally written down. This should also include a statement regarding what will happen if the agreement is not kept or honored.

While this is the abbreviated description of restorative practices, it is important to note that other practices may also be restorative. For example, in a district where there is a great deal of violence and conflict within the community, trauma may be a factor. It would be restorative to provide teachers with knowledge about trauma and how it impacts behavior and how to deescalate someone who has been triggered and is lashing out because of that trauma. Providing conflict resolution skills may also be a restorative action for a community. The key to understanding what other restorative practices may be necessary is to ask the key questions; how do we restore this community to balance and repair any harms that may have occurred and are still causing disruption and conflict within the community.

What are Restorative Practices...continued from page 7