



Struggling Toward Humanization: Restorative Justice, Deeper Learning, and the Pursuit of Transformed Relationships at an Urban Charter School

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Struggling Toward Humanization: Restorative Justice, Deeper Learning, and the Pursuit
of Transformed Relationships at an Urban Charter School

Sarah M. Fine

Dr. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot
Dr. Jal Mehta
Dr. Meira Levinson

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of the Graduate School of Education of Harvard University
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for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Dedication

To Avi, whose sweetness and intensity inspire me to be my best self.

To Sasha, whose delight in the world fills me with joy.

And, finally:

To Micah, whose love and companionship sustain me through it all.

Acknowledgements

It truly takes a village to raise a dissertation. To that end, I am blessed to have benefitted from an extraordinary amount of intellectual, emotional, and material support throughout this process, without which I certainly would have foundered. I would like to extend my thanks to a few particularly important sources of such support here.

First, I would like to thank the members of my doctoral committee: Dr. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, Dr. Meira Levinson, and Dr. Jal Mehta. Dr. Lawrence-Lightfoot has acted as both an anchor and a compass, offering a balance of encouragement and critique and helping me to keep sight of my broader purpose. Dr. Levinson has been an energetic and intensely rigorous thought-partner, helping me to articulate and defend my ideas with more clarity than I might ever have done otherwise. Last but not least, Dr. Mehta has been my primary mentor and intellectual companion throughout my doctoral journey. His guidance, support, and friendship have buoyed me through many moments of doubt, and his brilliance and intellectual integrity are continual sources of inspiration.

Surprised as I was to receive it, the generous financial support provided by the Spencer Foundation and the National Academy of Education enabled me to devote my undivided attention to this project this year. The Harvard Graduate School of Education also extended several smaller grants which allowed me to focus on the process of data collection and analysis. To all of these institutions, I offer gratitude.

This project could never have happened without the participation of the leaders, teachers, and students at “Outlook Collegiate Academy,” the school which sits at the center of this project. I deeply appreciate their willingness to let me observe and interrogate their work. I extend special thanks to the two extraordinary campus leaders whom I here call “Nora” and “Valerie,” for their generosity with their time and their willingness to be reflective and vulnerable with me.

For the last five years I have been lucky to have Dr. James Noonan as a friend and writing partner. James’s careful readings of my half-baked drafts have always pushed my thinking forward, and his company throughout the often-lonely passage through graduate school has been invaluable. Over the past year, I also have benefitted from valuable intellectual support provided by three other doctoral colleagues: Victoria Theisen-Homer, Chris Buttimer, and Dr. Jenna Gravel. Their thoughtful commentaries on my writing, along with their encouragement, were always useful.

Although I live three thousand miles away from my parents, I am deeply indebted to them for their unwavering love and support. My mother, Deborah Hirschland, has worn an astonishing array of hats throughout this process: cheerleader, therapist, thought-partner, devoted grandma, and, on occasion, line-editor-in-chief. For his part, my father, Jeffrey Fine, contributed wisdom, humor, and curry, all of which always hit the spot.

The other members of my east-coast family have cheered me on as well. Thank you to my sister, Shoshanna Fine, for inspiring me to think—and live—more boldly than I might otherwise do, and to her wonderful wife-to-be, Laurel Gabler, for blazing the way several years back when she completed her own doctoral studies. Thank you to my grandmother,

Evelyn Polk, for her enthusiastic endorsements of my ideas. Finally, thank you to my late grandmother Esther Fine, who, well into her nineties, responded to my stories of professional triumph and woe by sharing stories about her own thirty years teaching fifth grade in the Boston Public Schools. Both of these women are deep sources of personal inspiration.

As the parent of two young children, I needed as much help with childcare as I possibly could get in order to have time and space to complete this project. My two sets of parents-in-law, Robyn Perlin and Ed Duncan and Ruth and Joel Perlin, were extraordinarily generous in providing such help, allowing me to “lean in” while trusting that my children were safe and happy. Their unwavering love and support—material, logistical, culinary, and otherwise—has meant the world to me.

Finally, I would like to thank Micah Perlin, my partner of nearly a decade. I don’t think that Micah had any idea what he was signing up for when he encouraged me to apply to HGSE’s doctoral program; for that matter, neither did I. Even so, he has been in it with me every step of the way, making me cups of tea while I labored over my proposal, waking up in the wee hours with our children so that I could make it to early-morning meetings at my research site, taking in stride the absent-mindedness which has accompanied my intensive work on this manuscript, and, throughout, insisting that I never put my work before my—and our—well-being. I am eternally grateful for his love, support, and unflagging gameness for whatever comes our way.

Avi, my almost-4-year-old, keeps asking me when I’m going to graduate. I’m not sure he understands what this means beyond the fact that there might be cake to eat, but I do know that he and his younger brother, as continual sources joy and meaning in my life, have helped me to keep my eye on the prize. And I will admit that I’m a little bit thrilled that I finally can answer his question with confidence. Soon, kiddo: I’m going to graduate very, very soon.

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Abstract

As the twenty-first century hurtles forward, a growing number of American schools have set their sights on ambitious instructional goals—goals which go beyond basic literacy and numeracy to involve “deeper” competencies such as critical thinking and creative problem-solving. At the same time, in response to data demonstrating that youth of color tend to experience disproportionate rates of detention, suspension, and expulsion, many schools are also striving to replace zero tolerance policies with more equitable and inclusive approaches to discipline. In this dissertation, I focus on a former “No Excuses” charter school which recently made commitments to both of these aspirations. Specifically, I employ a range of ethnographic methods to explore and narratively interpret the work of a group of leaders who are engaged in an effort to transform the teaching, learning, and broader culture of their four-campus school in light of its new vision—a vision which marries the goal of supporting deeper learning in classrooms with the goal of reorganizing school culture around the philosophy and practices of restorative justice. Taking a phenomenological approach, I focus on the experiences and sense-making of these leaders as they strive to enact this new vision through their work with each other, with teachers, and with students. The study sheds light on the affordances and dilemmas associated with applying the restorative justice framework to situations of leadership as well as to instances of instructional practice. More broadly, it suggests that successfully transforming schools into more equitable, humanizing, and intellectually vital institutions requires educators to conceptualize culture and instruction as interrelated and mutually supportive entities—an argument which challenges some of the dominant perspectives and structures in the field.

Outlook Collegiate Academy's Academic Leadership Team Roles and Names

System-level leaders

- Head of School and acting Chief Academic Officer (THEO)***
- Director of Culture (SUZANNE)***
- Director of Teacher Training and Development (ELLERY)**
- Director of Student Services (LIANE)**
- Assistant Director of Student Services (KATIE)**
- Director of Human Capital*
- Director of Out-of-school-time Programs
- Director of Development and External Relations
- Director of Family Engagement
- Manager of Data, Assessment, and Accountability*

Campus-level leaders

- Principal of the Early Childhood Campus (SUSAN)*
- Vice Principal of the Early Childhood Campus**
- Principal of the Upper Elementary Campus (KERRY)**
- Vice Principal of the Upper Elementary Campus (REBECCA)
- Grades K-6 Math Coordinator
- Grades K-6 Literacy Coordinator**
- Grades K-6 Literacy Coach*
- Principal of the Upper School (BENNY)*
- Vice Principal of the Upper School (LIZA)**
- Upper School Coordinator of Instruction (PAUL)**
- Upper School Literacy Coordinator**
- Upper School Math Coordinator (DANIEL)**
- Upper School Instructional Coach (RACHEL)*
- Principal of the Collegiate Institute (VALERIE)***
- Collegiate Institute Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction (NORA)***

** Leaders who were present for more than 75% of observed meetings*

***Leaders who participated in one interview*

****Leaders who participated in multiple interviews*

Silos

Given that this is a project concerned with the pursuit of transparency and visible thinking, it seems only fitting that I begin with a confession.

The confession is this: when I first sat down to coffee with Theo, the man who heads the institution that sits at the center of this project, I was not a very good listener.

It was a humid afternoon in late June. With the academic year long since over, the university café where we sat was quiet to the point of being awkward. Theo and I, however, were at ease right away. Although we had never met in person before, I knew a bit about his world; several years earlier, I had conducted an action research project with a team of humanities teachers at his school. For his part, he had read some of what I have written on the topic of “deeper learning,” and, after connecting with a mutual acquaintance, had reached out to talk with me about the possibility of working with the school’s leadership team in the coming year. I listened with interest to what he had to say—or so I thought at the time. In retrospect, though, I realize that I only heard half of what he told me.

The part I heard was the part about how the four-campus urban charter school that he had been leading for thirteen years, Outlook Collegiate Academy (OCA),¹ was in the process of crafting a new instructional vision. During the early years of his tenure, Theo told me, OCA had been a progressive-leaning institution; he himself had been a protégé of the late philosopher-educator Ted Sizer, and when he took the helm as the principal of OCA’s Upper School and later as the K-12 Head of School, he brought to the work a Deweyian vision of inquiry-based, student-centered, constructivist teaching. As the

¹ As per my IRB agreement, all names in this project, including “Outlook Collegiate Academy,” are pseudonyms.

accountability movement gained momentum following the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, however, the school had drifted quite far in the opposite direction, embracing a tightly micromanaged “No Excuses” model of instruction focused narrowly on the content and skills which appeared on state standardized tests.

Now, with change in the wind when it came to educational policy, Theo had resolved that the school should return with renewed commitment to its progressive roots. “We want to beam a laser focus on instructional quality this year,” he told me, “but we want to broaden our definition of instructional quality so that it means more than high [state test] scores. We want our students to be engaging in learning that is rigorous and authentic and deep.”

This excited me. In the years since I left my own classroom to pursue doctoral work, I had become steeped in the world of schools that have made serious commitments to “deeper learning”—learning which, as I will discuss in greater depth later, involves sustained critical thinking and draws together elements of mastery, identity, and creativity. In partnership with a skillful faculty mentor, Dr. Jal Mehta, I had conducted ethnographic fieldwork in almost thirty such schools around the country. By design, the institutions that we included in our sample had already gained reputations as leaders in the field; many were designed from the start to achieve deeper-learning-related goals, and most had spent a number of years trying to actualize their aspirations. Thus, it was intriguing to hear about a school with a (re)emergent commitment to deeper learning, because it gestured toward an opportunity to study the change process.

The other part of what Theo said, the part that I heard but did not fully take in, was about how OCA also had adopted what he called “the restorative approach.” This

was the other major strand of change work that the school had undertaken, he told me, and it concerned transforming the school's broader culture as well as changing its practices around discipline and behavior management. He probably said more about this, but if he did, it didn't register deeply enough for me to remember what it was.

Looking back on it now, I can see that there were several reasons why I paid so little attention to this part of Theo's account. The first is that I knew very little about the restorative approach beyond the fact that it was related to restorative justice, and I knew very little about restorative justice beyond the fact that it involved finding alternatives to zero tolerance discipline policies. Thus, I did not have a conceptual framework by which to make sense of what Theo told me about the restorative approach, and so I discounted its importance.

The more important reason for this response is that my experiences had conditioned me to think of the domains of school discipline and school culture as standing apart from the domains of curriculum, instruction, and pedagogy. This conditioning began at the charter school where I worked for four years as a teacher: a place where, as at many urban public schools, there was a dedicated "discipline staff." In our case, this staff was made up of middle-aged Black men who handled pretty much everything that happened outside of classrooms. During the faculty orientation at the start of each year, Vice Principal Spears, who oversaw this staff, would address the teachers—mostly young White women—with a message that delineated sharp boundaries between our respective roles. "Your job is to teach," he would say. "Our job is to make sure that you can do your job. If a student isn't letting you do your job, put them out. We'll handle them. Period. End of story."

End of story indeed. My colleagues and I certainly cared about the relational dimensions of our work; we lamented the antagonisms that our students seemed to have developed toward everything school-related and puzzled endlessly about how to overcome them. Had we been given an opportunity to think about it, we might have recognized that these antagonisms had something to do with our teaching, with the discipline staff's approach to handling discipline, with the school's broader culture, and with the ways that these things jointly factored into students' experiences. But there were no such opportunities. Never were Vice Principal Spears or any of his staff invited into the so-called "quiet room" where I and the school's other instructional leaders held our meetings, and never were we invited into the corner office where they held theirs. As a result, the school's approach to discipline and culture remained siloed from its approach to teaching and learning, and the potential intersections between the two spheres remained unexamined.

I encountered similar silos in the world of educational scholarship. In the course of our attempt to understand the multi-faceted nature of deeper learning, Dr. Mehta and I noticed that researchers whose work focuses on the cognitive dimensions of learning rarely seem to engage with those who focus on the affective dimensions, and vice versa. More broadly, those who focus on what happens at the level of the "instructional core," such as curriculum, instruction, pedagogy, and assessment tend not to talk with those who focus on "external" dimensions such as school culture, school climate, and educational justice. There are certainly a few scholars who have advocated for more ecological and intersectional perspectives on what happens in schools—my advisor Sara Lawrence Lightfoot is among them—but for the most part, research tends to be undertaken and

disseminated in ways that enforce similar boundaries to the ones I encountered as an educator.

It was this set of experiences which prompted me initially to ignore what Theo told me about how OCA had adopted the restorative approach. Having constructed my identity as an “instruction person,” I did not imagine that I could help with or learn from the school’s quest to embrace a new way of approaching discipline and culture, nor did I imagine this quest to be related to the effort to transform classrooms into places of powerful learning. Theo accepted this perspective. He and I agreed that throughout the next school year I would help to facilitate the process by which OCA’s Academic Leadership Team sought to unpack and enact the school’s new instructional vision, and that also, pending the group’s blessing, I would collect ethnographic data along the way. In the written agreement that I drew up, I was careful to be clear about the boundaries of my involvement, limiting it to “activities pertaining to instructional improvement.”

These boundaries began to collapse the moment that I set foot at OCA, but it wasn’t until five months later, as I sat observing a tense conversation among system- and campus-level leaders, that I fully recognized it.

In Chapter 2, I describe this conversation in more detail. For the time being, the important thing to know is that it concerned a task on which the school’s twenty-five-member Academic Leadership Team (ALT) had been working for several months: the creation of a new educator evaluation rubric which better would reflect OCA’s new priorities than the one issued by the state. At the start, the task had seemed like a promising extension of the work which the group had undertaken in the fall—work which involved unpacking some of the specific elements of the school’s new instructional

vision. By the third meeting, however, the rubric creation process had begun to implode. Frustration and strong feelings reigned, and every attempt to address individual concerns seemed to lead to more confusion. The two leaders tasked with facilitating the process, Ellery and Suzanne, found themselves uncertain about how to proceed. As Ellery noted in a moment of dark humor, “At this point the word rubric alone makes me want to crawl under a table.”

As I sat watching leaders try to make sense of what had gone wrong and heatedly debate how to move forward, a realization which had been dawning on me for several months finally forced its way to the surface. The realization was that the effort to transform OCA into a “restorative learning organization” was inextricably tangled up in the effort to imagine and support a new kind of teaching and learning. Said differently, the questions and dilemmas which recurrently surfaced during ALT meetings were rarely just about instruction; they were also about culture—and more often than not, they were about the intersection of these two domains.

This was, perhaps, what Theo had been trying to tell me from the start.

After further reflection and analysis, it became clear that the questions which arose during ALT meetings could be grouped into two main clusters. The first cluster—a cluster which was mainly about culture—involved dilemmas of what I will call *symmetry*, e.g. broad forms of coherence and alignment when it comes to the experiences of adults and students within schools (Mehta & Fine, In Press; Roberts, 2012). Leaders frequently talked about the need to “live our values” and “take a restorative approach to leadership,” but enacting this commitment, even just in the context of ALT meetings, proved to be extremely complicated. For example: How could leaders move away from

traditional hierarchical power dynamics while maintaining clear decision-making and accountability processes? How could they be deliberative and transparent in their process while also maintaining some level of efficiency? And how could they ensure that their work was responsive to the needs of teachers, staff, and teachers, even as the pressure to meet deadlines continued to bear down?

A second cluster of questions involved what sociologists might call *boundary-work*, which encompasses the drawing, redrawing, and dissolution of differing categories (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). In the case of the ALT, these questions explicitly drew together the discourses surrounding the work of cultural transformation with those surrounding the work of instructional improvement—discourses which the group initially assumed were unrelated to each other. As the year wore on, for example, many leaders began to talk more pointedly about the implications of the restorative justice framework for curriculum and pedagogy. What, they wondered, does it mean to teach restoratively? How does such teaching align with and/or depart from other conceptions of exemplary instructional practice? What might the answers to these questions suggest about where to focus their attention with respect to teacher evaluation and support?

I was not alone in my recognition that the boundaries between the school's instructional and cultural goals had begun to blur. Members of the ALT, too, had begun to think and work outside of their usual silos. It was no accident, for example, that Ellery, whose role involved supporting novice teachers, and Suzanne, whose role involved supporting school culture, had chosen to work together to facilitate the rubric creation process. It also was no accident that a subset of the ALT was working to redesign the OCA's two secondary campuses to better reflect the school's simultaneous commitments

to deeper learning and restorative culture. Such efforts to transcend boundaries were in some cases more instinctive than deliberate, but they nonetheless reflected a growing inclination to think holistically about the kind of community that OCA was trying to become, and, as such, to conceptualize the school's cultural priorities and instructional priorities as part of a coherent whole. Theo and several others began referring to this pattern as “the helix”—an apt metaphor for the way in which the school's two strands of change-work had begun to entwine themselves.

In this dissertation project, I explore the experiences and sense-making of OCA's leaders as they ventured into this complex territory. This territory is largely pathless; the scholarly and practice literatures have very little to say about how cultural work and instructional work intersect in the messy realm of real schools, with particularly little which explores the implications of the restorative justice framework for domains beyond those of behavior management and school culture. As well as reflecting broader patterns of siloing described above, this gap is a symptom of the fact that “practice quickly has outrun theory” when it comes to the rapidly spreading use of restorative justice in schools (Vaandering, 2013). In turn, this suggests that the field would benefit greatly from research which develops and/or extends theoretically-grounded perspectives on topics such as the implications of the restorative justice framework for leadership and instructional practice, as well as from thickly-described cases which can help educators to “see,” and thus anticipate, the affordances and dilemmas associated with adopting the restorative approach.

My hope is that this dissertation project, in small ways, will begin the work of meeting these needs. Accordingly, the chapters which follow take a range of approaches

and forms. In Chapter 1, I set the stage for the project by exploring the frameworks associated with restorative justice and deeper learning and speculating about the potential synergies between them; I also describe the broad methodology of the project and take up the question of my own positionality within it. In Chapter 2, I present a case study of OCA's academic leadership team, exploring the school's history of pendulum swings between progressive and authoritarian values and then using this as a frame for exploring the dilemmas which leaders encountered as they strived to bring their work into alignment with the restorative approach. In Chapter 3, I explore the ways that OCA's leaders and teachers made sense of the emergent concept of "restorative instruction" and draw this sense-making into conversation with theoretical perspectives on the implications of the RJ framework for curriculum and pedagogy. In chapter 4, I present a narrative portrait of a teacher-leader whose work gestures toward some possible answers to the question of what restorative instruction and leadership might look like when enacted in practice. Finally, in the Epilogue, I draw broader lessons from the study, arguing that the field would be well-advised to adopt an expanded view of school coherence; I also suggest that those who see themselves as part of the movement for progressive schooling should engage more deliberately with those who see themselves as part of the movement to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, and vice versa.

My experiences working on this project have convinced me that instruction and culture are more deeply interrelated than many assume—and indeed that it is impossible, or at least counter-productive, to think about either domain without considering the ways in which it simultaneously impacts and is impacted by the other. To say it differently, those of us who care about creating more powerful schools would do well to consider the

interrelationships between instruction and culture in more sustained and systematic ways. This is not in and of itself a new argument; it is one which long has been championed by progressive educators who reject the notion that students' minds, bodies, and souls should be treated separately, and who have sought to design schools accordingly. As my work with Dr. Mehta has revealed, however, such schools—and the perspectives which undergird them—are few and far between. Far more common are institutions like the one where I began my career, where siloed thinking dominates and where the transition toward more integrative and humanistic perspectives, if it happens at all, is likely to be an uphill process.

In this light, the fact that OCA's leaders chose to "lean in" to the question of what it might mean to live, lead, and teach restoratively comes off as both courageous and important. Their story does not offer many answers, but it sheds light on the challenges that schools might face if they are serious about trying to transform themselves into more equitable and intellectually vital institutions. As such, it is a story well worth telling. I hope to do it justice in the pages to come.

Chapter 1

Setting the Stage: In pursuit of school transformation

In recent years, public conversations about the persistence of institutional racism in American society have grown both in strength and in reach. For schools, and especially schools serving large numbers of students from historically marginalized communities, this has meant public criticism of what has become known as “the school-to-prison pipeline”—the troubling pattern whereby children of color, especially Black and Latino boys, experience disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion and as a result land in the juvenile justice system (Bahena, Bahena, Cooc, & Currie-Rubin, 2012; Kim, 2010; Mallett, 2016). In turn, this has given rise to a set of ambitions which often are expressed as imperatives for school administrators. Shine a light on inequities. Gather and disaggregate data about school discipline. Replace “zero tolerance” policies with policies which prioritize inclusivity and reintegration. Develop practices which help to rebuild relationships and trust.

Although there are a variety of ways that schools might organize to meet these imperatives, adopting the practices associated with restorative justice (RJ), a philosophical framework which emphasizes relationality, interconnectedness, and the importance of “facilitated encounters” between those who cause harm and those impacted (Zehr, 2002), has emerged as a key tool for doing so. Although RJ draws on a variety of much older approaches to community problem-solving, the first documented use of RJ in schools took place only two decades ago (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013), and as such it is often treated as a “new” approach to discipline and culture. The past five years, in particular, have seen an explosion of interest in using the framework as a mechanism for

disrupting patterns of educational injustice (Fronius, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016).

Recent years have also seen a shift in the conversation around what should be happening in American public school classrooms. More specifically, in response to the widespread belief that all students should graduate high school ready to attend four-year colleges or to pursue careers in the knowledge economy, the K-12 education sector has come under pressure to orient toward a new set of academic ambitions. These ambitions, which often get lumped under the umbrella term “deeper learning,” can be expressed as a set of imperatives relating to teaching practice. Create classrooms that support critical and creative thinking. Cultivate authentic inquiry. Teach reflective habits of mind. Place students at the center of instruction. Focus on “twenty-first century skills” such as collaboration and communication. Although many of these goals are far from new, their prominence in current reform discourses stands in contrast to the emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy which has dominated the last quarter-century of rhetoric and policy-making (Mehta & Fine, 2015a, 2015b, In Press).²

The four-campus urban charter school which sits at the center of this dissertation project, Outlook Collegiate Academy (OCA), is reflective of both of these broad trends. Like all schools, OCA has a particular history that shapes its ecology and identity (Lightfoot, 1983). Beyond such particulars, however, the commitments that the school has made over the course of the past several years are highly aligned with the shifting priorities of the field. In the spring of 2013, for example, after examining data which

² Throughout this chapter, and in particular the sub-section titled “Organizing for Deeper Learning,” I rely heavily on content that I and Professor Mehta have generated over the course of our six years’ worth of research and writing on the topic of deep learning in American secondary schools. In cases where I draw from published material, I provide specific citations.

suggested that boys of color were being disproportionately issued detentions and suspensions, OCA's leaders decided to adopt what they called "the restorative approach" to discipline and culture-building. This represented a sharp departure from the school's previous reliance on exclusion-based discipline systems and, more broadly, from its acceptance of a culture which leaders characterized as "rigid" and "broken." A year later, during the summer of 2014, the school's academic leadership team drafted a new instructional vision. This vision specified, among other things, that teachers should strive to create learning experiences which "[move] students toward the development and application of higher-order thinking skills," "[treat] students as knowledge creators, not merely knowledge receivers," and "[include] regular performance-based exhibitions of learning." These "deeper" goals represented a significant shift away from school's prior identity as an aspiring "No Excuses" institution which sought to enact a micromanagement-heavy, skills-focused, test-oriented model of instruction.

In Chapter 2, I explore in greater detail why and how OCA chose to take up these two new priorities. For the moment, however, what matters is the fact that the school's decision to pursue self-transformation echoes two consequential recent developments in the American K-12 education sector: the growing commitment to addressing issues of (in)equity in educational justice and the gradual shift away from the "basic skills" emphasis associated with the first instantiation of the test-based accountability movement. As the result of this resonance, I argue, examining the school's recent change efforts provides a window into the general challenges involved in the change-work to which a growing number of schools are committing.

With this said, it is worth dwelling briefly on the fact that OCA undertook the

effort to “go restorative” and the effort to deepen instruction concurrently. Although there is no easy way to determine how many schools might be in similar situations, this is likely a fairly unusual co-incidence of change priorities. It is possible to imagine that this casts OCA as too unusual a case to be useful to the field, but I would like to argue the opposite: the school presents an opportunity to use empirical inquiry as a platform for exploring the intersections between deeper learning and restorative justice—frameworks which rarely, if ever, have been drawn into conversation with each other. Thus, exploring the experiences of OCA’s leaders as they strived to transform their school not only can generate insights into the nature of adult learning in the context of organizational change, but also can help to extend the boundaries of theory.

The rest of this chapter is intended to serve as a foundation for these explorations. In the next section, I examine the two key frameworks of the study in greater depth and briefly touch on the value of drawing them into conversation with each other. I then outline the broad design and methodology of the project and, finally, take up the question of my position within it.

Conceptual Framework

This study draws on two main strands of literature: literature which deals with the use of the restorative justice framework as an approach to school discipline and culture, and literature which deals with the nature of deeper learning and the challenges of organizing schools and classrooms to achieve it. Here, I trace the broad outlines of each of these literatures and build an argument that each has gaps which this project can help to fill; I then speculate about the potential synergies between the two. These explorations are intended to create foundational context for the dissertation as a whole, but they do not

constitute a comprehensive literature review. In the coming chapters, I will delve more deeply into relevant sub-dimensions of some of the topics which I outline below.

The Spread of Restorative Justice in Schools

As described above, the second decade of the twenty-first century was one in which the winds of change were blowing with respect to conversations about the persistence of structural racism in the United States. Although the systematic oppression of communities of color by the police is hardly a new phenomenon, in the winter of 2012, the shooting of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager who was gunned down by a White neighborhood watch coordinator, shone a spotlight on what a growing number of people acknowledged to be an intolerable reality. Two years later, the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, produced an even louder outcry, spurring protests and riots around the country and projecting the nascent “Black Lives Matter” movement onto the national stage. As well as creating a platform by which to advocate for police reforms, this movement launched a public dialogue about the roles that public institutions play in perpetuating the oppression of Black and Brown citizens (Coates, 2015).

A related dialogue had begun several years earlier in the world of American K-12 schools. This dialogue focused on what Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera (2010) and others have termed the “racial discipline gap”—the disproportionately high rates of detention, suspension, and expulsion experienced by Black and Latino students, especially boys, when compared to their White peers. As a number of high-profile reports demonstrated (Blad, 2016; Gillespie & Losen, 2012), these chronic school exclusions, which for some begin as early as preschool, often result in excluded populations dropping out and

eventually landing in the criminal justice system, thereby fueling the so-called “school-to-prison pipeline” (Mallett, 2016; Noguera, 2003).

While racial inequalities in discipline have been documented for more than thirty years, they are especially pronounced in the many schools which tout zero tolerance policies—policies which “punish all offenses severely, no matter how minor.” These policies became popular in the 1990s as a response to perceptions of growing school violence, developing alongside the related theory of “broken windows policing,” which argued that harsh punishments for minor infractions would help to reduce the incidence of major ones (Noguera, 2003; Skiba, Noam, & Skiba, 2001). Despite the fact that there is a growing literature documenting the ineffectiveness of such policies (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Casella, 2004), their popularity persists in many schools, especially those which predominantly serve students of color. “No Excuses” charter schools have embraced the dogma and practice of zero tolerance with particular zeal (Golann, 2015; Whitman, 2008).

Zero tolerance is not the only connection between schools and prisons. As Vaandering (2013), Wadwha (2016), and others have noted, the general approach that public schools take when handling student misconduct is quasi-judicial, echoing the punitive orientation which characterizes western criminal justice systems. To this end, discipline practices focus on identifying rules which have been broken and meting out punishments for those who break them, as well as on excluding those perceived as disobedient or disruptive out of the belief that doing so will maximize the learning of those who comply (Karp & Breslin, 2001). In some schools, especially high-poverty urban schools, these practices are paired with surveillance technology such as metal

detectors, security cameras, and school police officers (Taylor, 2013). Such practices have cemented “the interlocking relationships between schools and the judicial system” (Saltman & Gabbard, 2003, p. 3). Although many construe these relationships as a purely contemporary phenomenon, they also can be seen as an expression of a longstanding pattern of authoritarianism in schools (Harber, 2004; Harber & Sakade, 2009).

Regardless of whether it is old or new, the punitive nature of school discipline recently has come under fire for its contribution to broader patterns of structural inequality. Calls for more equitable approaches to school discipline have amplified rapidly, permeating not only K-12-specific publications such as *Education Week* but also more mainstream venues such as National Public Radio, *The Atlantic*, and *The New York Times* (See Glass, n.d. and Richmond, 2015, for examples). As a result, schools and school district face mounting pressure to publish disaggregated data about exclusions, to dismantle zero tolerance policies, and to adopt alternative approaches to handling disciplinary incidents.

It is against this backdrop that restorative justice (RJ), a framework and set of practices which support non-punitive approaches to addressing harm (Zehr, 2002), has become popular. Although research on the use of RJ in schools is still quite scarce, positive press coverage, as well as preliminary findings suggesting that RJ can both reduce discipline referrals and positively impact school climate, have ensured its rapid spread (Fronius et al., 2016). In 2015, the number of U.S. schools and districts publicly claiming that they had adopted RJ was growing exponentially; there were also several high-profile examples of entire districts, such as San Diego Unified School District,

committing to a restorative model (Burks, 2015). Growing interest in RJ has also supported the development of an expanded training infrastructure.

The history of RJ is simultaneously short and long. Those who study the framework emphasize that it has roots in a variety of ancient traditions, drawing on practices that can be traced to indigenous communities all around the world (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Fronius et al., 2016). The circle processes which have become the hallmark of how many schools have adapted RJ, in particular, reflect a belief in the interconnectedness of all beings and a method for community problem-solving which can be traced to American Indian and First Nation Canadian communities (Zehr, 2002). As a formal program undertaken by representatives of the state, RJ began in the context of the Canadian criminal justice system in the 1970s, with the first successful victim-offender conference and the ensuing launch of a victim-offender reconciliation program (Wachtel, n.d.). Variations of the model quickly spread throughout North America and Europe, growing to encompass a variety of “facilitated encounters” between those who perpetrated crimes and those who were affected by their actions. The first documented use of RJ in an educational context was in Australia in 1994, when educator Marg Thorsborne used the practice of restorative conferencing to address an incident of assault in her school (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). Over the course of the following decades, a growing number of schools in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States began to employ conferencing as a model by which to address discipline issues.

Contrary to what some educators believe, RJ does not comprise a patented or comprehensively formulated program. Rather, it is a *philosophy* which is associated with

a set of practices and processes (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Wadhwa, 2015). This philosophy is broadly humanistic; it eschews individualistic, meritocratic, authoritarian logic and instead focuses on the innate worthiness and relationality of all people (Vaandering, 2013; Zehr, 2002). In this, at least as RJ advocates see it, RJ stands in contrast to retributive justice, which views individuals as objects to be controlled rather than as actors whose humanity must be respected regardless of their actions, and which focuses on notions of (un)deservingness rather than on expressions of need (Vaandering, 2013; Zehr, 2002). As I will explore at greater length in Chapter 3, RJ's philosophy also has deep connections to the liberatory perspectives associated with critical theory (Vaandering, 2010).

The processes which flow from RJ's philosophy are ones which are inclusive and collaborative, and which seek to produce consensual agreements about outcomes and the eventual reintegration of those who have caused harm. In the context of the criminal justice system, the central process associated with RJ is that of restorative conferencing, where those who perpetrate harm voluntarily agree to meet with those affected. Often occurring in the form of a circle with a "keeper" who acts as a facilitator, these conferences seek to answer three questions which are central to RJ: "Who has been harmed?" "What are their needs?" and "Whose obligations are these?" (Zehr, 2002, p. 31). The script for such conferences gives victims and perpetrators equal opportunities to share their perspective and weigh in on desired outcomes; the goal is to repair the harms caused by the wrongdoing, to transform the relationships among those involved, and, when possible, to surface and address the root causes of the issue. RJ thus treats perpetrators simultaneously as agents and as victims, a twofold lens which opens the door

for viewing wrongful behavior as a reflection of systematic inequalities rather than just as an expression of individual pathology. For this reason, many see RJ as particularly well-suited to the task of addressing and/or disrupting patterns of institutional racism and mass incarceration (Wadhwa, 2016; Winn, 2013).

Although many schools use the term *restorative justice* to describe their adoption of the restorative framework, theorists argue that many of them are in fact employing *restorative practices*, of which RJ is one example (Fronius et al., 2016; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). As Wachtel (n.d.) writes, “restorative practices” is an umbrella term; it encompasses proactive interventions which aim to build and sustain positive relationships, as well as reactive ones—e.g. RJ—which aim to respond to specific harms that have transpired. McCluskey et al (2008) argue that the shift in language from “justice” to “practices” is important because the “justice” dimensions of RJ are not always applicable to school contexts. As evidence, they cite data demonstrating that the majority of student behaviors which lead to exclusions are not violent ones, adding that “the borrowing of terms such as ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’ from criminal justice may then reinforce a discourse that demonises and criminalises young people in general” (p. 204). Zehr (2002), too, recommends drawing distinctions between RJ and restorative practices, noting also that other terms such as “the restorative way” have multiplied in recent years. Taking an alternate approach, Evans and Vaandering (2016) refer to the use of restorative practices in schools as “restorative justice in education,” to honor the underlying integrity of RJ philosophy and principles while recognizing that their use in school contexts requires specific treatment. While these distinctions are important, for the sake of

simplicity I will use the shorthand RJ to refer to restorative justice *and* restorative practices; the only exception is when participants themselves used alternate language.

Beyond questions of terminology, most of those who write about the use of RJ in schools agree that the framework offers a more equitable alternative to zero tolerance and other versions of punitive discipline, as well as a promising tool for developing school connectedness more generally (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Hopkins, 2004; Karp & Breslin, 2001; McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, et al., 2008; Richmond, 2015; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013; Winn, 2013). The most common RJ process in schools is that of *circles*, which are used in some cases to develop positive culture and strong interpersonal relationships and in other cases to respond to specific incidents of wrongdoing (Wadhwa, 2015). Another common process is that of post-incident conferencing, which deliberately strives to give students “a voice in the decision-making and procedural justice process” (Fronius et al., 2016, p. 6). Such conferences have much in common with restorative conferencing as it is undertaken in the context of the criminal justice system, namely that the focus is not on meting out one-size-fit-all punishments for rules which have been broken but rather on repairing and/or transforming the relationships which have been harmed and finding acceptable ways to reintegrate offenders (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). As one might expect, these conferences can be time- and resource-intensive; many school which have committed fully to RJ have dedicated staff-members whose job it is to facilitate and, later, to support participants in honoring the agreements that were reached.

Finally, and of particular relevance given its use at OCA, one of the most widely relied-on tools used by schools which have adopted RJ is a diagram known as “the social discipline window.” (See Figure 1, below.) This diagram, which adapts an earlier

framework offered by Glaser (1964) in his study of parole officer behavior, first was presented by McCold and Wachtel (2003) in their effort to develop a “conceptual theory” of RJ (p. 1). The original diagram’s x-axis indicates level of support/nurturance and its y-axis specifies level of control/discipline/limit-setting; its area is separated into four quadrants, each of which corresponds to a different paradigm. Various “renovations” to the social discipline window have downplayed the importance of control and instead emphasized the importance of relationships and reciprocal accountability (Vaandering, 2013); however, the basic descriptors associated with the four quadrants has remained constant, with the upper right-hand quadrant being the “restorative” quadrant. The key descriptor for this quadrant is “WITH,” to indicate that decisions are undertaken collaboratively; this stands by contrast to the punitive and authoritarian “TO” which characterizes the upper-left-hand quadrant, the permissive “FOR” which characterizes the lower right-hand quadrant, and the neglectful “NOT” which characterizes the lower left-hand quadrant.

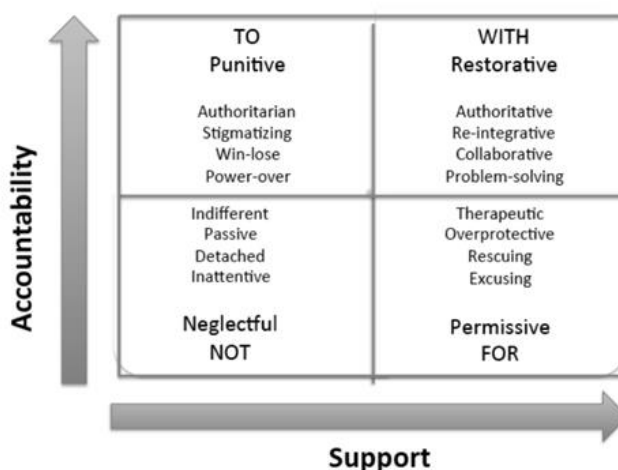


Figure 1. The Social Discipline Window (as used at OCA)

This diagram, in various adaptations, has become a linchpin of professional development around the use of RJ in schools. Powerful in its simplicity, it strives to capture the essential orientation of RJ by “[encouraging] educators to think beyond a punitive-permissive response to inappropriate student behaviour, to a restorative, authoritative response where adults work together WITH students in a more engaged and relational manner” (Vaandering, 2013, p. 313).

Stepping back, it is worth emphasizing just how profound a shift in perspective and practice is entailed in adopting this orientation. As discussed earlier, the dominant mode of “doing school” in many K-12 institutions, especially those serving poor and/or minoritized students, involves an authoritarian approach which revolves around conformity, compliance, and strictly enforced hierarchies of power. This runs directly counter to the more collaborative, relational, deliberative approach specified by RJ. It is for this reason that RJ cannot be enacted successfully if it is treated as an “add-on” to existing school programs; it must instead be treated as a core institutional commitment which has wide-ranging implications for a variety of school processes and which, as such, entails significant investments of time and resources (Boyes-Watson, 2008; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). To underestimate the significance of the commitments associated with adopting RJ is to undermine the framework’s potential and/or to render it vulnerable to cooptation by the status quo (Mccluskey, Lloyd, Kane, et al., 2008). Unfortunately, schools are all too likely to fall into such traps, especially in cases where they have adopted RJ only because the district has mandated them to do so (Gardner, 2014), or when they have begun with a narrow view of RJ as a self-contained tool by which to reduce office referrals (Vaandering, 2013).

It is also worth dwelling on the fact that the field does not yet have a rich and multi-dimensional base of research literature which explores the use of RJ in schools. Most of the empirical inquiries which have been conducted seek to establish correlations between RJ and reductions in office referrals and/or incidents of violence; even the research in this vein, however, “is still in the infancy stage” (Fronius et al., 2016, p. 2). Inquiries which explore the ways in which educators, students, and families experience and make sense of RJ are sparser still (Wadhwa, 2016). This makes for a troubling gap between practice and theory, with the production of practitioner-oriented resources intended to support the implementation of RJ by teachers and school leaders rapidly outpacing the production of high-quality research which could create a stronger theoretical foundation for the work (Vaandering, 2013), in turn making the work itself more robust, effective, and sustainable.

To this end, in the opening of their recent handbook on restorative practices in education, Evans and Vaandering (2016) write:

To date, restorative justice has primarily been a grassroots movement, with practice, rather than theory, driving its growth. This has allowed for the development of intricate practice, but as RJE [restorative justice in education] matures, clearly articulated theory becomes necessary for RJ practices to be effective and sustainable. For example, without a well-articulated theory, it is difficult to address concerns such as why some schools have been able to develop and sustain their practice while others have not (p. xii).

As I will explore in greater depth in chapters 2 and 3, there is particularly little research which deals with the implications of the RJ framework for the domains of school

leadership and instructional practice—and almost none which explores the ways in which educators working within RJ schools make sense of these implications. In light of widespread agreement in the literature that RJ entails a “paradigm shift” (Winn, 2013; Zehr, 2002) and thus must be treated as a whole-school approach (Hopkins, 2004; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012), such omissions are problematic, reinforcing approaches which treat RJ as a discrete intervention aimed at decreasing office referrals. This project, in its effort to thickly describe the experiences and sense-making of educators who recently committed to using the restorative approach as a vehicle for school transformation, represents an effort to begin to address these gaps. In particular, it helps to illuminate the uphill nature of the work involved in “going restorative,” demonstrating that accomplishing the transition from conventional to more humanizing approaches will require educators to make profound shifts in stance and in practice. In turn, this can serve as a foundation for a literature which draws together the existing theories associated with the RJ framework with the lived realities of who seek to transform their schools into restorative communities.

Mobilizing for Deeper Learning

The current call for deeper learning (DL) in American K-12 schools is a phenomenon which, like RJ, is at once old and new. As a number of historians have noted, school reform efforts in the United States have cycled back and forth between “basic” and “higher order” goals, with one or the other tending to take precedence in public conversations and policy-making (Cuban, 1993; Wirt, 1992). By all accounts, the early years of twentieth century were dominated by an emphasis on the former. The newly consolidated urban public schools, organized to batch-process large numbers of

immigrant children, focused mainly on equipping children with the “three Rs” along with values such as punctuality, patriotism, and obedience to those in power (Graham, 2005). Firsthand accounts reveal that these schools, much like the one-room schoolhouses that preceded them, were characterized by a predominance of rote learning which was paired with rigid authoritarian discipline (Rice, 1893/1969).

During the second quarter of the century, however, the winds began to change. Inspired by the work and writings of philosopher-educator John Dewey, the newly formed Progressive Education Association called for a more humanistic model of schooling that better could attend to students’ identities, interests, and development, and which treated schools as mini-societies which incubated democratic processes (Cremin, 1961; Dewey, 1915). These aspirations were most fully actualized in private “child-centered” schools which served elite families (Semel & Sadovnik, 2005), but they left a lasting imprint on the field, softening some of the more rigid disciplinary practices which formerly dominated classrooms (Graham, 2005), cementing the role of elective classes and extracurricular activities (Lynd & Lynd, 1929/1959), and spurring educators to imagine that classroom teaching at best could take on a spirit of adventurousness (Cohen, 1988). Although the imprint of progressive ideals was relatively shallow when it came to classroom instruction, especially when it came to instruction of poor and minority students (Cuban, 1993), these ideals had a significant effect on the aspirations of policymakers and educators. This effect was arguably strongest in the 1960s and 70s, when a number of reform efforts focused on fostering curiosity, creativity, and higher-order thinking through the use of inquiry-based curricula (Cremin, 1961; Ravitch, 1985).

Starting in the early 1980s, however, the pendulum began to swing back in the other direction. This shift was catalyzed by the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*, a report which argued that the lack of academic backbone in high schools made the United States vulnerable to domination by its foreign rivals, and which galvanized a gradual return to the goals of teaching foundational literacy and numeracy (Graham, 2005). Although for the better part of a decade there continued to be conversations about the importance of higher-order thinking, these renewed commitments to “the basics,” along with a growing emphasis on rectifying educational inequalities, eventually gave rise to the standards and accountability movement and culminated in the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001. Championed by some for its focus on equity and lambasted by others for its punitive and test-centric logic, NCLB insisted with unprecedented force that schools deliver effective instruction in basic skills to all students, regardless of race, class, home language, and/or special needs.

In turn, this reshaped public conversation about the ends of schooling, solidifying a sharp turn away from the more holistic and cognitively ambitious goals associated with the movement for progressive education. To help all subgroups to develop the knowledge and skills measured by state tests and college entrance exams, and to do so efficiently and at scale: this became—and remains—a core element of what it means to be a successful school in the age of accountability. As the result of the “teeth” provided by punitive federal policies, these new-old goals have penetrated more deeply into the world of schools and classrooms than those that preceded them. To wit, while institutional theorists historically have argued that educational policy is limited in its ability to influence the technical core of teaching and learning (Weick, 1976), newer studies

demonstrate that the pressures associated with high-stakes standardized tests have reshaped instructional practices in significant ways, especially in high-poverty schools (Jennings & Bearak, 2014; Jennings & Sohn, 2014).

In the early years of the twenty-first century, the confluence of high-stakes testing with charter school legislation gave rise to an entire new class of institutions: the “No Excuses” urban charter school. Serving predominantly poor students of color, these schools are unapologetically authoritarian in their approach, coupling a fierce commitment to test-score-based achievement with a philosophy and practice of “sweating the small stuff” both inside and outside the classroom (Mathews, 2009; Whitman, 2008). When it comes to pedagogy, this approach entails a skill-and-drill model of instruction where teachers break down content into bite-sized pieces, intensively scaffold and micromanage the process of knowledge acquisition, and use frequent micro-assessments to gauge progress (Mehta & Fine, 2015a, In Press). When it comes to culture and discipline, this approach involves taking a “tough love” stance which penalizes students who commit even minor infractions such as uniform violations and gum-chewing, and which, in so doing, echoes the practice of zero tolerance and the associated theory of broken windows policing (Mayorga & Picower, 2015; see below). Although “No Excuses” schools have come under fire for what some see as retrogressive neo-liberalism which perpetuates structural inequalities (Fisher, 2016; Golann, 2015; Mayorga & Picower, 2015), their impressive results on standardized tests and high college matriculation rates have cemented their role as “one of the most influential urban school-reform models” of the new century (Golann, 2015, p. 103).

By all accounts, U.S. schools still face significant accountability pressures. Over the course of the past half-decade, however, the pendulum has begun to swing back in the direction of more cognitively ambitious and broadly progressive instructional goals. Arguably, the seeds for this change were sown several decades ago, when researchers first began making the argument that the ever-more-complex realities of modern life necessitated a reconceptualization of the idea of “basic” skills (Murnane & Levy, 1996) and required citizens who could tackle complex problems in critical and creative ways (Kegan, 2003). This recognition, however, initially was eclipsed by the new regimen of school accountability. By the time the decade came to a close, however, a growing number of stakeholders had begun to voice their concerns about the limitations posed by focusing exclusively on preparing students for tests of basic ability. Some of these actors framed their aspirations for schools using the language of “twenty-first-century skills,” a term which refers to competencies such as communication, collaboration, and creative problem-solving (Mehta & Fine, 2015b). The sector’s growing commitment to moving beyond the basics was reinforced by the adoption of Common Core State Standards, which, despite the controversy around increasing federal control over education, were widely recognized as placing an unprecedented emphasis on critical thinking.

By 2014, the year that I undertook this study, this new-old commitment to higher-order skills and more broadly progressive models of schooling was gaining momentum. Although the Every Student Succeeds Act would not be passed until the following year, it was clear that the sun was setting on NCLB, and policymakers, educators, and philanthropists alike had begun to turn their attention toward what many had begun to refer to as DL—an umbrella term which encompassed “21st century skills” as well as

multi-dimensional mastery of academic content (Hewlett Foundation,” n.d.). Even the “No Excuses” charter networks, leveraged as they were in tests of basic ability, had begun to explore what it might entail to engage students in learning that is rigorous, interdisciplinary, and interest-driven (Mehta & Fine, In Press).

It was against this backdrop that Dr. Mehta and I undertook a long-term ethnographic investigation of deep-learning-oriented high schools. In 2010, the year that we began the project, public conversations still focused largely on achievement as measured by high-stakes tests; accordingly, our project took us to a number of schools that were considered alternative or fringe institutions. Many of these were schools inspired by the work of educational philosopher TheodoreSizer, who, through the founding of the Coalition of Essential Schools in 1984, had continued to advocate for a progressive, Deweyian, child-centered model of schooling even as the accountability movement picked up steam. By 2014, however, Professor Mehta and I found that the shifting winds of the K-12 world meant that our work—and that of the thirty schools that we had visited around the country—had moved toward the mainstream. Almost overnight, it seemed, the field had become keenly interested in the questions that we had been investigating: What will it take to organize schools, especially those serving large numbers of poor and/or minoritized students, around a more broadly ambitious set of goals? How can teachers in such schools be supported in learning to engage their students—*all* of their students—in experiences which develop critical thinking and creative problem-solving? How might policies and external programs best support such efforts? And, stepping back, how should the field define DL in the first place?

Providing full answers to these questions lies beyond the scope of this dissertation; they are the subject of an in-progress book manuscript. Since this dissertation is deeply informed by my work with Dr. Mehta, however, it is worth summarizing a few of the key arguments that we have developed through our research. These arguments concern the nature of DL itself, implications for teaching practice, and implications for the organization and functioning of schools. I treat these three topics by turns in the paragraphs below.

To begin with the question of definitions, Professor Mehta and I theorize that DL draws together elements of mastery, identity, and creativity into a triangular relationship with each other. At one node of this triangle lies *mastery*, which captures the elements of DL that are tied to content knowledge, pattern recognition and expertise (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993), epistemological understandings (Bruner, 1977), and transfer (Bransford, Brown, Cocking, & National Academy of Sciences, 2000). At another node, *identity* captures the way in which DL is fueled by learners' perceptions about the relevance of what they are learning (Shaffer & Resnick, 1999), as well as the ways that learning becomes deeper as it becomes more core to the self (Bloom, 1985). Finally, the *creativity* node captures the shift from receiving the accumulated knowledge of a subject or domain to being able to participate as producers of new artifacts and/or knowledge (Marzano & Kendall, 2006). We theorize that these three nodes can be viewed as densely interrelated and in some cases cyclical: as learners gain deep mastery in a given domain, for example, they are more able and inclined to engage in acts of creativity, which often leads to the kind of ownership that spurs them to (re)construct their identity as one that

includes their participation in the domain; this new identity, in turn, motivates the pursuit of greater mastery.

Building on this definition, Dr. Mehta and I argue that creating classrooms which can support DL is about honoring students' identities and aspirations as well as about asking them to engage regularly in tasks which fall at the top of learning taxonomies (Mehta & Fine, 2015b). For teachers, this means creating opportunities for learners to take social and intellectual risks (Fine, 2014), to reach dead ends and try again (Mehta & Fine, 2012), and to connect their learning to the world beyond school walls (Halpern, 2008; Littky & Grabelle, 2004), as well as treating students as active sense-makers (Gordon, 2009; Lampert, 2015) and engaging them in cognitively ambitious tasks (Lampert et al., 2013; Lampert, Boerst, & Graziani, 2011). More broadly, it means seeing students—and helping them to see themselves—as active participants and contributors to the subject domains that they study, as well as to the learning communities in which they are embedded.

Thus, teaching for DL, regardless of the pedagogical form it might take, requires educators to embrace a stance that sees students as fundamentally curious and capable beings, rather than as objects to be filled with predetermined knowledge, as charges to be coddled, or as threats to be contained. Embracing this stance runs counter to the knowledge- and teacher-centric paradigm that long has dominated Western traditions of schooling (Cohen, 1988). It poses a particularly counter-cultural proposition for those who work with poor and minority populations (Anyon, 1981), with those labeled as “disabled” (Hehir, 2005), and with adolescents (Fine, 2014). Later in this dissertation, I

suggest that this paradigm shift is epistemologically aligned with the shift that educators must make in order to enact RJ successfully.

Finally, and of particular importance to this project, the data generated by our work have allowed Dr. Mehta and me to develop a theory about the organizational features separating schools which have made significant headway toward enacting DL-related goals from those which have not. This theory draws together the arguments cited above with the literatures on effective schooling (Purkey & Smith, 1983) and internal coherence (R. F. Elmore, Forman, Stosich, & Bocala, 2014), positing that a key determinant of a school's ability to enact DL consistently across classrooms lies in the *granularity, transparency, symmetry, and thickness* of its vision. In other words, its organizational design must encompass richly-textured understandings of what its goals look like when enacted in practice (*granularity*), processes by which these understandings are made visible throughout the school community (*transparency*), mechanisms that position these understandings as the framework driving the learning not only of children but also of adults (*symmetry*), and systems by which teachers are supported in operationalizing these understandings in their classrooms (*thickness*) (Mehta & Fine, In Press). We further theorize that such qualities can be supported by the development of what some call educational infrastructure (Cohen, Peurach, Glazer, Gates, & Goldin, 2014)—guiding materials such as curricula, rubrics, and assessments—and that they can be shored up through the cultivation of collective identity and shared culture on the part of teachers, students, and families.

By virtue of our choice to employ a theoretical sampling strategy (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Smith, 1983), my work with Dr. Mehta focused on schools which had

gained reputations as leaders in the field. Thus, our theory does not yet address questions about how schools with emergent commitments to DL might *develop* the characteristics described above. What does it look like when a school that mainly has focused on basic skills attempts to reorganize its work to meet more ambitious goals? What must be learned and/or unlearned, and by whom, in order to move toward greater granularity, transparency, symmetry, and thickness? What meanings do the actors involved in such efforts make of their experiences? Given that the majority of American public schools interested in DL fall into the “emerging commitments” category, and given that the changing priorities of recent years mean that these schools are growing in number, exploring these questions represents an important step in translating our work into usable knowledge.

OCA, I believe, presents a promising case through which to begin such explorations. As I will argue in Chapter 2, the school’s twenty-year history can be viewed as a microcosm of the field’s history of pendulum swings with respect to instructional priorities; this positions the school as a vehicle for examining how pressures to re-focus on “higher-order” goals are playing out in institutions which were heavily impacted by NCLB. That said, as I suggested in the Preface, the school’s effort to change course with respect to instruction was inextricably tangled up with its simultaneous—and in some respects more developed—effort to change course with respect to discipline and culture. As a result, despite my initial efforts to do so, it was impossible to focus in isolation on the school’s work around DL; its work around RJ inevitably ended up becoming part of inquiry. I argue, however, that this too is important—for it is at the messy intersection of

what happens in classrooms and what happens beyond them where the real work of school transformation must occur.

Potential Synergies Between Restorative Justice and Deeper Learning

As suggested earlier, one of the main contributions that this project seeks to make lies in its effort to draw together the conversations around organizing schools to support RJ with those around organizing classrooms to support DL. On the one hand, my ability to undertake this effort is the result of pure coincidence, enabled by the fact that the year during which I collected data was one during which OCA's leaders happened to be pursuing both priorities simultaneously. Indeed, as the next chapter will demonstrate, the decision to change course with the school's "cultural core" was galvanized by a different set of concerns than the subsequent decision to change course with the instructional core. On the other hand, I do not believe it was pure coincidence that OCA's leaders began to work toward identifying—and operationalizing—the interrelationships between these two domains. Perhaps in a different context the two change processes would have continued in parallel, without ever intersecting. OCA's academic leadership team, however, is by its own admission an unusually heady group, with a number of members who—sometimes to their colleagues' dismay—favor abstraction and "big-picture thinking." And, as I hope this dissertation will demonstrate, even a small amount of big-picture thinking reveals that RJ and DL share much in common.

The broad outline of such commonalities can be seen even when relying only on the sketches that I have provided above. It is clear, for example, that both the tradition of RJ and the tradition of DL eschew traditionally hierarchical, authoritarian, adultist approaches to working with students. Both emphasize that young people have enormous

capacities for critical, creative, and transformative thinking. Both imagine the role of educators as being one of nurturance and facilitation, rather than of command-and-control puppeteering. Above all, both seek to transform schools and classrooms into fundamentally humanizing places.

These commonalities extend into more specific arenas as well. For example, as the coming chapters will begin to illustrate, the philosophical and epistemological assumptions of RJ are powerfully aligned with DL-oriented teaching traditions such as critical pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), and “critical constructivism” (Kincheloe, 1993). Restorative conferencing, too, embodies many of the qualities associated with DL: students are positioned as agents who, given the right conditions, have the capacity to learn and grow through the process of sense-making, perspective-taking, and collaboration (Fine, 2015).

Despite such synergies, the worlds of RJ and DL have generally remained siloed from each other. This is perhaps in part because their central concerns have not tended to be seen as overlapping. To wit, the world of neo-Deweyian progressive schooling has not, at least historically, had much to say about issues of institutional racism and other forms of structural inequality. Strikingly, many of these schools have been quite deliberate when it comes to approaching behavior management in ways which reflect a foundational belief that students should be treated as capable sense-makers (Semel & Sadovnik, 2005); however, they have not positioned this choice within discourses about equity. Indeed, until quite recently, the vast majority of progressive schools were private institutions which mainly served White children from elite families (Graham, 2005; Mehta & Fine, 2015b). Starting with Sizer’s Coalition of Essential School, the movement to democratize

access to progressive education has gained momentum, with a growing number of DL-oriented schools which serve large numbers of poor and/or minoritized students. Even so, the DL world continues to focus mainly on how to support the teaching of ambitious cognitive and social competencies; discourses around the role of schools in contributing to racial (in)justices and mass incarceration generally remain in the background.

On the flip side, even as RJ has become an established part of the K-12 education sector, theorists and researchers have not systematically tackled questions about the framework's implications for teaching and learning. For example, as I write about at length in Chapter 3, there is very little work which examines the ways that choices about curriculum and pedagogy can reify—or rectify—power imbalances between teachers and students. Similarly, although the literature on RJ in schools uniformly emphasizes the importance of fostering and repairing relationships among students, almost none of this literature addresses the question of whether, and if so how, classroom arrangements such as collaborative learning might support these goals.

Silos, separations, and worlds-within-worlds are a natural feature of a field as diverse and decentralized as that of American K-12 education. Still, given the synergies outlined above, I believe that there is a great deal to be learned from drawing RJ and DL into conversation with each other. I believe also that this learning can enrich the work of transforming schools into more broadly progressive and humanizing institutions. Many of OCA's leaders seemed to share these perspectives. In their efforts to begin the messy process of talking and working across silos, they can be seen as explorers whose experiences shed light on the contours of an important new territory—territory which is not devoid of pitfalls and dead-ends, but which is well worth the effort to traverse.

Research Design and Methodology

As I described in the Introduction, the emphasis of my work and research changed quite dramatically over the course of my time at OCA, gradually focusing on emergent questions about the restorative approach as it pertained to leadership and instruction. This shift reflects the importance of attending to “emic,” e.g. emergent, themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), as well as to the recursive nature of qualitative research design more generally (Maxwell, 2012). The descriptions and explanations below reflect these shifts rather than the original ways that I conceptualized and proposed the project.

Research Questions

The broad questions which guided this investigation are as follows:

1. How do members of OCA’s Academic Leadership Team make sense of their school’s new priorities, e.g. restorative justice (RJ) and deeper learning (DL)?
 - a. How, if at all, do they understand these goals to be related?
 - b. In what ways is their sense-making reflected in and/or shaped by their ongoing work with each other, with teachers, and with students?
 - c. What do the answers to these questions suggest about the challenges facing schools which seek to (re)organize around goals involving RJ and/or DL?

The Case Study Approach through Ethnography and Portraiture

To investigate these questions, I employed an ethnographic approach which aimed to generate analytic cases grounded in low-inference data. Broadly, case study research involves triangulating information in ways which allow researchers to describe and proffer interpretations of context-specific contemporary phenomena (Maxwell, 2012;

Stake, 1978; Yin, 2013). Case studies share the goal of answering “how” and “why” questions using data from a variety of sources; the nature of such data, however, can vary widely (Yin, 2013). In this instance, since my research questions were mainly phenomenological in nature, I relied mainly on the tools associated with ethnography: participant-observation, interviewing, and artifact analysis. Using these tools yielded a rich data-set which served as a basis for exploring themes, positing interpretations, and constructing interpretive narratives grounded in “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1977). In particular, by pairing naturalistic observations of leaders interacting during meetings with in-depth interviews during which these same leaders had opportunities for reflection, I was able to explore the ways in which sense-making both affected and was affected by practice and experience. More broadly, the ecological nature of the case study approach (Maxwell, 2012) proved well-suited to studying a school which was striving to integrate multiple goals.

Throughout, I relied especially heavily on the tradition of *portraiture*, a case-based ethnographic methodology pioneered by sociologist Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) and elaborated by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997). Like case study research more generally, portraiture involves undertaking deep investigations into specific phenomena out of a belief that “in the particular resides the general” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 13). To this, portraiture adds several epistemological concerns which made it a unique fit with my project. First, portraiture assumes that participants are “the best authorities on their own experience,” making it a natural medium through which to explore instances of situated sense-making (Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 137). Second, while social science inquiries often focus on instances of pathology and

dysfunction, portraiture concerns itself with understanding, interrogating, and celebrating instances of “goodness.” Portraitists do not view goodness as being a static or singular quality; to the contrary, they approach it as a dynamic and multidimensional phenomenon which, in the case of institutions such as schools, encompasses intentions and aspirations as well as accomplished actions (Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). As Lawrence-Lightfoot writes in her seminal study of American high schools: “Goodness not only reflects the current workings of the institution but also how far it has come and where it is headed” (1983, p. 24). This orientation proved particularly important in the case of OCA, which, during the year that I spent there, was what one leader wryly referred to as “a hot mess.” As Chapter 2 will demonstrate, this characterization was in many ways accurate. However, approaching the situation from the perspective of portraiture allowed me to view this “mess” as a reflection of the school’s effort to transform itself into a more joyful, equitable, and intellectually vibrant community—and thus as a core part of its pursuit of goodness.

Finally, more so than classic ethnographers, portraitists seek to construct narratives which revolve around resonant metaphors and which have a clear narrative arc. In order to achieve these goals, portraits tend to be “relatively unencumbered by theoretical frameworks or rigid perspectives” (Lightfoot, 1983, p. 9). These concerns resonate with my longstanding desire to explore educational issues in ways that are methodologically rigorous but also grounded in vivid stories; as such, they informed my approach to data collection. However, in the analysis phase I began to realize that the contributions of this project were more eclectic than I had originally imagined. As a result, the only chapter of this dissertation which is formulated as a full-blown portrait is

Chapter 4. Accordingly, this chapter does not include an explicit theoretical framework or a statement of chapter-specific methodology. Instead, it seeks to explore the project's overarching questions through the vehicle of careful, artful, evocative narrative. In addition, since I had a particularly rich relationship with the teacher-leader whose work is featured in this chapter, this chapter involves explorations of my own positionality.

Site and Participants

Founded in 1996, OCA is a K-12 urban charter school which serves roughly 1,100 students—63% low-income and 85% of color—across four campuses. OCA's Academic Leadership Team (ALT) is made up of twenty-five system leaders, campus leaders, and program coordinators. (See Page 1 for a list of roles and names.) Although there is a predominance of White women, the group is heterogeneous in terms of gender, race, and age. In Chapter 2, I provide a more detailed account of the school's history and institutional characteristics, as well as a more substantive exploration of the ALT.

Data Collection

The ten months that I spent at OCA spanned the academic year of 2014-15, which began in September and ended the following June. From September to December, my main role was that of designer and facilitator of bi-monthly ALT meetings devoted to the topic of "leadership for deeper learning." The goal of this work was for leaders to explore and thicken their understandings of what it means to teach in "constructivist and student-centered" ways—one of the elements specified in OCA's new instructional vision. During this period, out of a desire to get to know individual group-members better and in anticipation of moving into the role of participant-observer, I conducted a number of informal interviews with leaders and undertook several days' worth of informal

classroom observations across the school's four campuses. Since I did not yet have formal permission to conduct research, I treated these data as contextual.

The period for which I had formal permission both from Harvard's Institutional Review Board and from the ALT to study the OCA community lasted from January to June of 2015. During this time I did not take an active role in planning or facilitating meetings; instead, I transitioned fully into the role of participant-observer and ethnographer. (For more on the complexities surrounding my multiple "hats," see the section titled "Validity, Positionality, and Authenticity," below.) The process by which the ALT agreed to be the subject of a formal research investigation was an extensive one; In December, after I presented the goals and plan for the project, the group discussed the possibility of participation and decided by majority vote (92%) to allow me to move forward. The two leaders who expressed hesitation about the group's involvement stipulated that they would like to conduct a mid-point check without me present in order to make sure that the work was not jeopardizing fragile group processes. This check happened in April and yielded a mandate to continue data collection. I returned to OCA twice during the following academic year for follow-up interviews and observations.

Data strand 1: Individual experiences and sense-making

As one approach to answering my research questions, I recruited four ALT members to interview and follow closely throughout the study period. These individuals were Theo, the Head of School; Suzanne, the Director of Culture; Valerie, the Collegiate Institute's Principal; and Nora, the Collegiate Institute's Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction. In selecting these individuals I employed a purposive sampling strategy (Smith, 1983), seeking to reflect in my sample the diversity of positions represented in

the broader group and thus allowing for an exploration of how sense-making might vary by role. When recruiting campus-level leaders, however, I sought to work with two members of the ALT whose work overlapped—Nora and Valerie—in order to have a richer understanding of context and collaboration.

Interviews. Semi-structured interviewing is an ideal tool for exploring individual sense-making (Maxwell, 2012; Seidman, 2012), making it a powerful medium through which to undertake phenomenological inquiry. In the context of ethnography, and specifically portraiture, the practice of interviewing helps to support a broader stance which balances “generosity and challenge” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 137). It is with this in mind that I engaged the four participants above in a series of interviews about their thinking, learning, and work in relation to the school’s change efforts. Specifically, with each focal participant, I conducted between two and five audio-recorded, semi-structured, hour-long interviews. The initial interview protocol focused on eliciting their understandings of the school’s new instructional and cultural priorities in relation to their roles. Subsequent interviews focused more on the relationship between these understandings and recent experiences; I also integrated questions about the emergent notion of “restorative instruction.” (See Appendices A and B for protocols).

Participant observation. In addition to interviewing these individuals, I followed their work using participant observation, a methodological practice which cross-cuts many forms of ethnographic research (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). In order to establish a holistic sense of each participant’s role, I first spent a full day shadowing him or her. I then asked each participant to identify a strand of regularly occurring work that they would like me to follow throughout the study period. As it happened, all four

participants agreed that they would most like me to follow their collective work redesigning OCA's Upper School (grades 7-10) and Collegiate Institute (grades 11-12) to better reflect the school's commitments to both DL and RJ. Nora also requested that I regularly observe and talk with her about the Gender Studies elective that she taught to upperclassman—a space where she was striving to work out for herself what it might mean to “teach restoratively.” While observing all of the above activities, I wrote narrative fieldnotes where I strove to capture, but also to separate, low-inference “thin” descriptions from preliminary interpretations (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I also wrote analytic memos in which I identified emerging themes.

Data strand 2: Group experiences and sense-making

Participant observation. From January to June, I also acted as a participant observer in all Tuesday morning ALT meetings, many of which were devoted to redesigning OCA's model of teacher evaluation and support. I chose to follow this process because the nature of the task foregrounded questions about how to communicate and reinforce OCA's new priorities, making it a likely context for conversations about the nature and potential intersection of these priorities to arise. In observing these meetings, I adhered to the practices described above, taking narrative notes and using the process of memoing to identify and analyze relevant data. I paid particular attention to interactions which involved the four leaders whose work I was following more closely, seeking to understand how their sense-making did or did not become part of the broader group's conversations, and, conversely, how what was discussed in the broader group did or did not influence their thinking.

Artifact collection. In addition to taking narrative fieldnotes, I collected artifacts that the ALT produced in the process of their work. Such artifacts included meeting agendas, powerpoint presentations, and drafts of the new teacher evaluation rubric. Analyzing these artifacts added additional depth to the study, supporting the work of triangulation (Maxwell, 2012).

Additional interviews. In order to capture a broader array of experiences and perspectives than those of the study's four "focal" participants, I also conducted hour-long semi-structured interviews with ten other members of the ALT. I chose these additional participants using a purposive sampling strategy (Smith, 1983), seeking to reflect in my sample a range of roles, areas of focus, experience-levels, and cultural backgrounds so that I could capture as wide a range of sense-making as possible. In these interviews, I asked participants to talk about their experiences of the change process, and focused in particular on how they defined the emergent concept of "restorative instruction." In addition, toward the end of the study period, I conducted informal interviews with six teachers in the Collegiate Institute. For Protocol, see Appendix C. For more detail, see the "Methods" section of Chapter 3.

Other data sources. Although my lack of formal permission to conduct research prevented me from treating the informal interviews and observations which I undertook in the fall as data, I ultimately decided to treat my subjective experiences in ALT meetings throughout this period as a relevant source of context for the project. Originally, I planned to draw a bright line between my roles as facilitator-participant and participant-observer. In retrospect, however, I realize that my understanding of the ALT, as well as of OCA as a whole, was inextricably connected to my semester-long experience acting as

a facilitator. Accordingly, I decided to treat my notes from those fall meetings as data; I coded them accordingly. I also wrote a series of reflective memos in which I explored the ways in which my initial role might have influenced my subsequent perspectives. This practice reflects Peshkin's (1988) assertion that researchers must seek to understand their own subjectivity, as well as Herr and Anderson's (2014) recommendations for how action-oriented researchers can attend to their role.

Data Analysis

In line with the tradition of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1999), I analyzed data according to both hypothesized and emergent themes (Emerson et al., 1995; Maxwell, 2012). To do so, I used Atlas Ti, a qualitative data analysis platform. In line with the ecological perspectives of the case study method, I treated transcripts, fieldnotes, memos, and artifacts as a single corpus of data. Throughout this process I continued to write analytic memos in which I explored possible interpretations of emergent patterns. In exploring particular sub-themes such as how participants made sense of the concept of restorative instruction (the topic of Chapter 3), I returned to relevant portions of the data and re-coded it. Finally, since one of my goals was to be able to generate interpretive narratives, I sought to identify resonant metaphors which might later serve as through-lines (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). See Appendix D for a list of codes.

Validity, Positionality, and Authenticity

By contrast to the emphasis that experimental research methods place on making statistical generalizations, case study research seeks to make *analytic generalizations*, through which analysis of case data is used to confirm, extend, or challenge existing theory (Yin, 2013, p. 38). In effect, case studies not only provide rich understandings of

specific contemporary phenomena, but also provide a platform for theorizing about the general qualities which these phenomena illustrate (Stake, 1978). In order to be able to engage in such theorizing with credibility, case study researchers must be able to demonstrate that their data is valid and systematic and that their analyses have taken into account alternate interpretations; they also must acknowledge the ways in which the particular case(s) in question are differentiated from instances of similar phenomena (Yin, 2013). In this chapter, as well as throughout this dissertation, I have strived to attend to these considerations. In particular, although I argue that a deep investigation of OCA provides a window into the general challenges facing schools which seek to enact goals involving RJ and/or DL, I also acknowledge the many ways in which OCA is particular and distinctive.

Notably, the literature on case study research does not devote much attention to the question of researcher positionality. In addressing this question, I instead look to the related tradition of portraiture, which treats positionality as a central concern. Espousing the belief that representing research findings is necessarily an act of interpretation, portraiture takes authenticity, rather than validity, as the standard to which portraitists should aspire. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis define authenticity as the “resonance” and “truth value” of the final portrait as experienced by the participants, the portraitist, and outside readers (1997, p. 247). In turn, this perspective allows for a greater range of relationships between the portraitist and the participants than does positivist research. Rather than trying to excise herself from the process, the portraitist is encouraged to steer into the dynamics of inter-subjectivity, documenting and ultimately narrating her role in the inquiry process. In this, portraiture is aligned with action research, where researchers

and practitioners often serve as co-investigators and where such involvement is seen as a topic for inquiry rather than as a threat to validity (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Herr & Anderson, 2014).

It is this epistemological kinship which makes portraiture flexible enough to account for the positional complexities of my roles at OCA. In Chapter 4, for example, I acknowledge that my relationship with Nora included, at her request, coaching-like discussions of her teaching practice in light of the work around constructivism that I had led during the fall. Though this work served to deepen my understanding of Nora's thinking and her practice, it involved a more action-oriented stance than that associated with traditional ethnography; thus, it was imperative that I attend carefully and systematically to the ways in which my multiple "hats" might affect the phenomena which I sought to investigate. To this end, I regularly wrote memos about my evolving relationship with Nora, paying special attention to the ways in which my prior role as a facilitator and my current role as an informal coach might be influencing her responses to my questions. In addition, I engaged members of my writing group in "peer debriefings" which allowed me to discuss questions of positionality and to test the resonance of my evolving interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Finally, in terms of more concrete threats to authenticity, the boundaries of my consultative role limited concerns that might otherwise have arisen: my contract with OCA ended in January, meaning that by the time I began the process of formal data collection, I did not harbor any concerns about portraying the school in ways that might complicate or endanger my job.

Beyond such assurances, I would like to argue that the fact that I initially had an active role at OCA serves as an asset to the study. The context and relationships that I

built during the months I spent facilitating ALT meeting allowed me to construct “native” interpretations of the group’s conversations and actions once I moved into a more formal role as a participant-observer (Geertz, 1977). Moreover, the relational trust that I established with members of the group functioned as a necessary foundation for my inquiry, especially given that my interest lay in exploring a change process which was fraught with uncertainties and tensions. Finally, by making my twofold role a small but real piece of the story that I am trying to tell, I am able to explore the under-theorized dynamics of designer-practitioner collaborations—dynamics which I and others believe are critical to understand if research and practice are to become mutually supportive endeavors (Coburn & Stein, 2010).

In the summer of 2015, I presented an initial and tentative set of findings to a subset of the ALT. This presentation happened by prior agreement; the group, when agreeing to participate in the study, asked that I “give back” to them by sharing some of my thinking as I moved into the analysis phase. I audio-recorded the session so that I could treat it as a “member check” (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Trying as I was to balance “generosity and challenge” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 137), I was quite apprehensive about the session going into it. As it turned out, however, leaders were keenly interested in what I had to say and reported afterward that the ensuing discussion was an important one for them. I felt similarly energized and returned to the work of analysis with affirmations as well as a newly sharp set of questions. Ultimately, this process helped to establish what Lightfoot and Davis (1997) describe as *resonance*, a dimension of validity which involves the credibility and “truth value” of findings as they are received by those who participated in the study (p. 247).

Conclusion

As I describe in the first section of this chapter, RJ and DL are aspirations which have only just begun to (re)emerge more publicly in the field. Accordingly, there are very few schools that have made serious long-term commitments to these goals, and fewer still that have committed to pursuing both simultaneously. While this reinforces the fact that OCA is a distinctive institution, it also positions the school as a rich site for pursuing research which seeks to illuminate the interrelationships between culture and instruction. By exploring the tensions and insights that the school's leaders have experienced as they strive to reshape what happens in hallways and in classrooms, I hope to capitalize on the fact that "in the particular resides the general" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 14), and ultimately to support the important work of creating schools that are more powerful places to teach and learn.

Chapter 2

Striving for Symmetry: Surfacing dilemmas of restorative leadership

“One doesn’t discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time.”

--André Gide, *The Counterfeiters*, 1925

“You must think this is some kind of messed-up soap opera,” Kerry, the principal of Outlook Collegiate Academy’s (OCA’s) Upper Elementary Campus, whispers. She flashes me a wry grin and takes a sip of coffee before opening her laptop to prepare for the Academic Leadership Team (ALT) meeting which is about to begin. It is 8am on a frigid morning in early March. For a moment, I regret having passed up the chance to buy my own coffee on the way from the subway station. As the meeting gets underway, however, I quickly become absorbed in the task of observing the school’s twenty-five leaders as they jump back into a process which they recently have begun: the creation of a new educator evaluation rubric which will better reflect the school’s values than the one issued by the state. Although the rubric creation process was initiated by Theo, OCA’s Head of School, it is being co-facilitated by Ellery, the Director of Teacher Training and Development, and Suzanne, the Dean of Culture—two system-level leaders who Theo has been encouraging to take a more central role within the ALT in light of his recent decision to step down at the end of the year.

This morning, it is Ellery who stands at the front of the room and calls the group to order. White, in her early thirties, and openly lesbian, Ellery is a self-described OCA “lifer,” having spent the first years of her career teaching high school history before

moving into various leadership roles. Despite the anxiety that she has expressed to me in private about her ability to pull off the task that Theo has asked her to lead, she exudes an energetic sense of purpose. “We’re trying to learn as well as do, so we’re going to use some stuff from Making Thinking Visible today,” she says brightly. “It’s going to be great!” She goes on to explain that the group is going to do the “3-2-1 Bridge” routine, a routine which the authors of the book (Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011) offer as a way surface learners’ thinking and to trace how this thinking changes over time. Accordingly, each ALT member must come up with three thoughts, two questions, and one analogy, all related to the task of creating the new rubric. “If it [the routine] feels forced, we can talk about that,” Ellery adds.

After a few minutes of silent worktime, Ellery prompts leaders to talk in trios and then asks for volunteers to share their analogies with the whole group. Several leaders pipe up. Rachel, an instructional coach, likens the task of evaluating teaching practice to “the challenge and the frustration and the beauty of figure skating, where you’re trying to assess something based on both its technical merit and its artistry.” Theo, ever the storyteller, talks about how during a recent visit to an elderly relative who insisted on making a meal, he allowed his sons to slip him items from their plate that they did not want to eat. “Creating this rubric is about protecting our plate, so that we can focus on the things that matter most to us,” he says. Kerry, as usual, is humorously blunt. “Our processes for evaluation have felt like a voodoo doll being stuck with pins that are meant to bring about positive change,” she says. “I’m hoping that we move away from looking for what’s wrong to looking at what’s right.” A few leaders nod and several laugh.

After this, there is a long pause during which the mood in the room seems to

darken. Finally, Benny, the principal of the Upper School, offers his analogy. “This is like inserting a blitz package the third time that you play your rival—you have to have a new product despite the same situation,” he says. Paul, the Upper School’s Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction, picks up on this line of thinking by likening the rubric creation task to the Russian Revolution. “There were a lot of promises which were not substantiated, and the failures meant that things got scaled back and the country worked more slowly toward change,” he says. Several members of the group nod; a few scowl. Theo crosses his arms impatiently. Ellery glances toward Suzanne with a slightly stricken look, seemingly uncertain about how to proceed.

The tension in the room comes as no surprise to me. I think back to the last meeting, when several leaders voiced a strong belief that creating a new evaluation tool, which they predicted teachers would see as being an instrument of control and/or punishment, ran counter to the goal of nurturing “restorative professional culture.” I remember, too, a conversation that I recently had with Nora, the Collegiate Institute’s Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction, who told me that she thought it was folly to expect such a large group to collaborate on such a complex task, especially given the three-month timeline. Finally, I think about the fact that the ALT’s recent past is one which many leaders have described as being characterized by micromanagement, mistrust, and simmering resentments—and about how a subtext of the group’s work this year has been about working together in ways which better reflect of the value that the restorative justice framework places on transparency, deliberation, and power-sharing.

In light of all of this, it is easy for me to understand Ellery’s uncertainties. How can she and Suzanne honor the strongly negative feelings which many leaders have about

the rubric development process while still moving the process forward? What will it take, at the level of facilitation and process, for such a large and opinionated group to be able to come to specific agreements about what it means to take a restorative approach to teaching? Are Benny and Paul right that this is entirely the wrong way to pursue change? As the ALT sits in tense silence, Kerry catches my eye and subtly raises an eyebrow. Messed-up soap opera, it seems to say.

In some respects, “soap opera” is an accurate characterization of the four-month period during which the ALT worked on the new teacher evaluation rubric. The process certainly was fraught with conflict and tortuous deliberation, with feelings running high for virtually everyone involved. There was even a dramatic twist toward the end: an eleventh-hour decision to abandon the idea of phasing in the new rubric as a high-stakes evaluation tool in the coming year. Early on, I worried that these elements of drama might obscure my ability to investigate the ways that leaders made sense of the school’s new cultural and instructional priorities. As I got to know the OCA community better, however, these fears were replaced by a recognition that the tensions which characterized the ALT’s work were not a distraction from these priorities, but rather a reflection of the group’s struggles to understand and enact them.

In particular, as the vignette above begins to illustrate, throughout the rubric creation process leaders found themselves puzzling over what it would mean to work with each other, as well as with teachers, in ways which were more compatible with the values of the RJ framework than they had done in past years. For example, Theo’s decision to invite all twenty-five members of the ALT to participate reflected his desire to

counteract a longstanding pattern where “a small number of people were making decisions that got imposed on others”—a pattern which he saw as running counter to RJ’s emphasis on doing *with*, not doing *to* (McCold & Wachtel, 2003). Similarly, Ellery and Suzanne’s decision to create regular opportunities for ALT members to share their thinking and feedback reflected a belief that surfacing and honoring leaders’ experiences was part of taking “a restorative approach to leadership,” as well as a part of being learner- and learning-centered. These decisions were not always popular, nor did they always have the desired effects. Nevertheless, they illuminate that the ALT’s work throughout the winter and spring involved not only an effort to create a product which would reflect the school’s new priorities but also an effort to enact a process which did the same. The conflicts which arose during this period thus did not reflect generic group dysfunction so much as they revealed the challenges associated with creating *symmetry*, e.g. broad forms of coherence and alignment when it comes to the experiences of adults and students within schools (Mehta & Fine, In Press; Roberts, 2012).

Seen in this light, the story of the rubric creation process provides a valuable opportunity to explore the implications of the RJ framework for the domain of school leadership. A number of researchers whose work focuses on the use of RJ in schools allude to the existence of such implications (Amstutz, 2005; Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Hopkins, 2004; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013); one such researcher asserts, for example, that “RJ [must be] understood to have implications for all facets and fields of education including how adults relate to each other” (Vaandering, 2010, p. 170). However, the nature of these implications remains remarkably underexplored and undertheorized. To wit, a search for books, peer-reviewed articles, and dissertations

which include the topic of “restorative leadership” yields only 37 results; adding the word “schools” and/or “education” to the search narrows the field to 11. Substantively, most of these pieces concern the actions that leaders need to take in order to ready their schools for restorative discipline processes, rather than exploring the kinds of leadership behaviors which are compatible with the philosophy and values of RJ (Harrison, 2007; Mackey & Stefkovich, 2010; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). Thus, exploring the dilemmas that OCA’s leaders confronted as they strived to “live their values” provides a new and potentially important window into the challenges facing educators who take seriously the premise that RJ, if it is to support sustainable transformations in school culture, must inform the ways that adults work together as well as the ways that they structure experiences for children.

Out of a desire to make the view through this “window” as richly multidimensional as possible, I have divided this chapter into two main parts. First, since understanding any good soap opera episode requires knowing the back-story—or, to say it more academically, since taking an ecological approach to understanding schools requires knowing their particular histories (Gutiérrez, 2008; Lightfoot, 1983)—I present a brief institutional history of OCA. In this section, I trace the school’s pattern of pendulum swings between authoritarian and progressive values and explore why and how the school’s leadership decided to move in the direction of RJ and deeper learning. Finally, I argue that the year I undertook this project was one during which leaders found themselves in what organizational theorist Bridges calls “neutral zone”—a liminal space which spans the transition from old to new practices, and which is characterized by “all the old clarities break[ing] down” (Bridges, 2003, p. 40).

With this as a foundation, I then present the story of the ALT's attempt to design a new teacher evaluation rubric during the spring of 2015. In my analysis of this story, I focus on three dilemmas which arose during this process: the puzzle of how to move the work forward while meeting a wide range of individual needs; the tension between the imperative for efficiency and the desire to make decisions in collaborative, deliberative, transparent, and non-patriarchal ways; and the question of how to reimagine teacher accountability from a non-punitive standpoint while at the same time elevating expectations. I argue that although these dilemmas could be analyzed from a variety of theoretical perspectives, analyzing them from the perspective of RJ yields rich "native" interpretations (Geertz, 1975) which begin to illuminate the undertheorized topic of restorative leadership. In turn, this can help educators to anticipate the kinds of challenges they are likely to face while transitioning from authoritarian to restorative paradigms—and, hopefully, to weather these challenges with the patience and integrity that RJ demands.

A Note on Methodology

I describe the overall design, methodology, and analytic approach of this project in Chapter 1; it would be redundant to repeat this information here. However, before proceeding, I would like to add a few chapter-specific addendums.

First, more so than the chapters which follow, this chapter is constructed as an analytic case study. Accordingly, it has a two-fold emphasis: first, on using low-inference description to capture the nature of the phenomena in question; and second, on exploring salient patterns and interpretations which link these phenomena to theory (Yin, 2013). Although the chapter has two distinct sections—the first of which deals with OCA's

history and the second of which deals with the dilemmas encountered by the ALT as they worked on the new evaluation framework—I treat these as related parts of a single story. Thus, I save much of the analysis and exploration of implications for the final portions of the chapter.

Second, it is worth acknowledging that there are many ways to tell the story of OCA’s history. The one I present below is only one of them. The choices I make in telling it are shaped not only by the particular concerns of this project but also, as with all attempts at historical re-construction, by my biography and the perspectives that it has spawned (Foucault, 1984). To acknowledge this, I refer to this section of the chapter as *an* organizational history, rather than as *the* organizational history. More specifically, in telling the story of OCA’s shifting values, I rely heavily on Theo’s account of his fourteen years at the school. This account, by Theo’s own admission, is colored by his personal history, his identity as a gay upper-middle-class White man, and his vantage-point as a system leader. To balance this view, and in an effort “not to give powerful people undue prominence,” I have tried where possible to bring in other perspectives, especially those of teachers (Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 246).

A similar note applies to the way that I have chosen to tell the story of the rubric creation process. As outlined above, I have chosen to organize my analysis of this story around three specific dilemmas which I believe relate this story to broader discourses around RJ and restorative culture. Having conducted a series of ongoing “member checks” (Creswell & Miller, 2000) with individuals within the ALT, I am quite convinced that these dilemmas indeed reflected leaders’ desires to find healthier and more relationally attentive ways of collaborating, and that these desires were connected

to the school's recent adoption of RJ. It is worth acknowledging, however, that the literatures on leadership and group functioning offer a variety of alternate lenses through which to view these dilemmas, especially the dilemma involving the shift toward more democratic decision-making. My choice to engage only passingly with these literatures should not be seen as an indictment of their value or relevance, but rather as a reflection of my desire to capture the "native" experiences of participants and, in so doing, to address the undertheorized topic of restorative leadership.

Part I: Struggling Toward Progressivism in the Age of Accountability

Although it appears unremarkable to outside eyes, the fifty-foot expanse of asphalt which connects the two buildings of OCA's Peabody Street campus is much in demand. In the mornings, if it's not raining or snowing or bitterly cold, the space serves as a gathering place for students to socialize before the day begins. Wearing jackets or windbreakers over the school's ubiquitous navy-and-khaki uniforms, they congregate around the picnic tables that sit next to one of the building's brick walls, eating breakfast and bantering in a mix of English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole. Nearby, administrators with walkie-talkies prop open the main building's glass doors, greeting those who enter. Later, if the weather continues to cooperate, a second set of administrators supervise as the space is turned into a makeshift gymnasium-turned-cafeteria, with gangly boys from the Upper School (grades 7-10) playing kickball while their peers in the Collegiate Institute (grades 11-12), having earned the right to leave the cafeteria during lunch, cluster around the tables to eat. Finally, at the end of the day, the school's after-school staff puts down cones to designate the far end of the space as a zone for active pick-up, a much-needed commodity given the congestion of the adjacent streets.

The two-city area that surrounds the Peabody Street campus is one with a complicated identity that encompasses both poverty and privilege. Situated near several research universities, the area has always housed its share of affluent *élites*, but for many years the narrow residential streets that stretched to the north and east were the domain of working-class Irish and Italian Catholic families, along with immigrants from Brazil, Haiti, and El Salvador. Although a recent gentrification has sent rents and home prices shooting up, these less affluent populations remain a part of the community, in some cases benefitting from Section 8 housing policies and in other cases moving toward the area's industrial fringes. As a result, the streets which surround the Peabody Street Campus are a striking mix of old and new. A public housing complex with a 1970s-era striped canopy sits between stately renovated Victorians. A dilapidated bodega selling cigarettes and *cachaça* occupies a corner less than a block from a bustling Whole Foods. The process of gentrification is slightly less visible in the neighborhoods that surround OCA's Early Childhood Campus (grades K-3) and its Upper Elementary Campus (grades 4-6), each several miles from the Peabody Street Campus, but teachers at both campuses still complain that soon they will no longer be able to afford to live nearby.

The demographics of OCA's student population have shifted inversely to those of the surrounding neighborhoods. Although the school began as a small institution which served predominantly middle-class families, by the 2014-15 academic year it served 1,150 students in grades K-12, with 56% identifying as Black, 16% identifying as Hispanic, 12% identifying as White, 8% identifying as Asian, and 8% identifying as "other." Two-thirds qualified for free or reduced-price lunch and 40% came from homes where English is not the primary spoken language. As for OCA's teachers, almost 75%

percent were White women, most of whom came from upper-middle-class backgrounds and attended selective colleges. Many were in the first few years of their careers. The school's 25-member Academic Leadership Team (ALT) was equally female-dominated (80%) and only slightly more racially diverse, with five members (20%) identifying as Black. More than half of the group's members had been at OCA for five or more years, with a few who had been working at the school for its entire history and several more who described having “grown up” in the OCA community, joining the school as novice teachers and taking on leadership roles over time. Although many of these leaders were parents, only one had chosen to send her children through the school.

Early Years

OCA was opened in 1996 by a group of middle-class parents who were dissatisfied with the quality of the local public schools. Accordingly, in its early years, the school—which at the time served only grades 6-12—served a socio-economically advantaged and predominantly White population. In terms of pedagogy, the first five years of the school's existence were dominated by an extremely traditional approach to teaching and learning. At the time, OCA was run by a for-profit management company which implemented a proprietary curriculum which had been developed overseas. From Theo's perspective, the choice to contract with this company reflected the belief of the founding board that “as long as people adhered to the curriculum with fidelity, it didn't matter who the teacher was.” As a result, Theo reflected, the school was characterized by rigid pedagogical practices as well as “a tremendous amount of distrust.”

Valerie, who joined OCA's faculty early on as a Spanish teacher and in 2013 became the principal of the newly formed Collegiate Institute, was more generous in her

assessment. “I have a hard time with the narrative about how [OCA] was so horrible at the beginning, because there was a group of very dedicated intelligent teachers working really hard,” she said. “The problem was that [company name] owned all of the curricular materials, and everything was very test-driven. Kids were tested like every single week.” It came as a relief, she added, when midway through the 2001-02 academic year, the for-profit company abruptly withdrew, leaving in its wake an opportunity for the school to reinvent itself.

Experimenting with Progressivism

In order to understand what some leaders referred to as “[OCA] 2.0,” it is important to understand the perspectives that Theo brought to the work when he became Principal of the Upper School in 2002. Slight, energetic, and always impeccably dressed, Theo thinks of himself as a “entrepreneurial” leader with deep commitments to progressive education. He comes from an extremely privileged background; he grew up in Pittsburgh in an affluent, White, half-Jewish family. For the entirety of his K-12 years, he attended an extremely traditional private school—the kind of place, he recalls, where “teachers would say that if we didn’t do well, we’d be sent back to public schools.” Theo felt profoundly out of place in this community, but for many years he assumed that this was “just how school was.” During his junior year, however, he spent his spring break visiting a cousin who attended a public school that was part of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), a neo-Deweyian association of progressive schools founded by philosopher-educator Ted Sizer. The experience of tagging along to classes with his cousin radically changed Theo’s vision of what schooling could be:

Kids were out in the hallways playing music. Teachers were on a first-name basis with their kids. Real projects were happening, where students had a voice and it

wasn't just writing these pat essays so that we could conform. And I was like, "Holy shit, what is this? *What is this?*"

Inspired, Theo decided to apply to Brown, where Sizer was teaching at the time. After matriculating, Theo sought out Sizer as a mentor. In turn, several years later, Sizer invited Theo to serve as one of the founding teachers at the Parker School, a progressive public charter school in western Massachusetts. Theo enthusiastically accepted.

During his six years at Parker, Theo taught an interdisciplinary, inquiry-based humanities curriculum. In accordance with the school's model of "looping" advisories, he followed a single group of student through from 7th to 12th grade, forming deep and lasting relationships with them. His formative experiences as a teacher thus not only cemented a vision of progressive schooling but also affirmed the importance of undertaking significant relational work with students. When Theo left Parker in 2002 to take on the Upper School principal position at OCA, he brought these values with him—values which, as it turned out, many of the school's teachers did not share. Nearly half of the Upper School's teacher chose to leave after his first year in the job, causing a plummet in morale. In the years which followed, however, Theo's vision for the school began to gain traction. He put in place an advisory system, created regular time for collaboration, and encouraged teachers to plan units that culminated in public performance tasks. He reflected, "If you had asked [teachers] what the instructional vision was, they would have said that they needed to frame units around essential questions and that inquiry needs to be the driver of learning."

The culture among OCA's faculty during this five-year period, as Theo described it, reflected the sense of openness and positivity which characterized the campus as a whole. "I'm not a revisionist historian—the school wasn't perfect," he said. "But it was

intimate and it was collaborative, and there was a lot of trust and people were honest with each other and mostly having fun most of the time.” Jeremy, who joined the Upper School’s English department in 2005, agreed with this assessment. “It felt like leaders and teachers were on the same team—they would go get a drink together after work, leaders knew what was going on in classrooms,” he said. On this other hand, Jeremy experienced the school’s emphasis on progressive pedagogy as being more an aspiration than a reality. Valerie agreed with this assessment. Although the school “felt like a family,” she said, its progressive instructional values were expressed mainly as vague aspirations.

Embracing “No Excuses”

There was no distinct moment that the “OCA 2.0” era came to an end, but interview participants agreed that by 2008 the school had taken a sharp turn away from progressive aspirations. Perhaps not coincidentally, this shift accompanied a change in Theo’s role; in the middle of the 2006-07 schoolyear, the board asked him to temporarily take over as the K-12 Head of School, and in the following year the position became permanent. This transition converged with an uptick in accountability pressures associated with the passage of the NCLB Act, which attached newly high stakes to the existing regimen of state standardized testing. Theo’s transition also converged with a shift in demographics which was due in part to the fact that OCA’s Lower School, which would soon expand and be separated into two campuses, had begun to gain a positive reputation among the local Haitian community. Thus, even as the neighborhoods surrounding OCA became more affluent and more White, the school gradually became a “majority minority” institution which served large numbers of high-poverty students,

many of whom came from non-English-speaking homes.

It was as the result of these convergent shifts, Theo reported, that OCA's values and aspirations changed quite dramatically.

When I [became Head of School], that's right when the next wave of charter schools started gaining traction, which were the "No Excuses" schools. And they were unapologetic in their approach towards closing the achievement gap, which was to make sure that Black and Brown and poor kids could do as well on standardized tests as kids whose parents have a lot of money and are highly educated. And those schools started getting all the goodies because they did that really well. And for a while, we were able to sustain doing well enough... but then our demographic began to shift so that we were seeing a pretty precipitous decline in our performance on standardized tests. At the same time, at the Upper School, I think that some of the magic of what we had built in the first five years had evaporated a bit. And the adequate yearly progress provision of No Child Left Behind started becoming a major focus for all schools. So we shifted towards more of the model of the "No Excuses" schools which we were constantly benchmarking ourselves against.

This shift was cemented by the fact that a leader named Beth, whose success as the principal of OCA's middle school hinged on tight micromanagement of instructional practices and a punitive approach to discipline, was promoted into a system-level role.

Beth's tenure as OCA's Director of Staff Development, more than anything else, signaled that OCA had begun to orient itself around a new set of values.

Teachers and leaders who worked at the school during this period agreed that the school's *de facto* identity, both instructionally and culturally, was as an aspiring "No Excuses" institution. Nora, who joined the Upper School's English faculty after working in several CES-inspired public schools, described the school's instructional model as being "factory-like" in its approach. "The emphasis was on measuring discrete skills through assessment," she said. Kerry agreed, condemning the school's approach as one that produced classrooms which lacked vitality or depth. "Teachers were talking about 'evidence and analysis' every day, a hundred times.... it was all for the test," she said.

The command-and-control stance which undergirds the “No Excuses” model extended into domains beyond the classroom as well. At OCA’s two lower campuses, which had always been quite traditional in their approach, the school’s new values reified an already-strict approach to discipline. At the Upper School, where behavior incidents had been treated on a case-by-case basis, the change was more dramatic. “All of a sudden parents had to sign ‘compacts,’ dress code was really tight, there were all these discipline codes,” one leader described. Theo drew a direct connection between these new policies and the shifts in the school’s instructional vision. “Similar to the shift pedagogically to a formulaic approach to teaching based on skill development and not deeper understanding, we also shifted in that direction culturally and behaviorally,” he said.

This rigidity was viewed by some as a stronger platform for instructional efficacy than what came before. Many of OCA’s Haitian families, for example, welcomed the school’s stringent treatment of misbehavior because they saw it as mirroring the values of their community. For many, however, the embrace of zero tolerance discipline signaled the end of a more broadly individualized and relational emphasis. This proved true not only for students but also for adults. To wit, teachers and leaders agree that OCA’s “No Excuses” period is one during which trust and collegiality among the school’s adults began to erode. As Jeremy experienced it, leaders became simultaneously more punitive and more removed from what was happening in classrooms, leading to “intense distrust between the faculty and the administration.”

The school’s leadership was encountering similar culture problems internally. Originally, when the school was smaller, there had been little need for lengthy cross-campus leadership meetings. As concerns about schoolwide coherence mounted,

however, Theo instituted Tuesday morning “admin” meetings, which, to his dismay, increasingly became fraught with tension. “[The ALT] became a deflating place, a suffocating place, a place where people left with greater anxiety and stress than they entered,” he said. By the 2013-14 year, things had hit rock bottom. Theo had taken a sabbatical year to finish his long-neglected dissertation, and so meetings mainly were led by Beth, who, as noted above, was a fierce believer in the command-and-control approach of “No Excuses” schooling. Beth also believed in the importance of symmetry between the experiences of students and those of adults. Accordingly, ALT meetings were structured to reflect the values and practices that the school was trying to enact in classrooms and hallways.

This did not go over well with leaders, who found this approach to be demeaning and disempowering. Kerry, who had recently taken over Beth’s role as Principal of the Upper Elementary Campus, was particularly struck by the symmetry between what was happening in ALT meetings and what was happening in classrooms—symmetry which, for her, underscored the flaws of the “No Excuses” approach:

There was this undercurrent of: “We don’t trust the adults in the building so we’re going to script and micromanage everything.” So in admin meetings you were supposed to model good instruction, and good instruction was to come in, do a silent written “do now,” maybe do a turn and talk, clear objectives, and some sort of exit ticket. And I’m like, I’ve been teaching for 17 years. I shouldn’t have to hand in an exit ticket to [Beth]. [Laughs] And, I mean, I didn’t like the [“No Excuses”] vision anyway, and so sitting there in meetings I thought, oh my God, this is what we do to kids all day and I *hate* this.

Not all leaders saw the school’s embrace of the “No Excuses” model as being solely responsible for its negative professional culture. For example, Liza, who began working at OCA in 2002 as a middle-school social studies teacher and then became the Upper School’s Assistant Principal, believed that the culture problems which came to a head in

2013-14 had been brewing for a long time. She agreed with Kerry, however, that these problems were ones which symmetrically affected students and adults. “There’s just like a kind of nasty blame culture that starts at the leadership level here and trickles all the way down to the way we interact with kids and families,” she said. “When things don’t go well, the question isn’t, ‘How can I help?’ the question is, ‘Whose fault is it?’”

Regardless of how they see the origins of the problem, interview participants agreed that as OCA moved toward the end of its second decade, morale hit an all-time low. Students were unhappy; families were unhappy; teachers were unhappy; leaders were unhappy; and, despite the pervasive focus on “teaching to the test,” the school was struggling to meet the federal government’s Annual Yearly Progress requirements. To make matters worse, in 2013, the state charter board surprised the school with an unplanned visit. In their report, the auditors described a school that lacked both instructional coherence and positive culture; they warned leaders that the school needed to shape up by the time its charter was up for renewal in two years’ time.

It was high time for a new approach.

Changing Course with the Cultural Core

“It was hard, but it stuck,” Suzanne reflected. “I think it’s amazing that the restorative approach is one of the things that’s actually stuck, you know?” She laughed—a low, short, musical laugh—and leaned back in her chair, legs crossed, waiting for me to formulate my next question. I was struck, not for the first time, by her comfort with silence. Conversations with Suzanne are almost meditative; she often seems content to say less and listen more, leaving space for stillness.

Suzanne brought a very different set of perspectives to her work at OCA than did

most of her colleagues. Black, single, and in her late thirties, she grew up in Atlanta in a family of educators and began her career as math teacher in the District of Columbia after graduating from Spelman College. After a few years, her interest in theology and conflict resolution drew her away from the classroom; she attended divinity school and afterward took on a series of jobs abroad, one of which involved working overseas with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on issues of transitional justice. In 2011, she returned to the U.S. to join OCA as the Director of Family and Community Engagement, eventually moving into the role of Dean of School Culture.

By nature as well as by training, Suzanne is oriented around the emotional, relational, and spiritual dimensions of human experience. In interviews, she emphasized that she did not see herself as an instructional expert. Recalling her years in the classroom, however, she explained that the academic work which she undertook with her students was inextricably tied to the attention that she paid to them as “whole beings.” “Every quarter I would have one-on-ones with my kids.... so I learned that developing an intuitive knowing about a child comes through a process of listening and spending time with them that’s not always about, ‘I want something from you,’” she reflected. Suzanne’s perspective is thus one which eschews authoritarian, utilitarian logic and emphasizes the importance of surfacing and attending to individual needs.

It was this perspective which prompted Suzanne to advocate for RJ when OCA found itself contemplating a change of course. It was the spring of 2013, and an internal audit conducted by system leaders revealed what the charter board would encounter and make public a few months later: the school was in crisis. Among other things, the audit revealed that the school was disproportionately doling out detentions, suspensions, and

expulsions to its students of color, especially its Black and Latino boys. Accordingly, the new strategic plan included “positive school culture” as one of key buckets for improvement. Using her skills as an organizer, Suzanne took the lead in helping the school community to decide on a path forward, convening and eventually convincing a group of stakeholders that RJ was the best fit with “who we [at OCA] say we are.” Leaders generally supported this choice. Theo, in particular, found that Suzanne’s case for RJ reawakened his dormant commitment to progressive schooling. “[Suzanne] forced us to hold a mirror up in relation to our espoused values and our real actions,” he said. “Ultimately we picked the restorative frame because it felt like a good fit with our values, which are progressive values.”

When OCA’s four campuses opened their doors to students in the fall of 2013, they did so as part of an institution which now labelled itself as restorative. Gone were the stringent behavior compacts. Gone were the systems of demerits and detentions. Gone were the one-size-fit-all systems which leaders had determined to be overly formulaic. Instead, teachers were supposed to build relationships with students through circle processes and to manage (mis)behaviors using a system of tiers to determine appropriate non-exclusion-based responses; leaders, for their part, were supposed to facilitate problem-specific circles with students when more serious issues arose.

Implementing this vision, however, proved to be far more difficult than many expected. This was due to what many leaders later identified as being a premature launch. To wit, the decision to take on the restorative approach starting in the fall was made late in the previous spring, which left very little time to plan for how best to roll it out, very little ability to anticipate and preempt problems, and very few strategic resources by

which to support the work. To compound this, starting in June, Theo left on a sabbatical, leaving Suzanne to try to make RJ a priority in a leadership environment which virtually all members of the ALT agreed was dysfunctional. “I was kind of out there by myself, trying to figure out how to make [RJ] work,” Suzanne lamented. As a result, leaders experienced a large amount of pushback from teachers and families, who did not always understand and/or support the RJ framework.

By the second year of implementation—the year that I undertook this study—things had begun to look up in some respects. At the Early Elementary Campus, leaders were helping teachers to see the linkages between RJ and the Responsive Classroom framework with which they were already familiar. At the Upper Elementary School, teachers and leaders were working together to hone a schoolwide model for culture-building circles and problem-solving conferences. At the Peabody Street campuses, however, things were still quite unstable. Students continued to disrupt class on a regular basis, and teachers, who felt under-prepared to implement RJ and under-supported by the administration, were increasingly dubious that changing course had been a good decision. In addition, in the late fall, Benny, one of OCA’s few leaders of color, announced that he would not be returning as Upper School principal the following year—an event which sparked accusations of institutional racism and further decreased morale among students and faculty. By midyear, a team of Peabody Street leaders were gearing up to work on redesigning the Upper School and the Collegiate Institute so that the use of space, time, and human capital could better support RJ and restorative culture.

Despite these hiccups, leaders noted that the work around RJ had achieved unusual momentum and “stickiness,” especially given the school’s track-record of

adopting but then retreating from change initiatives. As Liane, the Director of Student Services, a *de facto* member of the principal team, and one of OCA's longest-tenured leaders, reported: "School-culture-wise, this is the first time we've ever had a clear identity with a name—it's really refreshing." Suzanne echoed this sentiment, adding that despite her earnest hope that RJ would stick, she did not initially believe that it would do so. "Sometimes I'm in a little bit of disbelief myself, given everything that's happened, that we're in such a good place [with RJ]," Suzanne said. Other ALT members affirmed that although implementation has been much more challenging than they anticipated, they continued to find the philosophy and practices of RJ to be deeply compelling. As one leader commented during a meeting: "We are trying to imagine hope for our communities and our kids, and [RJ] seems like the one option I can see as hopeful in a way that others we have tried have not been."

Changing Course with the Instructional Core

Although the implementation of RJ signaled an initial shift away from the "No Excuses" approach, in the 2013-14 schoolyear instruction at OCA remained focused on the skills assessed on state standardized tests. When Theo returned from his sabbatical in the summer of 2014, however, the stage was set for a change of course. Beth had chosen not to renew her contract and her position had not been filled, leaving "some oxygen in the system." For his part, Theo returned to the school with new inspiration. He described his sabbatical year as a kind of "awakening" process during which he realized that OCA had drifted much too far from the progressive vision of teaching and learning that he held dear. Now, with changes in the broader policy environment making this vision more tenable, he decided to help the leadership to clarify the school's instructional approach.

“Coming back, my goal was to help our community get clear on that while leading from a place of my own interest and passion, thus the green sheet,” he said.

The “green sheet” to which Theo referred was the instructional vision that the ALT drafted during a two-day retreat in the summer of 2014. The document happened to be printed on green copy-paper the first time it was disseminated, and over the course of the year, it became known as “the green monster”—an apt term given the ambitious nature of the vision it laid out. To wit, the “green monster” specified that effective instruction at OCA should have seven core characteristics:

- *Restorative*: Educating students toward self-regulated positive behavior through promoting, nurturing, and sustaining positive relationships.
- *Culturally Responsive*: Mindful of and attentive to the cultural assets of [OCA]’s students and families.
- *Authentic*: Forging real world connections with regular performance-based exhibitions of learning.
- *Constructivist / Student-centered*: Students as knowledge creators, not merely knowledge receivers.
- *Standards-based*: Aligned with Common Core State Standards and aimed at acquisition of academic knowledge/skill.
- *Rigorous*: Moves students toward the development and application of higher-order thinking skills (Bloom’s taxonomy).
- *Differentiated*: Adapted to multiple learning styles and pathways of knowledge and skill acquisition.

Some of this language, e.g. the last three descriptors, reflected the priorities which had characterized OCA during its “No Excuses” era. The addition of terms such as “culturally responsive,” “authentic,” and “constructivist/student-centered,” however, signaled a shift back toward a more progressive and “deeper” vision of teaching and learning.

It was at this juncture that I entered the story as an active participant. Since June, Theo and I had been playing around with the question of how I might leverage my expertise around deeper learning to support OCA's leaders. In August, with the newly-created instructional vision on the books, we decided that I would lead the ALT in a "course" of sorts on alternating Tuesdays. We titled the course "Leadership for Deeper Learning" and decided that its broad goals would be to support leaders in working together to thicken and cohere their understandings of the "green monster." When Theo proposed that a significant portion of the group's meeting-time be devoted to this task, leaders near-unanimously supported the decision; later, in a vote, they decided that the course would focus on the "constructivist / student-centered" tenet of the new vision. Theo's calculus in using such a significant portion of the ALT's meeting-time for new learning reflected a desire not only to focus the group on the goal of instructional improvement but also to restore "life" and "breath" to a situation that had been "suffocating." As he described: "I wanted to reclaim the Tuesday morning meeting time as a space that nurtured the leaders, where it wasn't just about the complex and real work of administration and decision-making and on-the-fly real-time response but really more of a sort of life-breathing place."

The work that the ALT undertook with my supervision over the course of the fall was varied and complex. My goal, as I explicitly told the group, was not only to help them to deepen and cohere their understandings of constructivism and student-centeredness, but also to *model* constructivism and learner-centeredness in the ways that I facilitated the work. Accordingly, although at a few strategically important moments I delivered mini-lectures on topics such as the cognitive science that undergirds

constructivist theory, I strived to serve mainly as a facilitator, supporting leaders in surfacing their preexisting beliefs and mental models, making their thinking visible to each other, and helping them to synthesize this thinking into a set of evolving definitions. With my support and facilitation, the group also engaged in a process of instructional rounds (City, Elmore, Fiarman, Teitel, & Lachman, 2009) during which leaders visited each other's campuses in order to gauge the extent to which constructivist and student-centered practices were already being used in classrooms. Among other things, this process shed light on the incredible variability in classroom practice both within and across OCA's campuses—variability which leaders saw as an obstacle when it came to moving toward actualizing the new vision, since it suggested that teachers would need significant differentiation with respect to training and support.

Despite this recognition, this shift toward deeper instructional aspirations, as with the shift from authoritarian to restorative discipline and culture, was one that many leaders welcomed. As Kerry put it:

There's finally a focus on engaging, constructivist learning experiences for kids. Like the kind of things that kids remember about school—like, learning that's not all at the expense of who they are as people. The analogy that I keep using is I feel like we've just opened the windows. I'm like, "Aaaahhh, [sighs], for sure." Like I can breathe again.

Other leaders were more cautious in their enthusiasm for the new instruction vision.

Liane, for example, said that she supported the "green monster" in theory but worried that OCA might not be ready for such a dramatic change of course. Liza, similarly, feared that despite its good intentions, the new instructional vision would be seen by OCA's already-demoralized teachers as another set of expectations that they would never be able to meet.

It was this issue—the issue of how to translate the school’s new aspirations into realistic expectations for teachers—which became a central concern for the ALT during the winter and spring of 2015. Originally, Theo and I had planned for the “Leadership for Deeper Learning” course to continue during this time; in December, the ALT voted to extend their work around constructivist teaching by undertaking an intensive study of the thinking routines specified in *Making Thinking Visible* (Ritchhart et al., 2011). As so often happens in the world of schools, however, more pressing matters began to encroach. In this case, Theo had told OCA’s board that the school planned to take advantage of a new policy that would allow it to replace the state’s educator evaluation framework with a school-specific evaluation tool. It quickly became clear the task of creating this tool, along with the annual budgeting process, would require most of the ALT’s time for the second half of the year. Thus, by mid-winter, the ALT’s work had moved from a space of exploration to a space of creation, whereby the group sought, through the design of the new rubric, to clarify what both the “green monster” and the restorative approach specified in terms of expectations for teachers. This chapter opened with a glimpse into this process; in the next section, I explore it in greater depth.

The Neutral Zone

Before I continue with the story of the rubric creation process, there are several points worth emphasizing with respect to OCA’s history. First, although the school’s story is complicated and particular, it is also a story whose contours reflect the shifting emphases of educational policies during the past twenty years, and more specifically the waxing and waning influence of the No Child Left Behind Act. To this end, as Theo openly acknowledged, it is no accident that OCA’s myopically test-focused era began

around 2007; this was precisely when schools around the country began to experience the “teeth” associated with Adequate Yearly Progress requirements and, as a result, to orient more explicitly around the new regimen of accountability. In fact, although charter schools are supposed to be partially insulated from external requirements, OCA was arguably *more* influenced by the accountability movement than it might have been if it were organized as a district public schools because it had to compete for “the goodies” with its “No Excuses” peers. Similarly, OCA’s new priorities emerged precisely as it became clear that NCLB soon would be replaced by a less narrowly focused model of external accountability, and as calls for more ambitious instruction and for more equitable educational justice processes began to amplify. This serves as more evidence for the argument set forth in Chapter 1: the argument that OCA, while far from being an institutional “everyman,” is nonetheless reflective of several major trends in the K-12 world—and thus can be seen as a window into the more general challenges facing schools at the present moment.

A second point worth emphasizing is that despite OCA’s history of shifting priorities and campus-to-campus inconsistencies, there is a powerful case to be made that the school’s adoption of RJ—and to a lesser extent its adoption of the vision of deeper learning set forth in the “green monster”—set in motion an institution-wide process of transition. To wit, while their experiences of implementation varied, leaders and teachers from across all four campuses agreed that the decision to “go restorative” represented a decisive change of course for the school. Several used the metaphor of “putting a stake in the ground” to describe the decision to adopt RJ; others talked about the importance of publicly naming their commitment to the new paradigm. As Suzanne reflected, “We’re

totally ‘out’ with the fact that we’re trying to be a restorative school at this point... we’re really standing behind it.” Many of OCA’s leaders viewed the adoption of the “green monster” as a parallel, albeit less developed, attempt to move in a new direction. As Theo put it, the new instructional vision represented an attempt to “get clear on who we want to be instructionally...the same way we’ve been getting clear on who we want to be culturally.” The fact that leaders talked about “who we’re *trying* to be” and “who we *want* to be,” however, underscores their widespread acknowledgement that the school was still toward the beginning of its journey toward RJ and deeper learning. These new priorities had certainly served to shake things up, but they still functioned more at the level of aspiration than at the level of reality.

It is in this light that OCA in the year that I undertook this study can be viewed as residing in what Bridges (2003) calls “the neutral zone”: a liminal space that separates the rejection of old practices and identities from the full transition to new ones. Although the fact that the restorative work was two years underway might suggest that OCA had already moved beyond this zone with respect to RJ, Bridges draws a distinction between a *start* and a *beginning*:

Even though there is a new situation in place and they have started to grapple with it, people in the neutral zone feeling lost, confused, and uncertain. The *beginning* will take place only after they have come through the wilderness. [...] Starts involve new situations. Beginning involve new understandings, new values, new attitudes, and—most of all—new identities. (2003, p. 58)

As the next section of the chapter will illustrate, confusion, uncertainty, and a sense of identity in flux are all apt characterizations of the ALT as the group struggled to negotiate

ways of working with each other which better reflected the values of the RJ framework than what came before. The group was even more clearly in the neutral zone with respect to the effort to move away from the “No Excuses” approach to instruction which had characterized the school until recently; many leaders, in fact, felt profoundly torn between their desires to embrace deeper learning goals and their doubts that doing so would be feasible or fair to the teachers in their charge. The “hot mess” which characterized the work of the school’s leadership during the study period thus reflects the general challenges associated with institutional transitions, as well as the interconnected nature of the two priorities which the school sought to enact.

Part II: Struggling to Live the Vision

To Theo, the decision to ask the ALT to use its bi-monthly meeting time to develop a new teacher evaluation rubric was a no-brainer. In fact, it promised to solve a lot of problems simultaneously. First, it represented a way to signal that the school’s new instructional vision—the “green monster” that he had guided the group in developing over the summer—was here to stay. This was important it would demonstrate to whoever took over as the new Head of School that OCA was committed to moving toward deeper learning. Second, it presented an opportunity for Theo to appease OCA’s influential board, which had been urging him to explore merit-based pay as a way to boost teacher retention. By telling the board that leaders first needed to develop an institution-specific system of evaluation, Theo would be able to extend the timeline for this process and thus insulate the school from the storm of anger and distrust that the specter of merit pay threatened to initiate. Finally, Theo saw the rubric development process as an opportunity to support Ellery, a talented young leader who he recently had been mentoring, in

stepping forward in her leadership. Ellery, he thought to himself with pleasure, would be the perfect person to facilitate the process: diligent, action-oriented, instructionally knowledgeable, and well-liked by her colleagues.

To Suzanne, Theo's decision that the ALT would spend the winter and spring developing a new rubric was promising but also concerning. On the one hand, Suzanne was optimistic that the task presented an opportunity for the ALT to experience a sense of success and shared ownership—an important step in making sure that the group continued to move beyond the simmering resentments and mistrust of previous years. On the other hand, knowing that making decisions about something as high-stakes as teacher evaluation would inevitably surface complex political and interpersonal dynamics, Suzanne was worried about Theo's decision to delegate sole responsibility for facilitation to Ellery. As hard-working, intelligent, and well-liked as Ellery was, Suzanne thought, the expectations being put on her were perhaps not being matched with adequate support. Suzanne decided to offer Ellery her assistance as a co-planner and co-facilitator. This decision, in her mind, had the added benefit of giving her a platform by which to ensure that the restorative approach, and concerns about relational culture and social-emotional learning more broadly, were reflected in the new evaluation tool.

Ellery was both excited and overwhelmed. Having recently started a part-time masters' program in educational leadership, she had spent a lot of time thinking about organizational learning, and this presented a chance to test out some of her theories. In particular, she was excited about the chance to develop a tool which could help the school to cohere its expectations for teachers around a common vision. On the other hand, while she wanted to believe Theo's claim that the rubric process should be easy to complete in

the three-month timeline that he laid out, she could not shake the nagging feeling that he was underestimating the complexity of the task. After all, nothing was ever easy when it came to the ALT.

When Suzanne offered Ellery her support, Ellery accepted with gratitude. Together, the two leaders mapped out a plan, paying attention not only to what would need to happen by what dates, but also to how the group might work together in ways that reflected the school's new vision. As Ellery said to her ALT colleagues at the end of the first design meeting: "We want to have a process that is restorative, authentic, constructivist, rigorous, social-emotional—*all of it.*"

The meeting had gone more or less as expected. The weekend prior, Ellery had sketched out a skeleton of the new rubric, and during the meeting leaders had opted into work-groups devoted to populating specific categories. Although several leaders had voiced concerns about the tight timeline and confusions about why the group was creating a new tool from scratch given the profusion of others which existed, most seemed cautiously excited about the opportunity to align the school's criteria for evaluation with its new vision. Susan, the Principal of the Early Elementary Campus, had been the only one who really dug her heels in with respect to the "why" of the task. This, however, was par for the course when it came to Susan, who saw it as her job to insulate the teachers and students at her campus from abrupt changes—and Suzanne already had scheduled a meeting so that the three of them could figure things out. Thus, as Ellery read over the feedback cards which leaders had filled out at the end of the meeting, she felt a sense of relief. Her nagging concerns about the ALT's ability to complete the process successfully were, "for a hot minute," assuaged.

Two weeks later, during the next rubric design meeting, these concerns reemerged with a vengeance. At the beginning of this meeting, Suzanne reminded the group that the design process presented an opportunity for leaders to support each other's social-emotional learning. Since the exercise associated with this reminder took longer than expected, and since one consistent strand of feedback from last time had been a desire for more small-group worktime, Ellery moved through her own agenda items as rapidly as she could: she summarized the feedback from last week and articulated how she and Suzanne had integrated it into their plan; she shared a partially-populated version of the rubric which now included developmental categories (e.g. "unsatisfactory," "needs improvement," "proficient," "advanced"); she directed the group's attention to a variety of sample rubrics; and she issued directions about how to use the worktime. Ellery thought all of this had been clear, but as she and Suzanne circulated among the groups it became evident that many leaders were confused about the directions. It also was evident that they had a growing number of substantive questions about the rubric. Would three or even two developmental categories be more useful than four? Should the language of the draft rubric be shifted so that "proficient" referred not just to teacher moves but to student outcomes? More broadly, did it really make sense to deliberate over these kinds of questions given the tight timeline for the process? Wouldn't it be better to choose one of the example rubrics from other progressive schools and then adapt it to reflect OCA's emphasis on the restorative approach? Although the tone varied from group to group, the ways in which leaders articulated these questions indicated a mounting sense of frustration.

At the end of the meeting, Suzanne stepped in to try and salvage the situation. As

was her way, her tactic was to model humility and transparency and to name what she saw as the underlying issues. “We’re *in* the work now, team, and it turns out that it’s really complex for a number of reasons: one is because the work itself is complex and another is because our relational work as a group is complex,” she said. She added, “I also want to acknowledge that we rushed through the opening frame and it may have worked for some and it may not have worked for all and just like with teachers working with students in a classroom, working for some is not good enough.” There were some murmurs, and the energy of the room seemed to soften. Emboldened, Ellery stepped forward. “I think I really rushed through things, and I want to take ownership and responsibility for that,” she said, blushing intensely and fighting back tears. “I guess I worry that the work that we’re trying to do together is going to undermine the way that we’re trying to work together.” Several leaders nodded and two of them spoke up to acknowledge Ellery’s apology. “You just modelled what we’re trying to teach teachers to do in the classroom, so thank you,” commented the vice principal who worked with Susan. “You just modelled making errors visible, and that’s exactly what we need,” added Rachel.

Suzanne and Ellery’s willingness to own up to their mistakes had, perhaps, temporarily pulled the group back from the brink of crisis. Leaders’ substantive questions about the rubric, however, only amplified in number and in intensity during the next meeting. Only about half of the ALT was present this time; the rest were overseeing the administration of the state standardized tests. Ellery and Suzanne broke those who were present into groups to work on refining the by-now lengthy draft of the rubric. It quickly became clear, however, that many of the groups were stuck on big-picture questions

which were preventing them from doing this task. Suzanne and Ellery made an impromptu decision to reconvene as a whole group. They asked leaders to leave their laptops on the tables and to form a circle of chairs. “We’re going to try not to over-facilitate, so that the conversation can be more organic,” said Ellery. “We want you to share out your puzzles and wonderings, and then we’ll try to ‘bucket’ them.”

The ensuing conversation covered a lot of ground. Liane, speaking for her group, expressed excitement about one of the sample rubrics and floated the idea of adapting it instead of “reinventing the wheel.” Nora said that she and her colleagues were stuck on the question of whether the rubric was supposed to serve a summative purpose, a formative purpose, or both. “The analogy we were using is we want to know if we’re building the curriculum or the test, or both the curriculum and the test,” she said. Theo talked about how his group had been puzzling over the question of individualization. They agreed, he said, that in a “deliberately developmental” school, different teachers would be working on different things at different times—but they were stuck on what this meant when it came to the rubric. Should it represent baseline expectations, or should it paint a picture of what would be happening in classrooms if the school’s aspirations were being fully enacted? A literacy coach at the Upper Elementary Campus picked up on this line of thinking, noting that Theo’s group’s concerns connected to a question about the school’s identity. She asked: Is OCA thinking of itself as teacher training organization? If not, she suggested, then it would be problematic to impose such ambitious expectations onto novice teachers; this would be a “do *to*” and would set them up to fail.

The conversation was intense but collegial; the smaller size of the group, combined with the circle format, lent it a sense of intimacy. The end of the meeting,

however, brought a sharp return of anxiety and tension as leaders summarized the questions which needed to be resolved. “We need to get clear on our outcomes, our focus, the strategies to get us there, and about what type of school we’re trying to be,” said one leader by way of summary. Her colleagues nodded. “I’d like some decisions, especially about whether we’re building the final exam or the curriculum,” Ellery said. “What do you think, Suzanne?” There was a silence. Referring to the fact that all but one of the campus principals were missing, Suzanne finally said, “I think if we’re going to make decisions then the decision-makers need to be in the room.” Liane shook her head in disbelief. “Seriously, are we going to try to get consensus?” she asked. Ignoring this comment, Suzanne closed the meeting with words of encouragement, saying, “I look at the tenor of our dialogue and how we’re becoming a more restorative leadership group in how we operate... it’s important to stop and notice the change in us and celebrate the things we have accomplished and still keep in view the things we haven’t gotten to yet.” Even so, the sense of being at an impasse lingered as leaders packed up.

Ten minutes later, upstairs in Theo’s office, Suzanne, Ellery, and Theo convened for an unanticipated meeting. For what Ellery later called “one of the longest hours ever,” the three leaders engaged in a tense debrief conversation in which they tried to figure out why the process was going wrong and what to do about it. At first, the dialogue was cautious, with the three leaders being careful to avoid conflict. Ellery commented “I think we’re pretty much on the same page, but it would be helpful for me to figure out how we’re going to answer the questions that everyone [in the ALT] has because we can’t move anywhere until we answer them.” Theo, for his part, praised Suzanne for the way that she handled the morning’s meeting, saying, “You facilitated it really well by going

where the group needed to go.” In response, Suzanne reiterated that she thought that the rubric process, even though it was foundering in some respects, was helping the ALT to become “a more cohesive team.”

As the conversation continued, however, tensions and emotions heightened, especially with respect to the dynamic between Theo and Suzanne. It quickly became clear that the two leaders were coming at the problem from two very different angles. Suzanne offered her interpretation that the problem lay not in the task itself but in the group’s deep-rooted and longstanding cultural issues:

What’s holding us up is an adaptive issue. This is only my third year in leadership here, but it’s all the same issue we keep coming back to: power and trust. The tenor of our work together is a lot more amiable and we’re working together better but I don’t think we’ve named the thing that has kept us from working, which is that people are having a hard time considering that the leaders of the leaders are really trusting them.

Elaborating on this, Suzanne voiced her opinion that the ALT could benefit from spending the next meeting talking about the underlying power dynamics which were making the process so hard, rather than working on the rubric itself. “We have to identify what has gone wrong so that we can move on,” she argued. “We almost never do that kind of work, and I have a personal belief that doing that kind of work serves doing the other kind of work.”

Theo looked doubtful. He acknowledged that Suzanne was likely right about the root of the problem, but he asked, with a slight edge of accusation: “What if people experience managing the process as stagnating the process?” The key question for him, he continued, was about his own role as a decision-maker. He had deliberately stepped back, he said, but now he wondered if what the ALT needed was for him to make some clear decisions about the questions which had been raised. On the other hand, he said, he

recognized that doing so might perpetuate undesirable dynamics:

I guess I'm living in a tension like, should I take this thing back? I could just reclaim this work and get it done. I've deliberately not been standing up front and instead I'm trying to offer perspective as a participant and work with you guys behind the scenes, but it's really hard and it doesn't seem to be working. If we want to re-correct course, we can, but it would be traditional and patriarchal for me to come back in and say here I am, I'll come back in, the white stallion. That's how people expect me to behave, but I don't think that's restorative.

Suzanne responded to Theo with a conviction that was surprising given her generally restrained demeanor. “[Theo], restorative doesn't mean consensus necessarily,” she said vehemently. “I think it's a ‘both/and.’ The leaders want the space to be able to create something, and that means they need to be able to make decisions, but they also need to know what the non-negotiables are.” She added that it would be entirely appropriate for Theo to help her and Ellery to communicate these non-negotiables, so long as it didn't undermine their ability to continue facilitating the work. In fact, she said, if Theo could make transparent the fact that he was supporting the two of them in their growth by helping them to decide the non-negotiables, this would “model for people what we want them to be doing with their own teams.”

Theo tapped his pen lightly on the metal leg of the table, his expression hovering between perplexity and frustration. He looked toward Ellery, who had listened to this exchange in silence. “Where are you in your thinking?” he asked. Ellery hesitated before answering. “I think I thought I was taking on a big but interesting task, but I didn't recognize that I was doing something bigger than that which was about the identity of the institution. That's interesting conceptually, but symbolically complicated given my position in the organization,” she said. “I guess I feel caught in the middle in our trio.” She added, after a pause: “I know that it might be super un-restorative of me, but I just

really want some answers to the questions that people were asking this morning.”

The meeting ended without much clarity. A week later, however, Ellery, Theo, and Suzanne met again and, in the spirit of empowering leaders by being clear about the non-negotiables, made several of the pending decisions to which Ellery had referred. The rubric, they decided, would function as a summative evaluation tool; in May, a subset of the ALT would begin creating a related but separate “guide to restorative instruction” which would serve as a formative development tool. They also decided for once and for all to abandon the idea of adapting a preexisting rubric, since OCA’s combination of restorative values with deeper learning was not one which they saw as being well-reflected in any of the frameworks that they had found.

Emboldened by these decisions and feeling renewed urgency around the timeline, Ellery worked feverishly to consolidate the work that the ALT had done to date. With Suzanne’s endorsement, she decided to reorganize the rubric’s categories to reflect the school’s new vision. Within the umbrella standard which pertained to lesson delivery, for example, the criteria for success were organized into the following categories: “student-centered pedagogy,” “cultural responsiveness,” “social-emotional learning,” “authentic learning experiences,” “standards-based teaching,” “rigor,” “differentiation,” “safety,” “environment,” and “relationships.” The language inside of these categories was richly connected to the descriptions on the “green monster,” as well as to the materials which the school had been using to support implementation of the restorative approach. Finally, Ellery felt, the rubric was beginning to resemble the bold, distinctive, OCA-specific “stake in the ground” that Theo originally had imagined.

The ALT reconvened on a misty Tuesday morning in early April. At long last, the

endless winter—the snowiest on record in the region—finally seemed to be abating. The mood of the group, too, felt palpably lighter than it had two weeks earlier. When Ellery explained that she, Suzanne, and Theo together had reached some clarity about the purpose of the rubric, several leaders snapped in appreciation. An even larger number of expressed their excitement when Theo announced that he had managed to secure funding for a much-expanded summer training institute for new teachers. “The idea behind all of this [the rubric, the guide, and the summer institute], is that to anyone who shows up at [OCA], we can say, here’s what good teaching looks like at this institution and here’s how to do it,” Ellery said. “It’s textbook restorative: high expectations with high support.” There were some more snaps and nods.

After Suzanne prompted the group to spend a few minutes looking over the new rubric draft, however, the mood in the room grew darker. Suzanne asked for initial thoughts and reactions to the “essence” of the document, but nobody answered. “How should I interpret the silence?” Suzanne asked. She directed this question toward Liane, who was scowling intensely, but Liane shook her head. “I’m too frustrated to talk about it right now,” she said. Finally, Kerry spoke up.

I know we’re not talking about implementation yet, but you just said that this is going to be an evaluation tool after all, and I’m going to be honest and say that I’m jumping ahead to that. This rubric is an awesome statement of our vision— whoever put it all together did a great job synthesizing. But my concern is creating the conditions where everybody is actually able to do all of the things that we’re requiring of them, so that evaluation isn’t just saying “gotcha” anymore. If this is a learning tool for me to learn more about what teachers are doing, that’s great, but to use this for evaluation—like, are my master teachers even master teachers anymore?

Susan, who had been nodding vehemently as Kerry talked, echoed these concerns. She added that she didn’t think it was realistic for evaluators to have rich information on such

a wide array of dimensions. Several other leaders, including Liane, indicated their agreement.

Suzanne took these comments in stride, reminding the group that “we’re not talking about the process of evaluation yet; we’re just talking about defining skillful teaching.” She asked Kerry and Susan whether their concerns would prevent them from being able to do the task at hand, which involved flagging places in the rubric draft which need further revision. The two leaders reluctantly shook their heads. “We want to meet everyone’s needs, and guess what? It’s not easy,” Suzanne commented toward the end of the meeting. “Please know that we open our doors proverbially to you to have a dialogue about your concerns.”

On the surface, Suzanne projected calm reassurance. However, in yet another hastily-convened debrief, she and Ellery agreed to reopen the question of whether and how to use the rubric as an evaluation tool next year. Ellery, as the primary “keeper” of the rubric’s content, felt strongly that the tool itself was far from representing consensus agreements about the nature of good instruction; thus, to require leaders to use it next year would be premature. Suzanne agreed. Although the decision to invite the whole ALT to help develop the new tool had reflected a desire to cultivate ownership, she said, she feared that if she, Ellery, and Theo ignored the group’s concerns about implementation, the rubric might still end up feeling like “a *do to*, not a *do with*.”

The two women brought these concerns to Theo along with a proposal: OCA’s principals and directors (e.g. Valerie, Benny, Kerry, Susan, and Liane) should be allowed to decide whether to use the new rubric as an evaluation tool next year or whether, instead, to stick with the existing system of evaluation and to pick priority areas from the

new rubric to guide the summer institute and the year's professional development. Theo, resigned to the fact that respecting the group's process meant changing course from this original plan, supported this proposal. To the two options that Ellery and Suzanne outlined, however, he added a third possibility: principals could choose whether to pilot the new rubric next year with groups of teachers who opted in to do so.

At the beginning of the next meeting, Theo took the lead in facilitating. He presented the three options to the group, emphasizing that the decision to offer principals and directors a choice about how to use the new rubric reflected a desire to be responsive to the group's feedback.

I want to acknowledge that [Ellery] and [Suzanne] have heard, listened, and acknowledged your feedback all the way through this process. It's very difficult to balance the different needs and wants and desires, which is partly why there are a smaller group of decision-makers in this proposal. I do want to be clear that we *are* moving forward with this new rubric because it better aligns with our vision—it will be a teaching tool no matter what. But you have some options in terms of whether you use that rubric for the purposes of evaluation or not. Hopefully this is news that feels energizing or at minimum relieving.

For the first time since the start of the process, there was virtually no pushback from the group with respect to the nature of the content which had been presented. Instead, leaders jumped into spirited discussion of the pros and cons of the three options, focusing mainly on the question of whether it would be a good idea to have two different rubrics being used across—and potentially within—campuses. Beyond some concerns about logistics, the conversation centered on the question of whether having two rubrics in use would reflect the goal of being “deliberately developmental,” or if, alternately, it would be generally “destabilizing” and perhaps even “alienating” for novices, who likely would be the ones using the less ambitious rubric. Kerry also voiced a desire to involve the teachers at her campus in the decision. “If I had my druthers I would give the two rubrics to each

grade-level team [of teachers] and ask them what they think before I made a decision. I think people are more invested in what they choose, and I don't want to do this *to* people," she said. By design, the meeting ended without a decision: Suzanne made it clear that it would be the principals and directors who ultimately decided what to do.

Over the course of the next month, two things happened. First, the principals, directors, and coordinators of curriculum and instruction met as a group to deliberate about the priorities which would anchor the summer institute as well as the next year's professional development. After several exercises and an extended conversation, they decided that these areas would be collaborative learning, visible thinking, and restorative classroom management—three high-leverage “buckets” of practices which they saw as being central to the priorities laid out in the new vision. During this period, Suzanne and Ellery also met with each of these leaders individually, trying to gauge their inclinations with respect to how to use the rubric in the coming year. It quickly became clear to that everyone was more comfortable with the idea of using the rubric as a learning document rather than as a high-stakes evaluation tool. Ellery and Suzanne summarized what they had heard to Theo, who, in turn, finalized the decision that in the upcoming year OCA would stick with its existing evaluation process and focus instead on building capacity around the three focus areas.

When the ALT reconvened in early May, Theo summarized these two decisions to the group. The reaction was overwhelmingly positive. The key emotion, it seemed, was a sense of relief. “I’m thrilled with focusing on the work of what we want to teach [teachers] without being afraid about evaluation,” Katie said effusively. Another leader echoed this sentiment, adding, “I feel that overall the slowing down is fantastic—my

colleagues will be relieved because it was bringing some angst.” Strikingly, while leaders acknowledged that the rubric development process had been “bananas” and “crazy-town,” none suggested that it had been a total waste of time. A few leaders even praised the growth and learning which had occurred as a result. As Rachel commented to the group: “I value that this process happened. There was some important learning about how we work together and listen to each other.” Several of her colleagues nodded at this, and Katie responded: “I want to second what you said. It’s really hard to walk away from lots of thought and time and energy that people put in—that’s scary and disappointing—but it’s important that we were able to get to a safer place. I don’t think that would have happened in past years.”

Suzanne agreed with Rachel and Katie: the several months that the ALT had devoted to developing the new rubric, she believed, represented an important “turning point” with respect to group process. In an interview in late May, with the benefit of several weeks’ worth of distance from the final rubric meeting, she reflected:

I feel like [leaders] are in a pretty collaborative place right now, actually. I think they feel *heard* to some degree, more than I’ve thought that they felt heard in the past. I’m comparing it to the last two years of my leadership here: it’s a whole lot more functional even though we’ve been struggling in a lot in places and you could even say that with the rubric we kind of failed. [...] I think [Ellery’s and my] level of transparency with people allowed them to say “I don’t really like that, I don’t think that’s good for us.” So we kind of loosened the reins on people being judged when they disagree. Now, I don’t think people are 100% satisfied with the rubric stuff that we were trying to do, but I think what they might say they appreciate is that we opened up the space to hear them and we changed our path based on their feedback.

Ellery, for her part, focused more on her relief at being returned to a role in which she felt successful: the lead developer of the new “Guide to Restorative Instruction.” “I’m just relieved that it’s over and we can get to the work that matters, which is figuring out how

to teach our teachers to do the kind of teaching that we want them to do,” she said. She acknowledged, however, that the rubric process had produced important—if uncomfortable and at points painful—learning for herself and her colleagues. “I guess you could say that we couldn’t have gotten to [the good place] where we are now without everything that happened,” she said. During the final six weeks of the school year, she and her colleagues devoted themselves to building out the new guide and designing the summer institute—tasks which, while demanding, raised none of the tensions that had characterized the previous months.

Analysis: Three Dilemmas of Restorative Leadership

To an outsider who does not know much about OCA’s specific history or about its recent commitments to institutional change, the story of the rubric process might come across as a story of generic leadership dysfunction. Indeed, even holding in mind the narrative laid out in Part I, there are still several obvious non-RJ-specific explanations for why the process foundered: Theo’s magical thinking about how easy it would be to design a new evaluation tool; the fact that Ellery and Suzanne failed to recognize the importance of clarifying the purpose of the rubric from the outset; the differences of personality and perspective among those leading the work; and, throughout, the lack of proactive forecasting with respect to anticipated barriers. There are also a number of non-RJ-specific theoretical frameworks through which one could interpret the particulars of the case. For example, Walker, Zimmerman, & Cooper’s (2002) work on constructivist leadership suggests that leaders seeking to support a shift from behaviorist to constructivist notions of learning must shift their notions of leading in symmetrical ways, which entails moving toward a collaborative, deliberative, distributed model of

leadership. Given that the “green monster” featured constructivist learning prominently, and that the ALT spent the better part of the fall semester digging into the theory and practices associated with constructivist teaching, one could imagine that perhaps it was the influence of this work which impelled the group to focus on questions of power imbalances during the spring.

Having been an integral part of the group’s work around constructivism, however, I can say with confidence that for many leaders this lens was a far newer and less “sticky” perspective than the one associated with RJ. To this end, it was not an accident that the strand of work which the group undertook in the fall petered out as the winter progressed, nor that the language and viewpoints associated with the RJ framework were the ones which most often cropped up in conversation. Rather, this reflected the fact that the effort to create restorative culture was one which had gained a fair amount of traction across the school’s four campuses, and which, as such, had become a point of shared reference for leaders, teachers, and students alike. By contrast, the effort to move in the direction of deeper learning had penetrated the school only in pockets, with many teachers and even some leaders reporting that the “green monster” was not yet a living document which could guide practice. It is with this in mind that I argue that the most “native” lens through which to read the case presented above is that of restorative leadership. This is to say that the core tensions and dilemmas which arose during the rubric design process reflected leaders’ desired to cultivate *symmetry* with the work around RJ—e.g. to enact restorative values through their actions and interactions, in hopes that doing so both would help them to understand these values better and would serve as a powerful mechanism through which to communicate their commitments to

others (Schein, 2004).

It does not take much to establish the fact that the members of the ALT cared about symmetry. Although Ellery was the only one who explicitly used the word itself—a reflection, perhaps, of her extensive conversations with me about the topic—her colleagues constantly used language which evoked the underlying idea that it was important that they as leaders enacted the kinds of values and processes which RJ demands of students and teachers. This language varied in its particulars, but it nevertheless suggested a common commitment. Rachel, for example, talked in one meeting about how she hoped that she and her colleagues could together “live our values as a restorative organization”; Liane described hoping the group would “walk our talk”; Theo talked about the need to “lead in the image of our vision and values.” Suzanne, for her part, explicitly used the term “restorative leadership,” and was lobbying—albeit without much success—to make regular time for the ALT to discuss this topic. Finally, as I will explore in more detail shortly, a wide range of leaders expressed their thinking and their hesitations about the rubric using language which evoked McCold and Wachtel’s (2003) social discipline window, which is a key part of the restorative framework.

It is with this widespread desire to create symmetry in mind that I explore three dilemmas of restorative leadership: the dilemma of responding to feedback, the dilemma of power-sharing, and the dilemma of balancing expectations and support. These surely are not the only RJ-related dilemmas which might arise in the context of attempts to “lead restoratively,” but they are, I believe, the most central ones to the participants and the process in question. They also, I believe, relate to some of the core tensions which are likely to crop up with respect to the application RJ more generally, even as they also

connect to age-old issues relating to democratic leadership models. I return to this point in my analysis below.

Finally, a brief note on terminology. I have chosen to use the language of *dilemmas* rather than that of *problems* because, as Cuban (1992) points out, the word “problem” invokes the word “solution,” which in turn suggests the possibility of a technical resolution. By contrast, the word “dilemma” gestures toward a more persistent situation of tension and complexity—one which practitioners can seek to manage through exploration, negotiation, and compromise, but not to decisively solve. It is this latter characterization which better captures the issues that OCA’s leaders confronted during the rubric design process, and which better aligns with the orientation of RJ.

Feeling Heard: The dilemma of responding to feedback

One of the hallmarks of the restorative framework is that it is concerned with surfacing and attending to individual needs as they relate to the goal of restoring and/or transforming relationships (Zehr, 2002). This emphasis on meeting needs is reflected in the three key questions which guide the process of RJ as it plays out in criminal justice contexts: “Who has been harmed?” “What are their needs?” “Whose obligations are these?” RJ’s attention to needs, in turn, opens the door for valuing subjective emotional experiences, which are reflective of the particulars of the situation at hand, the personal characteristics and histories of the individuals involved, and the context in which the problem or harm took place.

In this case, the history in question was one in which OCA’s Tuesday morning “admin” meetings had been a place where leaders experienced a form of psychological and interpersonal harm. Recall that Theo characterized the ALT in years past as a

“deflating place, a suffocating place, a place where a place where people left with greater anxiety and stress than they entered” and that Kerry, Suzanne, Valerie, Nora, and others affirmed this characterization. Kerry in particular dwelled on the fact that Beth, the system leader who during the previous year had facilitated most meetings, relied on micromanagement as a tactic for avoiding unwanted discussions and feedback. As Kerry described it, Beth would script meeting agendas so tightly that there was no room for organic conversations which might become a platform for dissenting voices and opinions to be heard. “[The system leaders] didn’t want to open space for those kinds of conversations.... it was like they didn’t trust us not to derail the plan,” Kerry said. Valerie affirmed this characterization, adding that Beth had discouraged her and the other campus principals from holding private meetings—a behavior which conveyed deep mistrust and, in so doing, served to amplify tensions between campus- and system-level leaders. As described earlier, this general emphasis on control was symmetrical with the approach that teachers were encouraged to take with students.

It was as a reaction to this history, as well as in an effort to align their process with the values of the restorative approach, that Ellery and Suzanne were deliberate about including regular opportunities for leaders to “weigh in” and express their needs. Strikingly, the one meeting feature which did *not* shift over the course of the four months was that each session ended with an opportunity for leaders to write and/or verbalize their thoughts about the process. The two facilitators relied particularly heavily on the “compass points” routine outlined in *Making Thinking Visible*—a routine which asks participants to share their *excitements*, *worries*, *needs*, and *suggestions* (Ritchhart et al., 2011). It is no coincidence, perhaps, that Suzanne and Ellery found this routine to be

useful, given the language and “needs orientation” that it shares with the RJ framework. In addition, throughout the process, Suzanne frequently urged leaders to meet with her and Ellery in private to talk at greater length about their experiences and needs. Several leaders took her up on this offer, some on multiple occasions.

Theo, too, believed that creating space for sharing feedback and articulating needs represented an important step toward creating symmetry. As he told me long before the rubric process began, he subscribed strongly to the idea that taking a restorative approach to leadership meant recognizing that “people need to weigh in order to buy in.” It was this belief, for example, which spurred him to ask the ALT to vote on which element of the “green monster” they wanted to focus on in their work throughout the fall. He thus was generally in agreement with Suzanne and Ellery that soliciting regular feedback was the right—and restorative—thing to do. On the other hand, as I will explore shortly, Theo had limited patience for dealing with the issues which emerged as the result of opening space for feedback.

Within three weeks of launching the rubric process, Ellery and Suzanne found that they had reached an impasse. Soliciting feedback, as it turned out, meant that they then had to figure out how to respond—and as a growing number of leaders began to voice their discomfort and/or disagreement with the idea of using the new rubric as an evaluation tool, this increasingly meant that they had to consider changing course. Attending to the strong emotions that the process surfaced for certain leaders, e.g. Susan and Liane, also meant that the facilitators spent a significant amount of time in individualized meetings. As Theo himself acknowledged, this practice echoed an RJ process: “When you have potentially heated group dynamics, someone’s reaching out and

having the meetings before the meeting.” However, in aggregate, these efforts to surface and attend to leaders’ individual and collective needs played a key role in slowing down the process, eventually drawing it to a halt.

There are two divergent ways to view this outcome. From the perspective of efficiency and goal-attainment—a perspective which often dominates schools—the rubric design process might be seen mainly as a failure: a retreat from the original goal and a waste of precious time and human resources. In this view, Ellery’s and Suzanne’s desire to attend to individual needs meant that the group got stuck in a morass of unnecessary discourse which distracted them from the task at hand. On the other hand, from the perspective of relationships, interconnectedness, and shared ownership—a perspective more closely aligned with RJ—the fact that Ellery and Suzanne were committed to being responsive meant that the group emerged from what could have been a toxic experience with a renewed sense of trust. After all, as Suzanne noted, the period from February to May was one in which leaders felt “heard” in ways that they had not in previous years. Other leaders affirmed that they were proud of how the group had weathered a complex and perhaps ill-advised scenario.

These two differing interpretations were played out by Suzanne and Theo in one of their most heated exchanges during the late-March debrief described in the narrative above. In response to Suzanne’s suggestion that the ALT spend a week “piecing apart the dysfunction,” Theo asked, “What if some people experience managing the process as stagnating the process?” Suzanne, quick in her reply, countered, “Are you speaking for yourself?” There was a long silence. The two leaders stared at each other pointedly, not so much in anger but in tense recognition of their unreconciled, and perhaps

unreconcilable, perspectives on how to balance the tension between process and product.

In an interview, Liza voiced her belief that Theo's resistance to the idea of devoting time and energy to the task that Suzanne proposed was one of the reasons that the ALT had experienced such persistent culture problems.

I think that we have done very little in the leadership culture to actually function in a restorative way—very, very, very little. Occasionally we sit in a circle, but we haven't done restorative work at the leadership level at all because that would involve being way more honest and way more real and acknowledging the hurt that has happened over the years, and I don't think that [Theo] is interested in doing that. [Theo] is a fixer. That's what he does: he identifies the problem and fixes it. But this isn't like that. This is about people's hearts and souls and the way you deal with that isn't by having an action plan. It's by like listening and hearing and *being* with those experiences.

It is important to note that Liza was only minimally involved in the rubric design process; early in the year, she had volunteered to “hold down the fort” at the Upper School on Tuesday mornings so that her colleagues could attend meetings. Thus, although she voiced these thoughts in mid-April, it did not reflect what was happening—and arguably shifting—during ALT meetings. Nonetheless, her decade of experience working with Theo, as well as her two years of experience facilitating restorative circles with students, lends credibility her perspective. In turn, this suggests that perhaps Theo's tendency to look forward rather than backward, and to fix problems rather than to try and understand their root causes, ran counter to the emphasis of RJ. Theo himself acknowledged these tendencies, commenting to Suzanne and Ellery at the end of one debrief that “I don't know what your process together looks like, but if it's like *this* [e.g. more about parsing dysfunction than finding solutions] I don't think that will be easy for me.”

Perhaps it is true that the most RJ-aligned thing to do in response to the intense emotions and dynamics which the rubric process surfaced would have been to devote a

series of ALT meetings to the goal of surfacing and healing old wounds. To argue that the only factor preventing the group from doing this was Theo, however, is to overlook the realities and pressures which framed the rubric work. During the months that the rubric process was happening, as always, OCA's leaders were scrambling to handle a bewildering number of other tasks: creating strategic budget plans for the following year; finalizing plans for shifting the ways that space, time, and human resources would be used on the Peabody street campuses; conducting teacher evaluations; dealing with contract renewals and hiring; planning for the new summer institute; gearing up for the upcoming charter renewal process; and, last but not least, interviewing candidates to take Theo's place. What did or did not emerge from the rubric design process had implications for many of these strands. Thus, to move away from "action planning" in favor of "listening and hearing and *being*" would be hard to justify for a variety of logistical reasons—and it would run profoundly counter to the ubiquitous pressure to maintain forward momentum. It is in this light that the question of how to respond to feedback emerged as a true dilemma, one which revolved around the fact that the values of RJ—along with the more broadly democratic, deliberative, distributed model of leadership which these values evoke—are ones which perhaps necessarily live in tension with the realities of public schools.

Rejecting the White Stallion: The dilemma of power-sharing

RJ, at its core, is a paradigm which seeks to disrupt oppressive power dynamics (Vaandering, 2010; Wadhwa, 2015). Instead of treating those who have caused harm as passive recipients of punishments determined by those in positions of authority, RJ seeks foster agency through dialogic processes which, if successful, produce mutually-

determined agreements about accountability (Zehr, 2002). Power is thus distributed among equally human actors, rather than concentrated in the hands of those who happen to have “gotten ahead” in a racist, classist, ableist, adultist, and patriarchal society. It is this emphasis on power-sharing—power *with*, not power *over*—which has spurred advocates to argue that RJ is a promising platform for dismantling institutional racism as it plays out in both the criminal justice system and the public school system (Mccluskey, Lloyd, Stead, et al., 2008; Winn, 2013).

The period during which leaders undertook the rubric creation process was one in which issues of power as they related to institutional racism were extremely “live” within the OCA community, as well as in the U.S. more broadly. The fall of 2014 had been especially intense, with an internal conversation about the ubiquity of microaggressions against the school’s leaders, teachers, and students of color being intensified by the nationally televised grand jury decisions not to indict the policemen involved in the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. In January, when Benny announced that he would be stepping down at the end of the year and suggested that he had been systematically disempowered by his colleagues, tensions reached a head. Students from across the Peabody Street campus convened an impromptu circle with leaders, expressing their strong reactions to Benny’s announcement and, in effect, accusing the school of institutional racism. OCA’s leaders were conflicted about the situation. Although most believed that Benny’s situation was more complicated than students recognized, many of them, including Theo, also acknowledged that the school’s persistent failure to retain teachers and leaders of color indicated serious underlying issues.

Given this context, and given the emphasis that RJ places on moving away from

authoritarian forms of power, Ellery, Suzanne, and Theo were all on heightened alert around issues of power and power-sharing as they launched the rubric design process. Even within their trio, there was a complex set of power dynamics. These dynamics in part pertained to race and gender, with the two women, one Black and one White, working under the supervision of a White man in a position of ultimate authority. There were also dynamics around age and position, with Suzanne and Theo being older and higher up in the hierarchy than Ellery, who only recently had taken on a leadership role. The power dynamics in the broader ALT were equally complicated, with similar issues of race and gender, and with the additional complication that leaders at a range of stages and in a range of positions within the organization—from part-time instructional coaches all the way to campus principals and system leaders—were deliberating together about how to proceed with the rubric.

The fact that so many leaders were involved in the design process was itself a reflection of Theo's belief that taking a "power with" stance meant being as inclusive as possible. At the start of the year, he had deliberately expanded the circle of leaders who were invited to participate in system-level work, inviting all of OCA's leaders—not just principals and directors group which had constituted the ALT in years past—to join the "Leadership for Deeper Learning" course. He also took pains to be clear that this invitation was not a mandate in disguise, telling leaders that he trusted them to decide whether participating would be a good use of their time. Leaders, for their part, seemed to appreciate both the invitation and the trust bestowed on them through the offer of choice. In the end, almost all of them chose to participate in the course. Later, however, things got murkier. This is to say that Theo did not think to make a similar "opt in / opt out"

offer to leaders around the rubric design work; thus, by default, most of those who had been involved in the fall's meetings ended up participating.

This, in turn, led to a dilemma: how could the facilitators empower such a large group of leaders as collaborative decision-makers without sacrificing the ability to move forward? This is in some respects a dilemma which transcends the particular discourse of RJ; it involves tensions which appear in the literatures on democratic school leadership (Apple & Beane, 2007) and transformative school leadership (Quantz, Rogers, & Dantley, 1991), among others. It is also a dilemma which appears in some of the literature on restorative conferencing, particularly in relation to the question of how decisions about accountability can be reached if conference participants are unable to identify mutually acceptable solutions (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). Despite these precedents, however, Suzanne and Ellery seemed not to have anticipated the problem. Their default assumption going into the process was that the most “restorative” strategy was to make sure that all members of the group were on equal footing with respect to participating in deliberations, and that this levelling of power dynamics would automatically produce consensus agreements.

As an increasing number of big picture questions about the design and purpose of the rubric cropped up, however, the flaws in this line of thinking became evident. Nora, in a private conversation with me, expressed a belief that it was folly to try and answer such questions through discussion. She was clear that as a coordinator and not a campus leader she did not need—or want—to be put in the position of making big decisions. “I just want the leaders of the leaders to tell me what we’re doing and where we’re going so that I can do the work well,” she said. Liane agreed, arguing that although she valued the

contributions made by non-campus-level leaders, she did not think that these folks should have equal weight when it came to making big-picture decisions.

The question of how to make decisions in ways that were efficient and decisive, but which did not disempower participants, was the central one that faced Theo, Ellery, and Suzanne in their work behind the scenes. Theo, especially, acknowledged that he was wrestling with the question about the symbolic impact of his role as a White male leader at the top of the school's hierarchy. His inclination toward action tempted him to "take [the process] back"; this was certainly what he would have done in prior years. In light of everything that had been happening recently at the school, however, he recognized that doing so might send the wrong message about power and authority. "It would be traditional and patriarchal for me to come back in and say here I am, I'll come back in, the white stallion.... [but] I don't think that's restorative," he mused. Later, he acknowledged that his concerns about figuring out how to handle power were not limited to the rubric situation:

The place where I give pause to myself these days is around decision-making and how and when I make what kinds of decisions and who it affects and in what ways, and how that is wrapped up in power, privilege, authority. I'm not sure that's a direct corollary to being a restorative organization so much as it is getting to know and working with [Suzanne] a lot over several years. But I guess it's not a coincidence that she's been the one who has taken the lead on the restorative work—rethinking power and decision-making is so much a part of that.

In light of Theo's association between Suzanne and the question of how to navigate questions of power, it makes sense that one turning-point for the trio came when Suzanne said that restorative leadership did not always require consensus agreements, nor that it precluded being decisive about the non-negotiables. The power dynamics which were at play within this interaction are themselves interesting: Suzanne, an influential but

less formally powerful figure than Theo, effectively gave Theo permission to take back some of the formal power which he had chosen not to exercise in light of his belief that being a restorative leader precluded all forms of top-down decision-making. In so doing, Suzanne helped to push Theo beyond an “either/or” viewpoint where restorative leadership precluded *all* preexisting practices, guiding him instead toward what she herself called a “both/and” view—a view which allows for the exercise of authority in contexts where such authority serves to support others in moving toward their purpose rather than to “undermine” them. In turn, this seemed to allow Theo—and eventually Ellery—to more confidently make some decisions which would allow the ALT to move forward in the work.

Questions about how to handle decisions in ways that attended to issues of “power, privilege, [and] authority,” however, lingered well beyond this meeting. More than a month later, when Ellery commented that she was still confused about why the rubric process was turning out to be so difficult for everyone, Suzanne said: “I think people are still trying to figure out how they are empowered in the work.” The journey toward such empowerment, she continued, was not one that would—or could—be finished in the context of the rubric task, since it was one that had deep ties to the history of OCA, as well as one which was tangled up with the institution’s efforts to deal with previously unaddressed issues around race and racism. “It definitely hasn’t been easy, but I think for the first time that we’re on the right path,” she added.

Feeling Held: The dilemma of balancing expectations and support

The previous two dilemmas involved questions about how to enact restorative values through the process of developing the rubric. Not coincidentally, the content

around which these process dilemmas revolved—e.g. the nature and potential uses of the tool that the group was developing—also raised questions related to symmetry. To be more specific, leaders found themselves increasingly puzzled about whether it was possible, given the current structures of the school, to elevate expectations for teachers while simultaneously reimagining accountability from a non-punitive standpoint.

As outlined in the previous chapter, the pairing of high expectation with high support is a central part of how RJ theorists have defined restorative practices. The social discipline window lays out these distinctions clearly, connecting the notion of high expectations and high support to the idea of “doing *with*, ” and making clear distinctions between this approach and the punitive, permissive, and neglectful practices which result from other pairings. This, in turn, opens the door for viewing individual failures not merely as the result of poor decision-making and/or flawed personal characteristics, but also as a reflection of an inappropriate balance of expectations and support provided by teachers, parents, communities, the government, the society at large, or other responsible bodies (Mccluskey, Lloyd, Stead, et al., 2008). It is in this way that RJ opens to door for examining the root causes of harmful behavior—and thus for surfacing issues of institutional oppression (Wadhwa, 2015; Zehr, 2002).

Perhaps because they had used the social discipline window so often during professional development sessions devoted to RJ, virtually all of OCA’s leaders had internalized the “high expectations, high support” definition of restorative practice. Even the briefest glance back at the case presented above reveals that the language of the window’s two axes—along with the associated language of “doing *with*, not doing *to*”—was suffused throughout their interactions. For this reason, it was crystal-clear to many

members of the ALT that if they were going to significantly raise their expectations for what teachers needed to be doing in their classrooms and hold them accountable for following through—and as the new rubric came together it seemed evident that this was what was going to happen—then they as leaders would be obligated to provide elevated support. To do otherwise would be, as Kerry put it, “totally not restorative.... the opposite of what we [as an institution] say we’re trying to become.”

Given this perspective, the most obvious question that leaders found themselves facing was whether they—and OCA more broadly—had the capacity to support teachers in achieving what the new rubric specified. As described in Part I, several of the campuses chronically struggled to retain teachers beyond the first few years in their careers, which meant a perpetual influx of novices. Even in pockets of the school where the faculty was more stable, coaches often ended up spending much of their time “putting out fires,” e.g. dealing with urgent situations where teachers were not meeting baseline expectations, rather than developing capacity in teachers who were already reasonably competent. As Liza put it:

Where feedback is consistent and predictable and there are regular opportunities for dialogue, then it’s a lot more natural to be able to hold someone accountable and remind people of their commitments. Then people feel held. But I just don’t know if we have the capacity to do that for everyone, especially the teachers who aren’t super high needs. We certainly haven’t been able to do that in the past.

It was against this backdrop that the question of whether OCA should reimagine itself as a teacher training organization came up. Although some leaders saw this question as one which represented an unnecessary digression from the task at hand, others felt strongly that it was connected to the central question of whether OCA could devote more resources to preparing its novice teachers—which in turn would mean that there would

not be so many “fires,” and that all teachers would have the benefit of sustained support.

The school’s chronic professional culture problems further complicated the issue. To wit, some leaders were dubious that it would be possible to convince teachers that the new rubric was anything except for punitive, even if it were paired with promises of heightened support. This interpretation reflected leaders’ recognition of the fact that OCA had a long history of being individualistic and punishment-oriented in its approach to accountability. Recall, for example, that Liza characterized OCA as being host to a “blame culture” in which the default response to seeing something go wrong was not to ask, “How can I help?” but rather to ask, “Whose fault is it?” Ellery echoed this belief, saying that OCA’s professional culture, although it perhaps was moving in the right direction, was still one which reinforced individualism over interconnectedness. In an interview, she reflected on how this was playing out for her in her attempt to facilitate the rubric process:

We live in a system where it’s every person for him or herself. We don’t have a lot of training in community and in how to live in community and give support in community. So then when I’m flailing around up there leading this totally botched ALT meeting and it’s clearly a hot mess, instead of people saying, “Hey, let’s help. Let’s figure this out together,” they’re like: “Looks like you’re struggling on your own. That sucks for you.” And that’s really different than a community focus where we’re all responsible for one another’s work together. It’s very different than what restorative culture is supposed to be, I think.

It was this lack of an interconnected, mutually supportive, reciprocally accountable culture which spurred some leaders to argue that introducing a new high-stakes evaluation tool would inevitably make the school’s problems worse. As Kerry put it in a meeting with Suzanne and the other principals: “Up until now evaluation was a ‘do to,’ not a ‘do with,’ and then here we are building a new ‘do to’—there’s a lot of cognitive and emotional dissonance there for me.”

Interestingly, both Theo and Suzanne voiced a strong belief that under the right conditions it would be possible to approach accountability and evaluation in a restorative way. Suzanne even devoted a small-group meeting to this topic, urging principals and directors to reimagine systems accountability as systems of support. As members of the ALT voiced their increasingly pointed anxieties about introducing the new rubric as an evaluation tool, however, both she and Theo began to realize that the conditions, both internal and external to OCA, were not yet ripe for making this shift. “We’re such a product of our cultures, especially this last era, where we internalize and take in the failure—we punish ourselves,” Suzanne commented. Theo was even more explicit about connecting the barriers to overhauling OCA’s evaluation framework with the pressures of the NCLB era. If it were 1995 instead of 2015, or if OCA were a private school, he lamented, then “we could be doing things totally differently—teacher evaluation would be not about summative year-end ratings but a culture of ongoing improvement where supervisors and supervisees are in partnership.”

The way that the ALT ultimately handled this dilemma was by deciding to *begin* with elevated support and then, perhaps later, to move toward formalizing the school’s new expectations by phasing in the new rubric. This decision brought an immense sense of relief to everyone involved, and it seemed to reflect the values of the RJ framework better than the original plan. Theo and several other leaders, however, harbored lingering concerns that this decision in fact signaled a permanent retreat from the ambitions specified by the “green monster,” especially given the upcoming transition in leadership. Indeed, when I returned to OCA two years later, shortly before the start of the 2016-17 academic year, Nora and Valerie reported that although the two of them had continued to

support the Collegiate Institute's teachers in becoming more student-centered and constructivist in their teaching, the "green monster" had virtually dropped off the map with respect to the ALT's work. The rubric, for its part, had never seen the light of day, although some of its language was being used in training resources such as the "Guide to Restorative Instruction."

Patience, Paradigm Shifts, and the Dilemma of Collapsing Boundaries

In her work on RJ in education, Dorothy Vaandering emphasizes that the restorative paradigm is one which must exist as much at the level of intent and stance as at the level of structure and practice. She asks, "In what is being named as RJ, what message is being sent? Is it a message of adults wishing to reinforce control or one that encourages relationship and respect? In whatever capacity one serves (teacher, parent, researcher, student, administrator), if committed to RJ, do actions convey an intent to live restoratively?" (2010, p. 161). As I hope this chapter has served to illustrate, many of OCA's leaders had reached a place where these questions were guiding their work. They had internalized some of the fundamental values and perspectives of the restorative approach, and, in ways which Vaandering suggests are still quite rare in the field, they had recognized that it was incumbent upon them to "live restoratively." Acting on this recognition felt to most like the right thing to do. It also, however, made their lives infinitely more complicated. In short, in committing to strive for symmetry, leaders found themselves forced to traverse the neutral zone—a confusing and unstable place where "all the old clarities break down" (Bridges, 2003, p. 40).

Strikingly, however, the group did not respond to the experience of being in this place of uncertainty by reverting to old patterns and habits. Instead, they chose to double

down on their commitment to embracing new ways of seeing, doing, and being. As a result, they slowly were able to make their way toward a “safer” and “healthier” place: a place where they felt able to work *with* each other and to approach the work of supporting teachers from a less punitive standpoint. Along the way, they were forced to shift how they conceived of success, elevating process outcomes while letting go of their attachments to product outcomes and certain forms of efficiency.

I would like to argue that these shifts in orientation, along with the uncertainties associated with the transition process, are phenomena which school leaders should anticipate and plan for if they are serious about making institutional commitments to RJ. In effect, if OCA is any indication, schools are likely to underestimate the material and psychological demands associated with the decision to “go restorative,” and thus to find themselves blindsided by the intensity of the transition. This, in turn, endangers the process. In is in recognition of this danger that I spend these final pages trying to generalize further about the nature of the challenges that educators likely will confront as they strive—and struggle—to become more restorative in their leadership.

As a start, it is worth saying that it is by no means inevitable that all schools which adopt RJ will recognize or orient around the need for symmetry. To the contrary, research suggests that many schools treat RJ as a discrete program which pertains only how schools respond to student (mis)behavior (Vaandering, 2010). This oversight, however, is deeply problematic, rendering RJ vulnerable to cooptation and/or compromising its long-term sustainability (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Mccluskey, Lloyd, Stead, et al., 2008; Vaandering, 2014a). A foundational point emerging from this chapter, then, is that it is imperative for school communities to accept the premise that RJ

is a philosophy and an accompanying “way of being,” rather than merely a set of practices. Doing so opens the door for becoming more powerfully humanistic, interconnected, and equitable; failing to do so likely means continued incoherence. Accepting the imperative to “live restoratively,” however, comes with significant requirements. The first and perhaps most important requirement is *patience*. As the case presented in this chapter illustrates, making the transition away from an authoritarian leadership paradigm toward a restorative leadership paradigm is likely to be profoundly destabilizing for leaders, raising complex questions about the nature of decision-making and accountability and surfacing previously unaddressed issues around power and privilege. Addressing these issues will take time and sustained effort, and, as the interactions between Theo and Suzanne illustrate, it likely will also produce uncertainty and discomfort. If leaders are unwilling or unable to persist through these experiences, they are unlikely to achieve the restored and/or transformed relationships which RJ promises to produce.

A second and related point is that restorative leadership requires rejecting some of the most deeply ingrained perspectives which dominate the field. American public schools, which long have been oriented around rationalist notions of efficiency (Mehta, 2013) and utilitarian notions of leadership (Quantz et al, 1991), tend to favor “once size fits all” strategies and to reward discrete, action-oriented, time-bound approaches to the work of teaching, learning, and leading (Conzemius, O’Neill, Commodore, & Pulsfus, 2005). Such approaches are arguably well-suited to meeting the demands associated with the current testing and accountability movement. RJ, however, involves attending to dimensions of human experience which do not align well with this paradigm. Relational

work does not fit neatly into the boundaries of 60-minute meetings, nor does it have immediate, tangible, and/or easily measurable outcomes. Perhaps as a result, schools have not tended to treat such work as important. The case presented above suggests that if leaders are serious about “living” the values of RJ, they will need to move away from this perspective, reimagining the work of meeting individual and collective needs as being equally “productive” as the work of producing new tools and materials.

On the other hand, the case also illustrates that it is problematic for educators to assume that the transition to RJ means that *all* prior practices must be abandoned. As Suzanne helped Theo to begin to realize, throwing the baby out with the bathwater—e.g. deciding that being a restorative leader precludes ever taking decisive individual action—is an overly simplistic interpretation of the framework. RJ certainly requires those in positions of formal authority to consider the impact of their actions on power dynamics and to work toward more symmetrical power relationships over time, but it is agnostic with respect to the form of such work; what matters is that the actions taken serve to empower rather than to marginalize co-participants in the community at stake. Thus, while RJ requires educators to accomplish a profound shift in viewpoint, it does not mean summarily abandoning all that came before, but rather making decisions about how to behave with a new set of values in mind.

A third point emerging from this chapter is that RJ-oriented leaders will almost inevitably find themselves contending with the question of how to approach accountability in new ways. From the perspective of RJ, the theory of action which gave rise to the current accountability movement is fundamentally *punitive* in the sense that it raised expectations without providing commensurately elevated levels of support (R. F.

Elmore & Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 2003). As Kerry and others at OCA help to show, this punitive stance has made a deep imprint on schools, making evaluation processes feel “like a voodoo doll being stuck with pins that are meant to bring about positive change.” Shifting the culture which surrounds evaluation and accountability is imperative to creating the kind of supportive, nurturing, high-expectations environment that RJ calls for; however, as the case of OCA illustrates, figuring out how to do so given the current political environment entails a significant challenge.

Last but not least, there was a final dilemma which the rubric design process surfaced for OCA’s leaders: *the dilemma of collapsing boundaries*. Essentially, as the weeks wore on, leaders realized that what they had assumed was a discrete task aimed at producing a discrete tool in fact raised questions about everything from how they wanted to work with each other and with teachers to the identity of the institution that they were trying to lead. This was, perhaps, a logical and predictable outcome of accepting a philosophy which is grounded in a belief in interconnectedness (Zehr, 2002). Nonetheless, leaders were surprised, and in many cases frustrated, by how quickly and definitively the initial parameters which had been set around the task gave way.

One particularly important boundary which began to collapse during the process was the boundary separating so-called instructional work from so-called cultural work. To wit, in trying to figure out what categories and content to put on the rubric, leaders found themselves contemplating what it would mean and what it would look like for teachers to attend to both the cognitive/academic and the social-emotional/relational

dimensions of learning. This, in turn, further complicated their work. Theo, in a final interview in June, reflected on how this colliding of priorities had played out:

Back in January, I had it in my mind that we were going to do two separate things. I was thinking, okay, [Ellery] is going to be responsible for supporting the academic leadership team in building out our system of evaluation to align with what we really care about, and [Suzanne] is going to be working with the K-12 leadership team around understanding and implementing restorative leadership in service of restorative practice. And in my mind those were separate functions, but then they became one, so it got clunky. That's not necessarily a bad thing—I think that the two of them working together on that project led to some really powerful generative work. But it got bigger than it needed to. I think some of that was a function of the merging of the restorative leadership work with the instructional vision work. And that's where all these things about the “vision for restorative instruction” and making sure that certain things like social-emotional learning and safety, not that these are bad things, got on the rubric. It just got really big. I never in my mind intended for it to get so darn big.

Thus, in taking up the idea of symmetry, OCA's leaders found themselves trying to figure out not just what it might mean to *lead* restoratively but also what it might mean to *teach* restoratively—a question which, as Theo commented, was almost unfathomably big. As it turned out, however, it was also incredibly important. It is this question which I turn to next.

Chapter 3

Imagining the Helix:**Exploring adult understandings of restorative instruction**

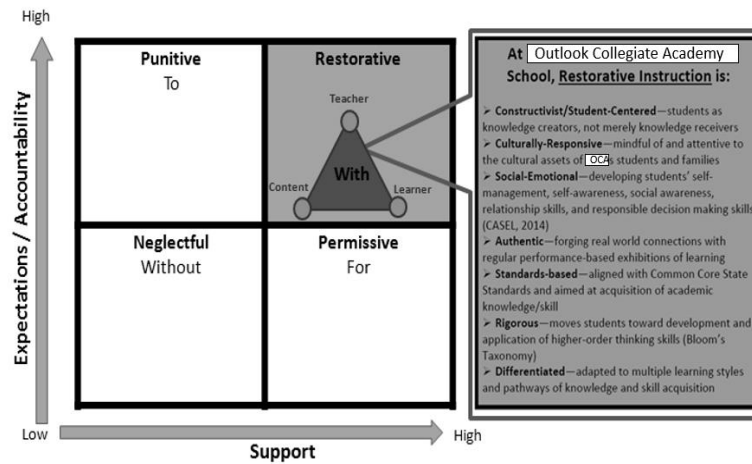
“Human beings are not normally divided into two parts, the one emotional, the other coldly intellectual... the split does, indeed, often get established, but that is always because of false methods of education.”

--Dewey, *How We Think*, 1910

It's another frigid Tuesday morning—the tail end of what is shaping up to be the snowiest winter on record in the region that Outlook Collegiate Academy (OCA) calls home. After three weeks of intermittent school cancellations, the Academic Leadership Team (ALT) has convened to continue the process of drafting the new teacher evaluation rubric. Only eighteen of the group's twenty-five members are here this morning; as they get settled, they shed hats and gloves and commiserate about the weather.

At 8:15am, after school-wide announcements have been delivered via loudspeaker, the meeting gets underway. Ellery, OCA's Director of Teacher Training and Development, projects a power-point presentation onto the whiteboard. As usual, she conveys a sense of upbeat urgency. “Okay everyone, I want you to ‘go abstract’ with me and [Suzanne] for a few moments,” she says. “Ready?” She scrolls forward to a slide which is dominated by an image I know to be familiar to the group: McCold and Wachtel's (2003) social discipline window, which suggests that restorative work emerges when high levels of accountability are paired with high levels of nurturance and support. In this case Ellery and Suzanne, OCA's Dean of School Culture, have modified the

diagram to put it in conversation with OCA's new instructional vision—the infamous “green monster” described in Chapter 2. The slide looks like this:³



Without giving the group any time to process this image, Ellery forges ahead in her explanation of it. “In a restorative learning organization, the instructional core has to be restorative,” she says, gesturing toward the instructional triangle that she has added to the upper right-hand quadrant. “Fortunately for us, the vision we built in July is indeed restorative!” She explains that to reflect this alignment, she has changed the heading of the green sheet from “At [OCA], instruction is...” to “at [OCA], restorative instruction is....” She also has replaced the third descriptor—the one which previously read “restorative”—to the word “social-emotional.” “The idea here is that the restorative piece is the air we breathe, not just one box to check,” she says.

Ellery asks if there are questions about this framing before she continues. There is a long pause. Eventually, Rachel, a literacy coach, offers some encouragement: “I just want to say that I’m excited: what you just said makes a lot of sense to me, and I think it

³ Slide is in original form with the exception of the school’s name and acronym.

will make sense to others too.” Ellery takes a swig of water out of her Nalgene bottle.

“I’ll drink to that!” she says. There is a smattering of laughter.

Within a few minutes, however, it becomes clear that the group is by no means at a place of clarity or consensus when it comes to the ideas that have been presented.

Susan, the principal of the Early Childhood Campus, raises her hand and voices a sentiment which I suspect that a number of members of the group share. “Can we slow down just a tiny bit?” she asks. “It’s all happening very fast and I’m having trouble processing.” Ellery looks unsure how to respond to this comment. Suzanne, who has been standing unobtrusively at the side of the room, steps in to help. “There will be more time for discussion in a bit,” she says. She adds: “The spotlight is on where it gets messy, difficult, challenging... this is a first pass at trying to figure out where the connections are among all of the stuff that we’ve been doing, and guess what? It’s not easy.” A few group-members nod; most remain impassive.

In my notes, I jot down some thoughts. Although I have questions about the group’s process, I mainly find myself wondering about how group-members are making sense of the content. What do the other leaders make of Ellery’s assertion that the seven descriptors on the new vision together constitute a “restorative” vision of instruction? Do they see this as a semantic shift, or as the expression of a consequential change in thinking? To what extent is the softening of the boundaries between culture and instruction as present for them as it seems to be for Ellery and Suzanne, who have been meeting behind the scenes in an attempt to draw together these two strands? What do the answers to these questions reveal about how leaders conceptualize the change-work that they are leading, and, more broadly, how can these answers shed light on the

implications of applying the restorative justice framework to the domains of curriculum and instruction? I make a note to revise my interview protocols to make space for leaders to articulate their thinking about what Theo, Suzanne, and a few others have taken to calling the cultural-instructional “helix”—a construct which I, like many of them, find myself contemplating with increasing pointedness as the year goes on.

As it turned out, the conversations that I had with OCA’s leaders and teachers about the relationships between the school’s cultural and instructional priorities surfaced some of the richest data of the project. This chapter explores the patterns and discontinuities that emerged from these interviews. At its heart lies the question of how to conceptualize the term “restorative instruction”—a term which explicitly draws together the domains of school culture and discipline with the domains of curriculum and pedagogy. This question, my data suggest, is one which became increasingly live for many leaders and teachers over the course of the year, animating and complicating their efforts to actualize the school’s new priorities. It is also a question about which the literature on restorative justice (RJ) in schools has startlingly little to say. Thus, exploring the ways that OCA’s adults made sense of this concept not only allows for a richer understanding of adult learning in the context of organizational change, but also sheds light on a gap associated with the fact that “restorative justice practice in educational contexts has outrun theory” (Vaandering, 2014b, p. 513).

The analyses that I offer in this chapter reveal both convergences and divergences in sense-making. With respect to the convergences, while a few leaders and teachers felt that the effort to conceptualize the interconnections between the work of cultural

transformation and the work of instructional improvement represented a heady diversion from the “real” task of school change, most expressed a belief that OCA would not be able to move forward successfully until those leading the charge could articulate a clear working definition of restorative instruction. Many also shared a general belief that restorative instruction is *relational instruction*—e.g., instruction where warm and supportive relationships serve as a foundation for instructional efficacy. As a result, they tended to believe that teachers should engage students in both proactive culture-building processes and reactive problem-solving processes, despite the fact that during the school’s “No Excuses” era such activities might have been construed as a diversion from the all-important work of academic learning. However, there also were striking divergences in terms of *which* relationships respondents saw as being important, as well as divergences in the reasoning they supplied about why attending to these relationships was important.

Many leaders and teachers also invoked OCA’s in-use version of McCold and Wachtel’s (2003) social discipline window diagram in their responses, positing that restorative instruction should align with the characteristics of the restorative quadrant. When pressed to unpack this idea, however, they diverged quite widely in their interpretations. Some focused on the diagram’s axes, arguing that restorative instruction involves the pairing of high expectations and high support—a pairing which, as several leaders pointed out, gesture toward a generic quality which is arguably present in most if not all versions of “good teaching.” For these leaders and teachers, the RJ framework provided a warrant for engaging in culture-building activities in the classroom but did not strengthen the case for pursuing the school’s new instructional vision. Others, however,

emphasized the descriptors associated with the restorative quadrant, suggesting that teachers who adopt a restorative approach to instruction must see themselves as co-learners with students—a fundamentally different stance than the one associated with the “No Excuses” model to which OCA had aspired in previous years. This view, in turn, opened the door for identifying linkages between the RJ framework and traditions such as collaborative learning and culturally responsive pedagogy. In few cases, however, were leaders or teachers able to provide a granular account of what it might look like to enact these linkages in practice.

Stepping back, this chapter suggests that it is critically important for schools which adopt the RJ framework to support educators in thinking through the shifts in priority, stance, and practice which will enable what happens in classrooms to reinforce and enact restorative values. It also provides a vivid illustration of just how difficult and time-intensive this work is likely to be, given the inherently constructivist nature of the process by which educators accomplish shifts in their thinking—even small shifts which involve concepts that to some might seem self-evident. Finally, this chapter takes up some of the questions associated with these findings, exploring their contours while also setting up the chapters to come. How can the existing tools and resources which are used to support the use of RJ in schools be modified to better support educators in identifying the key elements of restorative instruction? What kinds of tools and resources are missing? And, finally, how might the field move toward a shared a more granular and operational definition of what restorative instruction entails?

It is worth noting that the phenomena which lie at the heart of this chapter, unlike those featured in the other empirical chapters of this dissertation, are not ones which lend

themselves to thickly descriptive narrative. Similarly, the theoretical sub-topics which this chapter takes up are not ones which the broad-ranging conceptual framework in Chapter 1 fully addresses. It is for these reasons that I have chosen to include a separate literature review and, more generally, to structure this chapter in a more traditionally analytic way than those which surround it.

Literature Review: Silences, Silos, and the Silhouette of a Theory

To echo a question that one participant posed to me during an interview: “Outside of [OCA], is restorative instruction even a thing?” Or, to put it more formally, what does the existing literature on have to say about the implications of the restorative justice framework for teaching and learning?

The short answer is remarkably little. A Google Scholar search for books and peer-reviewed articles related to the phrase “restorative justice in schools” yields almost six hundred unique results and a search for the term “restorative discipline” yields almost five hundred. By contrast, a search for the term “restorative pedagogy” turns up less than sixty results; the terms “restorative instruction” and “restorative curriculum” turn up less than twenty in total. There are, of course, several richly theorized instruction-related terms which one might imagine as being related to the basic ideas that undergird the RJ framework, for example engaged pedagogy, responsive pedagogy, social-emotional learning, and so on. However, the amount of writing which explicitly draws the RJ framework into conversation with discourses about instructional practice is vanishingly small by comparison to the rapidly burgeoning literature which concerns the use of RJ and restorative practices as they pertain to school climate, culture, and discipline.

Dorothy Vaandering, a Canadian researcher whose work constitutes the most significant attempt to fill this gap to date, argues that the inattention of the restorative justice in education literature to issues of curriculum and pedagogy reflects the siloed origins of how RJ entered the education field in the first place. As described in Chapter 1, the K-12 sector's growing interest in RJ has coincided with perceptions of escalating school violence as well as pressures to address race-based inequities in discipline, along with mounting evidence that "zero tolerance" policies fail to mitigate either issue. As a result, Vaandering observes, educator and mainstream researchers tend to view RJ not as a philosophy but rather as a discrete intervention which aims to reduce discipline incidents and/or improve school climate (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Vaandering, 2010, 2014a). It is for this reason, she argues, that research evaluations of RJ in school contexts often focus on changes in office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions, reflecting and reifying the notion that "RJ has little bearing on the academic component of schooling" (Vaandering, 2014a, p. 67).

What Vaandering does not acknowledge is that the separation of conversations about school culture and climate from conversations about teaching and learning is a broadly common feature of Western schools and educational research. As noted in the Introduction, these boundaries are reflected even in the ways that schools organize human capital, with those whose roles involve supporting discipline, culture, and social-emotional wellness often working in relative isolation from those whose roles relate to academic learning. There is, of course, a logic to such separations; it would be unrealistic to require educators to play all roles at all times, and equipping them with a broader range of expertise arguably would come at the expense of specialization and depth. Moreover,

it is only natural that “in the immediacy of practice, [teachers and administrators] must inevitably take on the narrow view connected to their roles” (Lightfoot, 1983, p. 22). Even so, the boundaries between classrooms and hallways, instruction and culture, cognition and emotion, often become rigid to the point of extremity—especially given that students, who move through time and space as whole beings, experience no such compartmentalization (Dewey, 1913/1997;Sizer, 2000). With this in mind, it is particularly problematic that “many teachers and administrators develop their approach to discipline with a disregard for curriculum and pedagogy” (Fields, 2005, p. 3), and, conversely, that many develop their curriculum and pedagogies with little regard for how these things might affect student behavior. This broader pattern of siloing further problematizes the dearth of work which considers the curricular and pedagogical implications of the RJ framework.

Interestingly, much of the writing about the use of RJ in schools *alludes* to these implications, acknowledging that the adoption of the RJ framework in schools should have a bearing on the domains of curriculum, instruction, assessment (Amstutz, 2005; Hopkins, 2004; Karp & Breslin, 2001; Mccluskey, Lloyd, Stead, et al., 2008; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013; Wadhwa, 2015). When it comes to the particulars of these implications, however, most sources are vague and/or noncommittal. In one widely-used guide to the implementation of RJ in schools, for example, the author notes, without elaborating, that “many teachers have been struck by the strategies and experiential techniques used in restorative skills training courses and used them to transform their teaching style as well as the way they address behavioural issues” (Hopkins, 2004, p. 53). Several other authors suggest that teachers might use restorative circles as a format for engaging students in

discussions of academic content as well as a way to build culture and to handle problems when they arise. However, these authors say very little about the reasons for doing so, and imply that the transfer would be self-evident (Gray & Drewery, 2011; Wadhwa, 2015). Only Winn (2013) offers a richer explanation, positing that circle processes provide a promising platform for “eliminating hierarchies based on academic prowess” and thus for de-centering the power dynamics which so often play out in the context of pedagogy (p. 128).

Thorsborne and Blood’s book on restorative practices in education goes somewhat further than other practitioner-oriented literature, arguing that school leaders “need to make the link between RP and pedagogy crystal clear” to the teachers in their charge (2013, p. 50). In their explication of this link, however, the authors construe it mainly as an instrumental one in which restorative practices which attend to interpersonal relationships form a foundation for rigorous academic work. “RP helps to develop intellectual quality in classrooms by assisting in building connectedness in the classroom,” they write, adding that restorative practices help students to build key social-emotional competencies such as self-regulation (p. 51). When it comes to exploring more specific implications of the RJ framework for curriculum, pedagogy, or assessment practices, however, they remain silent, with the total space spent on the connections between restorative practices and pedagogy taking up less than two pages out of two hundred.

The small number of researchers who treat these connections in greater depth emphasize the epistemological linkages between RJ and critical theory. Of these researchers, Vaandering makes these linkages most explicit, insisting that educators must

take seriously the idea that RJ is not a set of techniques aimed at achieving greater social control, but rather a philosophy and set of associated practices which seek to counteract institutionalized patterns of oppression by affirming the interconnectedness and worthiness of all people. In a deliberate reference to Freire, she posits that “[Restorative justice] is really a commitment to humanization—the support of people in their ontological vocation of becoming more fully human” (2014a, p. 77). To ignore the significance of critical theory to RJ, Vaandering argues, is to open up the framework for cooptation by the authoritarian status quo—a mistake which her research suggests is all too common in schools which ostensibly have committed to RJ (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Vaandering, 2014a).

Using this as a point of departure, Vaandering suggests that the most RJ-compatible pedagogical framework is the one outlined by critical-feminist educator bell hooks in her (1994) work on “engaged pedagogy.” Vaandering argues that hooks’ work strengthens the case for viewing pedagogy as a domain for restoration by demonstrating that teachers often “reinscribe systems of domination” through the deployment of teacher-centered, control-oriented, culturally-biased instructional practices (hooks, 1994, p. 10). This perspective echoes that of Harber and Sakade (2009), who argue that the pedagogies which tend to dominate Western schooling both reflect and contribute to patterns of authoritarianism:

The [historically dominant] stress on certainty and the one ‘right’ answer leads to authoritarianism. This is because if knowledge is absolute and unchanging then there cannot be legitimate alternatives to it. There is little point in discussion and dialogue as the role of the teacher is to impart a factual body of knowledge to

immature recipients. This means a stress on the transmission of cognitive knowledge, subject content and values as though they were facts over education about values, skills, feelings and relationships. It also means an emphasis on teacher-centered learning over enquiry, discussion and critical analysis (173).

In her recent work, Vaandering explores what it might look like to eschew these widespread forms of pedagogical authoritarianism, describing how teachers can honor the goals of RJ by undertaking the endeavor of learning *with* students, rather than seeing instruction as something done *to* them.

Toews (2013), too, draws an explicit connection between pedagogical authoritarianism and the judicial authoritarianism that RJ seeks to replace. “One can hardly ignore the similarity between this [‘empty vessel’] approach to education and that of the dominant criminal justice system, in which a representative of the criminal justice system determines what punishment is meted out on a passive offender,” she writes (p. 11). Like Vaandering, she turns to critical theory in her effort to imagine a pedagogy which affirms and promotes the goals of RJ, arguing that RJ demands Freirian praxis in which teachers and student co-create knowledge as a way of transforming themselves, their relationships to each other, and the sociopolitical structures of their society. In order to achieve this, she argues, educators who practice “restorative justice pedagogy” must shift their underlying stance, imagining themselves not as experts but as facilitators who support learners in critically examining the world around them and in drawing these examinations into conversation with their experiences and mental models. Building on this notion, she outlines ten key values for restorative justice pedagogy: respect,

accountability, participation, self-determination, interconnectedness, particularity, nonviolence, humility, trust and transparency, and transformation (p. 16-17).

Although these values are grounded explicitly in the work of Freire, hooks, and other critical theorists, they also gesture toward the epistemological linkages between the RJ framework and the constructivist framework, which emphasizes the importance of supporting learners in making their own meanings of the content under study (Gordon, 2009). More specifically, they suggest an alignment between restorative justice pedagogy and “critical constructivism” (Kincheloe, 1993), which seeks to draw together classic Piagetian constructivist theory with discourses that emphasize emancipation through the development of critical consciousness. Toews’s values also align with the “restorative andragogy” framework outlined by Gilbert, Schiff, & Cunliffe (2013), who argue that RJ in any educational context demands that educators abandon traditional approaches which “center all power in the teacher,” and instead embrace approaches where teachers and students are “actively engaged in collaborative decision-making” (p. 51). Here, too, there is resonance with writing on constructivist teaching (Walker, Zimmerman, & Cooper, 2002), as well as with writing on culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012).

As these summaries suggest, much of what has been written about RJ in relation to teaching and learning focuses on how RJ-aligned pedagogy must serve as a vehicle by which to pursue a transformed set of power dynamics between teachers and students. This writing thus emphasizes one of the three relationships which lie at the “instructional core” (City et al., 2009): the relationship between the teacher and the learner. Less present is a treatment of how the relationship between the learner and the content, or that

between the teacher and the content, might achieve similar alignment. In her work on “Restorative English Education,” Winn (2013) begins to address this gap by suggesting that educators who work with historically marginalized populations should talk openly with students about the school-to-prison pipeline, framing the endeavor of teaching and learning as an alternative to the narratives associated with institutional racism. The dominance of hopelessness in the lives of Black and Brown students, Winn argues, “demands that educators explicitly address mass incarceration, juvenile injustice, and the policing and silencing of youth, and return to English education as a site for imagination and creativity” (132). In particular, Winn argues, restorative English educators must make space for students to share their experiences of injustice and marginalization, to examine these in light of a range of texts, and, ultimately, to transform them into productive action. This vision resonates with the work of Christensen, who draws a direct line between exclusionary discipline and the curriculum, positing that “the school-to-prison pipeline....begins when we fail to create a curriculum and a pedagogy that connects with students, that takes them seriously as intellectuals, that lets students know we care about them, that gives them the chance to channel their pain and defiance in productive ways” (2012, p. 41).

Across all of this work runs the shared conviction that RJ-aligned instruction, as with RJ itself, entails a paradigm shift away from the status quo (Zehr, 2002). Perhaps this helps to explain why much of the writing on the topic, Vaandering’s included, is at its most incisive when it comes to defining what restorative instruction is *not*. To wit, it is not rigidly hierarchical (Gilbert et al., 2013), it is not culturally hegemonic (Winn, 2013), it is not blind to the particular identities and needs of the students being taught (Toews,

2013), it is not transmissive in its view of knowledge (Vaandering, 2010), and, most importantly, it is not about trying to “manage, control, shape, or mold students, as if they were inanimate objects” (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p. 13). It is not, in short, business as usual; it runs directly counter to many of the dominant patterns of belief and practice that have characterized American schools and classrooms—and especially those serving historically marginalized populations—throughout the past century.⁴ As a result, its successful enactment is likely to pose significant challenges for many educators, requiring them to shift not only specific practices but also the epistemological and pedagogical frameworks that undergird their work. In turn, this suggests that embracing RJ-aligned instruction will require *unlearning*, a phenomenon which goes hand-in-hand with the process of conceptual accommodation (Coburn, 2005) and which is all but required when it comes to enacting major shifts in practice (Gabella, 1995; Mehta & Fine, In Press).

If the literature which theorizes about the relationship of RJ to instruction is sparse, the literature which explores the ways that educators conceptualize this relationship is sparser still. Only Vaandering (2009, 2014a) and Waghwa (2013, 2015) have conducted significant empirical research which investigates educators’ sense-making around the implementation of RJ in their schools, and in both cases the emphasis has been on how educators broadly interpret the framework, rather than on how they make meaning of its implications for the domains of curriculum and pedagogy. The analyses that I offer in this chapter—as well as the “thick descriptions” that I offer in the next

⁴ For a lengthier discussion about the longstanding dominance of transmissive, control-oriented instruction, see Chapter 1; see also Freire (1968/2000), Cohen (1988) and Mehta & Fine (2015b). For a discussion of culturally hegemonic pedagogy and curriculum, see Ladson-Billings (1995).

one—represent an attempt to begin to fill this gap. Investigations in this vein, I argue, are critical to the continued expansion and sustainability of RJ in schools; more broadly, they can bolster efforts to bridge the cultural-instructional divide in order to support more powerful approaches to school transformation.

Methods

In Chapter 1, I outline the broad goals and study design of this project. These descriptions provide necessary background information for this chapter. Since the particular data and analytic strategies on which I rely here differ somewhat from those employed elsewhere in this dissertation, however, I include a brief treatment of chapter-specific methodology here. This treatment should read as an addendum to the descriptions provided in Chapter 1.

Research Questions

The questions that I explore in this chapter represent a subset of my broader question about how leaders understand the school's two-stranded change agenda. I ask:

- 1) How, if at all, do leaders and teachers make sense of the term “restorative instruction?” How does this sense-making relate to their roles?
- 2) In what ways does this sense-making converge with and/or depart from existing theories about the nature of RJ-aligned curriculum and pedagogy?
- 3) What do the answers to these questions suggest about the challenges facing schools which seek to extend the RJ framework to the domain of instruction?

Data Sources and Analytic Strategy

Most the data on which I draw to answer these questions are data from interviews. Although the relationship of the restorative approach to instructional practice was an

emic rather than an etic theme (Maxwell, 2012), it emerged early enough in the study that I was able to explore the topic through semi-structured interviews not only with the study's four focal leaders, but also with ten other "core" members of the ALT, for a total of 14 leader participants. (See Page 1 for a list of interviewee roles; see Appendices A, B, and C for interview protocols). I chose these additional participants using a purposive sampling strategy (Smith, 1983), seeking to reflect in my sample a range of roles, areas of focus, experience-levels, and cultural backgrounds so that I could capture as wide a range of sense-making as possible. Interviews lasted from 45 to 90 minutes and were audio-recorded and then professionally transcribed. In addition, I conducted brief (15-30 minute) interviews about the topic of restorative instruction with six teachers within the Collegiate Institute. These participants, too, ranged widely in their characteristics, and in particular with respect to their levels of experience. In coding interview transcriptions I employed an iterative coding strategy (Seidman, 2012), seeking to establish the ways in which individual sense-making did and did not align with the theories described above, and also to identify emergent themes. Throughout this process I wrote analytic memos in which I explored possible interpretations (Weiss, 1995).

In addition, I also re-coded my fieldnotes from all ALT meetings with the particular topic of this chapter in mind, honing in on moments when conversations about the relationship between RJ and instructional practices arose during whole-group and small-group interactions. As the narrative in the opening of this chapter suggests, such moments were especially frequent in the meetings when the group was developing the new teacher evaluation rubric. I sought to identify the core ideas and tensions which animated these moments, as well as to understand the ways in which these episodes of

group sense-making might reflect and/or affect what leaders recounted in individual interviews. Finally, for the sake of triangulation (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Maxwell, 2012), I examined working drafts of the new evaluation rubric, as well as the “Guide to Restorative Instruction” which a subset of leaders began to develop toward the end of the data collection periods. While these documents do not represent consensus agreements about how to operationalize the idea of restorative instruction, they do reflect an attempt to describe the kinds of instructional practices which are compatible with the restorative framework.

Before I present the findings that emerged from this process, it is worth acknowledging that due to the nature and size of my sample this chapter does not, and cannot, represent an exhaustive cataloguing of how adults within the OCA community understood the idea of restorative instruction. It also does not permit me to explore how the sense-making of those interviewed changed over time. Luckily, however, my goal is not to generalize from my sample to other teachers and leaders or to make causal claims about how school-specific experiences might have impacted their views, but rather to explore a range of sense-making in order to draw the lived experiences of educators into conversation with existing theories about RJ-aligned instruction. Finally, it is also worth noting that the convergences in sense-making that I identify are no accident; rather, they reflect the fact that the topic of restorative instruction was one that was “in the air” at OCA during the period of data-collection, and which often came up in the course of shared professional activities. This is not a challenge to the validity of my findings, but rather a commentary on the ways in which sense-making within communities of educators in schools, like that within communities of students in classrooms, reflects

dynamic interactions between individual beliefs and collective experiences (Greeno, 2015; Lave, 1991).

Findings & Discussion

In the following section, I explore and discuss the findings which emerged from this analytic process, seeking both to capture key patterns in sense-making and to draw these patterns into conversation with the literature described above. In broad strokes, my data reveal that leaders and teachers did generally believe that the RJ framework has meaningful implications for instructional practice but that beyond this shared orientation they fell along a continuum with respect to the complexity of their thinking, with some seeing the RJ framework as loosely and/or instrumentally related to instructional practice and others suggesting that RJ's philosophical orientation might demand certain types of pedagogical stances while excluding others. Even in the latter cases, however, such theorizing focused more on the *gestalt* of restorative instruction than on what such instruction might entail in terms of granular practices. In this respect, OCA's leaders and teachers seemed to reflect the general state of the field, which has not yet embarked on the work of thickly imagining what RJ-aligned instruction might look or sound like. Finally, while a few participants suggested linkages between the RJ framework and the traditions of student-centered pedagogy, culturally responsive pedagogy, and collaborative learning, all but one were silent when it came to evoking the connections between RJ and critical pedagogy. For a graphical overview of the categories into which participants' beliefs tended to cluster, see Figure 1, below.

	<i>What are the key characteristics of restorative instruction (RI)?</i>	<i>What relationships does RI seek to establish, restore, and/or transform?</i>	<i>How are the relationships in question related to instructional efficacy?</i>	<i>Does RI demand and/or exclude specific pedagogies?</i>	<i>Core RI practices & related pedagogical frameworks</i>
Type 1 (N=1)	None. RJ does not have implications for the instructional core beyond ensuring that more students will be present for instruction.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Type 2 (N=11)	RI treats relationships as foundational RI pairs high expectations with high levels of support	Teacher-student	Uni-directionally / instrumentally	No	Culture-building circles Culture reparation circles
Type 3 (N=7)	RI treats relationships as foundational RI pairs high expectations with high levels of support RI requires teachers and students being positioned as co-learners	Teacher-student Student-student	Bi-directionally	Yes	Culture-building circles Culture reparation circles Collaborative learning
Type 4 (N=1)	RI treats relationships as foundational RI pairs high expectations with high levels of support RI requires teachers and students being positioned as co-learners RI demands critical exploration of oppressive power dynamics	Teacher-student Student-student Teacher-content Student-content	Bi-directionally	Yes	Culture-building circles Culture reparation circles Collaborative learning Culturally responsive pedagogy Critical pedagogy

Table 1. Typology of educator sense-making around the term “restorative instruction”
(N=20)

From Silos to Bridgework: Embracing the notion of restorative instruction

To what extent did OCA's leaders agree with the argument that Ellery so hastily offered during her presentation back on that frigid winter morning: the argument that “in a restorative learning organizational, the instructional core has to be restorative”? Was this an example of one leader's idiosyncratic sense-making, or a widely-shared view?

Although perspectives which see RJ as more than just a set of practices related to discipline and school climate are as yet quite rare in the field (Mccluskey, Lloyd, Kane, et al., 2008; Mccluskey, Lloyd, Stead, et al., 2008; Vaandering, 2009, 2014a), a significant majority (19/25) of ALT members indicated that they shared an underlying belief that RJ is not simply a set of tools to manage student behavior but rather a broader framework which has at least some bearing when it comes to instructional practice. This viewpoint was reflected (and perhaps shored up) by the widespread use of the term “restorative approach,” rather than the related terms “restorative justice” or “restorative practices.” In both large- and small-group discussions, leaders invoked the RJ framework by using the phrase “a restorative approach to...” and inserting whichever domain happened to be under discussion: discipline, culture-building, leadership, family and community engagement, teacher professional development, instructional practice, curriculum design. Broadly, this serves to underscore leaders' general embrace of the notion that the RJ framework has implications which extend well beyond the domains of behavior management and school culture—a viewpoint which opened the door for leaders to discuss the implications of RJ for the domain of instructional practice. Such discussions cropped up with increasing frequency throughout the data collection period.

It is possible, of course, that some leaders participated in these discussions mainly because they sought acceptance by their peers and supervisors, rather than because they were truly committed to the work of de-siloing culture and instruction. Liane, the Director of Student Services and a de facto member of the campus principals' group, subscribed to this view. In an interview, she noted that Suzanne in particular tended to bring up RJ during conversations devoted to "unrelated" topics. "We can be talking about anything and it's like, 'What's the restorative lens on that?'" Liane said with exasperation. "I think that's because there's this worry that things are going to be siloed.... and I think sometimes you *do* have silos and that's okay." Liane's insistence that the status quo was undervalued perhaps reflected her background; she had spent the entirety of her 18-year career at OCA, and, having seen a number of initiatives come and go, freely admitted that she was more interested in practical, specific, concrete action-planning than in heady discussions. "The observables—nobody [in the ALT] is ever willing to go there," she lamented during an interview.

Katie, who had recently left one of the region's most high-profile "No Excuses" school to work as the Assistant Director of Student Services, echoed Liane's perspectives. She presented herself as "fully committed" to the restorative approach as it pertained to discipline and culture-building, but she found the effort to extend the RJ framework into the domain of teaching and learning to be "a force." In particular, she found it problematic that the search committee tasked with finding a new Chief Academic Officer was prioritizing candidates who were familiar with RJ. "I want an academic leader who can say, 'Great, the restorative approach is fantastic—and we need to do XYZ to have better instruction,' not, 'We need to make their marriage or their

union in heaven complete,”” Katie said. Like Liane, Katie emphasized in conversations that her interest lay in moving beyond abstract thinking and instead focusing on high-leverage observable practices—a perspective which makes sense given her background working in a school which had spent a great deal of energy breaking down its vision of effective teaching into clear, teachable, bite-sized chunks.

Several teachers also seemed to subscribe to a similar viewpoint, responding to my questions about restorative instruction with an account of RJ as a set of disciplinary and culture-building practices which had little to do with the instructional core.

“Restorative instruction is about trying to get away from [the practice] of detention,” one novice teacher asserted. In defining the term, another novice teacher brought up the practice of conducting problem-solving conversations with students who misbehave during class, which he saw as a way to ensure that he was “not disciplining a student so that they are taken away from what they need to learn.” This teacher seemed to view of RJ as a behavior management tool which helps to ensure that students do not miss out on instructional time—a view which aligns to the argument that the discipline gap and the academic achievement gap are “two sides of the same coin” (Gregory et al., 2010), but which does not acknowledge that RJ could or should have a bearing on the *what* or *how* of instruction. Among the (admittedly small) sample of teachers that I interviewed, this siloed view was dominant; only two of the six—both veterans with more than five years of experience under their belts—offered richer thoughts about the potential relationships between RJ and instructional practice.

Support for such siloed perspectives were far less strong among leaders. Liane and Katie were in the minority; 10 of the 14 leaders who participated in interviews

readily engaged in conversations about the topic of restorative instruction, and the richness of these dialogues suggested that participants were grappling in authentic and ongoing ways with the topic. One leader, when I posed an initial question about the relationship of RJ to instruction, even laughed. “I knew you were going to ask me that,” she said. “That’s like the million-dollar question right now.” This perspective was substantiated by what I observed in weekly ALT meetings, which, as the opening scene of this chapter foreshadowed, increasingly involved explicit conversations about the implications of the restorative approach for curriculum and pedagogy. Rachel, an instructional coach who works with novice teachers in grades 7-12, commented on this progression during a late-March meeting: “It’s starting to be clear that restorative isn’t just a disciplinary practice, it’s an approach to teaching, and we need to make that clear [to teachers] from day one.” A number of her colleagues murmured their assent.

In an interview, Kerry, the Principal of the Upper Elementary Campus, asserted that this emphasis was a recently emergent one. During the previous year, she told me, she and her colleagues generally had viewed the RJ framework purely as a new approach to discipline; this was because RJ had been introduced to the OCA community as a way of addressing troubling trends in school exclusion and building more positive school culture, and also because it was new to most adults in the community. This year, however, the role of the RJ framework was deepening and expanding. “Restorative is more ‘in the water’ now,” Kerry said. “It’s starting to permeate conversations about what instruction should look like.” Among all of OCA’s principals, Kerry was most clear and vehement that committing to RJ required committing to a new *stance* when it came to instruction. “If you’re urging kids in advisory to solve problems with one another, and

then not doing that during your instruction—I mean, what message does that send to kids? Like, this is something you do this one period, but then all the other ones, never mind, we don’t value those things there,” she said. Kerry’s sarcasm here suggests that it is glaringly obvious that restorative educators should create opportunities for student to collaborate and take the lead in both instructional and non-instructional contexts; however, she freely admitted that this perspective was one that had not dawned on her until recently.

Theo, the Head of School, agreed with how Kerry described the shift in thinking which characterized the OCA community. In interviews, he suggested that the growing use of the term “restorative instruction” within the leader community, in particular, reflected the dawning of a new perspective:

Only this year are we doing the bridgework of really integrating the change processes around instruction and culture. I think it's the right path to be on. And I think it's really hard work. [...] The term restorative instruction is helpful because it bridges instruction and culture in a way that historically has been siloed. And I think that's been a big win for this year actually, is that people aren't looking at school culture and instruction as two separate spheres of influence on young people. That's been a huge mind-shift.

Not coincidentally, as described in Chapter 2, it was Theo who coined the term “helix,” convening several “helix meetings” in which he, Suzanne, and Ellery tried to map out a scope of work for the ALT which drew together the school’s cultural and instructional change priorities. Like Kerry, Theo freely acknowledged that this effort to think about school coherence and school more holistically was one which reflected a recent shift in his own thinking. As he saw it, however, this shift in fact represented a return to the kind of approach that had been “just kind of in the water” during his time at Parker—a school

which was designed around a core set of convictions about the kinds of experiences, academic and otherwise, which best could support young people in their development.

As previous section of this chapter suggests, acknowledging *that* the RJ framework has implications for instructional practice is not the same thing as specifying the particular characteristics of RJ-aligned instruction. Still, the fact that most of OCA’s leaders accepted—and in some cases embraced—the former premise is not to be taken for granted, especially given that the (admittedly limited) existing research on the reception of RJ by educators suggests that “RJ is most often understood in the context of managing student behavior” (Vaandering, 2010, p. 148). The fact that OCA’s leaders generally had moved beyond this limited viewpoint speaks to the relative maturity of their commitment to RJ, as well as to the pervasiveness of broader conversations about the importance of internal coherence and symmetry. It is also perhaps a testament to the dogged persistence of Suzanne, who, by her own admission, saw it as her charge to “wave the restorative flag” during leadership conversations of all stripes. Although this insistence sometimes made Suzanne an unpopular meeting participant—interviews reveal that Liane was not alone in her impatience—it may have helped leaders to move toward treating RJ as an all-encompassing approach with meaningful implications for instructional practice.

Restorative Instruction as Relational Instruction

As discussed in Chapter 1, one of the key differences that RJ advocates draw between RJ and retributive justice is that RJ emphasizes the primacy of human relationships and, as a result, organizes its processes around the goal of repairing damaged relationships rather than around the imperative to mete out “just” punishments

to those who have perpetrated crimes. Instead of asking which rules have been broken, who broke them, and what these rule-breakers deserve, RJ emphasizes the interconnectedness of all peoples, asking, in instances of crime and wrongdoing: “Who has been harmed? What are their needs? Whose obligations are these?” (Zehr, 2002, p. 31). A wide range of theorists and researchers agree that this relational essence is—or at least should be—the foundation for RJ and restorative practices as they are translated into education contexts (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Fronius et al., 2016; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). However, as discussed earlier, this underlying relationality is often overlooked or deemphasized by schools, which tend to treat RJ as a tool for reduced office referrals and more effective behavior management rather than as a more encompassing philosophy (Mccluskey, Lloyd, Stead, et al., 2008; Vaandering, 2010; Wachtel, n.d.; Wadhwa, 2015).

OCA’s leaders and teachers did not conform to this pattern. To the contrary, the single most common viewpoint that emerged in interviews and observations was the notion that *restorative instruction is relational instruction*, e.g. instruction which treats healthy and positive human relationships in the classroom as foundational to the endeavor of teaching and learning. This served as a powerful point of shared belief, one which most interviewed leaders (11/14) affirmed, and which ensured widespread support for the idea that teachers should use instructional time to develop and maintain positive relationships with students through processes such as circles. This belief was reflected by the decision to include “relationships” as a cross-cutting category in the new teacher evaluation rubric—a category which, along with those such as rigor and differentiation, was codified as a consideration that teachers must attend to in curriculum planning as

well as in daily lessons. As Suzanne put it in an interview, this decision reflected the group's increasing recognition that strong relationships are a *sine qua non* of instruction. "There are some foundational things that happen around relationships and classroom community that have to be in place before true learning can happen with students," she said.

Although treating interpersonal relationships as foundational to strong instruction might seem to some like a teaching no-brainer, this stance is by no means one that dominates the world of K-12 public schools. Explicit references to teacher-student relationships do not appear, for example, on many state-issued teacher evaluation rubrics, including the one which OCA had been using for the past five years.⁵ Moreover, in many high-profile "No Excuses" schools—schools whose model OCA had sought to emulate until recently—relationship-building tends to be treated as a non-instructional activity, relegated to contexts such as morning meetings or advisory (Mehta & Fine, In Press), and/or undertaken by teachers through instructionally unrelated acts such as memorizing students' names before the first day of class and referring to students' idiosyncratic personal characteristics (Thiesen-Homer, In Process). The professional literature which attempts to codify what teachers should know echoes and reinforces this pattern.

Although this literature dwells on the *importance* of teacher-student relationships (Darling-Hammond, Bransford, & LePage, 2007; Saphier, Hayley-Speca, & Gower, 2008), the relational aspects of teachers remain "remarkably undertheorized" (Grossman

⁵ Many such rubrics *allude* to teacher-student relationships; teachers in Massachusetts, for example, are expected to use "rituals, routines, and appropriate responses that create and maintain a safe physical and intellectual environment where students take academic risks and most behaviors that interfere with learning are prevented" (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012, p. C-7). However, the language of relationships is absent, and from the perspective of an explicitly relational framework such as RJ, this omission downplays the role of the teacher as a human actor in the classroom.

& McDonald, 2008, p. 188), with the dominant assumption being that capacities for positive relationship-building are innate ones which cannot be taught. Thus, the support of OCA's leaders for the idea that classrooms should be spaces where teachers deliberately undertake both proactive and reactive relational work, and the accompanying recognition that teachers must be supported in learning to do so, can be seen as a step in a new direction.

Close analysis of interview data, however, reveals several interesting divergences in how leaders conceptualized the role of relationships with respect to instructional practice. In particular, while some leaders espoused an *instrumental perspective* which saw the development of strong interpersonal relationships and strong classroom culture as prerequisites which support effective instruction but do not have a bearing on its core characteristics, others voiced a more *pedagogically-specific perspective* which saw RJ's emphasis on relationships as demanding instructional arrangements such as collaborative learning. The former view, while it drew a direct connection between culture and instruction, saw this connection as a straightforward and uni-directional one; the latter view, by contrast, opened space for re-examining the instructional core in light of relational power dynamics—and, conversely, for examining relational power dynamics in light of the instructional core.

Instrumental perspectives. Out the leaders and teachers who participated in interviews, roughly half (6/14 leaders and 4/6 teachers) espoused views which suggested an instrumental and uni-directional understanding of the connections between relationships and effective teaching. Liane articulated a perspective which was fairly typical of these participants. She stressed that she originally had understood RJ as being

only about reactive discipline, but that over the course of the last two years she had begun to grasp the importance that RJ places on proactive culture-building. This, in turn, helped her to see that RJ was not just about what happens “in the principal’s office,” but also about what happens in classrooms in more ongoing ways:

That idea [of proactive relationship-building] to me was so enlightening. When I thought about the teachers who had the fewest discipline problems and I looked at how they interacted with kids, those were the ones that kids trust, they enjoy each other’s company—they can have hard conversations with kids and be like, “Knock it off! Are you kidding me?” But a fragile, nervous, brand-new teacher who is like “I will assert power over you” gets into a huge blow-off with a kid. So to me being a restorative teacher is basically about focusing on relationships between kids and adults and trying to remove that power dynamic that tends to be so toxic with teachers needing to assert control over kids. It’s about having ways for teachers and kids to get to know each other and connect with each other and build relationships, because the teachers who have good relationships with kids don’t have the discipline problems that the others do.

In some respects, Liane’s language here evokes some of the central perspectives of RJ: the emphasis on connectedness, the rejection of “toxic” dynamics in which adults assert “power over” children, and the vision of relationships as foundational. Her depiction thus captures the anti-authoritarian ethos of RJ as it pertains to the general climate of classrooms, and, moreover, clearly supports the idea that teachers should devote time and resources to culture-building.

Liane’s understanding of restorative instruction, however, does not make room for considering power dynamics as they play out in and are impacted by the realms of curriculum and pedagogy. Rather, she suggests that the value of building strong relationships lies in their ability to reduce “discipline problems,” the absence of which presumably mean that more students can spend more of their time engaged in whatever kind of instructional activities the teacher has determined to be worthwhile. Classroom culture is thus configured as being a *platform for* and *input into* instructional efficacy; it

is an instrument for making sure that a maximum amount of teaching and learning can happen. In this light, it is no coincidence that Liane believed that the ALT had spent too much energy trying to de-silo culture and instruction; her instrumental view of the relationship between the two domains naturally feeds into the idea that their connection does not bear extensive unpacking. It is also perhaps no coincidence that Liane's job involved making sure that students with special needs were getting adequate services and sufficient academic progress; her role meant that she was focused more on "the basics" than on trying to imagine what it might mean to enact a more ambitious instructional vision.

Liane's view was fairly typical of those who expressed instrumental views, with one exception: several of the other leaders who espoused such views emphasized that restorative instruction should attend not only to the relationships between teachers and students but also to the relationships among students. "[Restorative instruction] is about the role of the teacher in a relational process, both in connecting with individual kids and with creating experiences where kids connect with one another," one instructional coach reflected. When asked to illustrate what this looks like in practice, this coach described a fourth-grade class where the teacher routinely opened the day by asking students to draw, share, and explain a "weather report" which symbolized their current mood and state of mind.

As I will explore shortly, for some leaders, considering peer-to-peer relationships as territory for development and restoration opened the door for valuing instructional arrangements such as collaborative learning. Liane and others, however, did not make this connection. Instead, they insisted on a view of teaching which includes making time

for general relationship- and culture-building activities, which in turn create a platform for enacting generically “good” instructional practice. Liane’s colleague Katie was particularly adamant on this point:

We [as a leadership team] have not actually had conversations about what good instruction looks like to us because there’s been such an insistence that we’re talking about restorative instruction and that defining that has taken all of our focus away from good instruction, which by nature would be restorative because you’re empowering students by educating them well.

As described earlier, Katie recently had moved to OCA after having worked at one of the most high-profile “No Excuses” schools in the region, a school which, like many of its counterparts, has anchored its work in an extremely granular and highly prescriptive vision of teaching practice geared toward producing achievement on standardized tests. Given this background, it makes sense that Katie was particularly frustrated with the ALT’s hesitation to come up with a more granular schoolwide vision of effective teaching. In expressing this frustration, however, she evokes a belief that *any* version of “good instruction” would be compatible with the RJ framework—including, presumably, the kind of micromanaged, skills-focused, test-oriented instruction which OCA had embraced until recently. She thus closed the door for making an argument that instruction aligned with the RJ framework might demand certain kinds of instructional practices and exclude others. This perspective echoes that of Thorsborne and Blood (2013) and others, who treat classroom connectedness as a uni-directional input into effective instruction and say little about the ways in which such connectedness might be mediated by students’ experiences of curriculum and pedagogy.

Pedagogically-specific perspectives. By contrast, other leaders and teachers espoused a view which saw RJ’s emphasis on relationality as one which had a direct

bearing on the particular instructional practices and instructional arrangements which restorative teachers should strive to develop. Among these was Liza, a veteran administrator who had begun her career at OCA as a social studies teacher and who now served as the *de facto* leader of the restorative discipline work that was happening at the Upper School. Liza was openly conflicted about the effort to de-silo the work of instructional and cultural improvement. On the one hand, she took the bi-directional relationship between the two spheres as a given, remarking almost offhandedly that “we all know that quality instruction positively impacts classroom culture.” On the other hand, as Liza herself acknowledged, her role skewed her focus toward the relationship- and culture-building side of the equation. “The teachers I work with are always the ones who struggle the most with classroom management so, sure, I talk about instruction too, but really I talk about routines and procedures so that they can actually get through a lesson,” she said.

Even so, Liza’s way of talking about RJ suggested that she saw the framework’s emphasis on relationships as a philosophical orientation with meaningful implications for instructional practice. This viewpoint was most apparent during a speech she gave to the Peabody Street faculty during an after-school meeting:

I’m really proud of the decision that we made a few years ago to build a community that is restorative and classrooms that are restorative, where we show students that we care about them as whole people and their voices and their experiences outside of school... where we attend to the whole child and we don’t just see our kids as brains with feet.

In a subsequent interview, Liza emphasized that the embrace of RJ meant that OCA had begun to move away from the purely cognitive view of instruction that had dominated during its “No Excuses” era. Teachers, she said, were beginning to realize how important

it was to base their choices about curriculum and pedagogy in the kinds of holistic understandings of their students that come only from having deep relationships with them. She thus suggested that it is possible both to treat relationships as a platform for instructional efficacy and also to see these relationships as having a bearing on the nature of instruction itself—a view which goes beyond the purely instrumental perspective which is endorsed by much of the literature devoted to the use of RJ in schools. At the end of one interview, Liza reflected that in some respects this “new” perspective about the role of relationships in the classroom represented a full circle in her own thinking, since she had begun her career teaching at a Catholic school where the spiritual dimensions of students’ experiences—e.g. their relationships with God—were integrated unapologetically into the curriculum.

Valerie, the Principal of the Collegiate Institute and one of the four leaders whose work I followed closely throughout the study period, went a step further in terms of theorizing about the forms of instruction which might align with RJ’s relational emphasis. Like many of her peers, Valerie stressed the notion that restorative instruction is relational instruction, asserting that “even before we said it was about relationships and restoring, that’s what [good teaching] was for me.” She insisted with particular conviction that the relationships in question are not just those between teachers and students but also those among students—a perspective which makes sense given that she frequently facilitated circles to address peer-to-peer wrongdoing, and that in her former role as a Spanish teacher she had relied heavily on peer-to-peer learning strategies. Valerie postulated that teaching in ways that align with the RJ framework requires not only undertaking general culture-building activities but also incorporating collaborative

learning processes into instruction. Such processes, she believed, support the kind of interpersonal relationship-building and social-emotional learning which RJ emphasizes. Interestingly, this perspective is not one that she articulated in our initial interviews. By the end of the schoolyear, however, she was much clearer in her views. “Collaborative learning *is* a restorative approach to instruction,” she asserted to her peers with uncommon vehemence during a June ALT meeting. Kerry, too, connected RJ’s emphasis on relationships to collaborative learning processes. “The restorative approach for me has a whole lot to do with like perspective-taking, and working collaboratively necessitates perspective-taking,” she said.

OCA’s new teacher evaluation rubric reflected these more pedagogically-specific views about the importance of fostering interpersonal relationships through collaborative learning. As noted in the previous chapter, this document was not finalized during the data collection period; in mid-May, the ALT chose to pause the development process and focus instead on planning the summer teacher training institutes. The final working draft of the rubric, however, reflected a decision to include “relationships” as a category pertaining to the planning and implementation of instruction. The “relationships” category of the curriculum planning standard read as follows:

Teacher creates lesson and unit plans that include activities/tasks that encourage and facilitate ALL of the following among students and the teacher:

1. Dialogue (student to student, student to teacher, etc.);
2. Exploration of diverse perspectives;
3. Collaboration; AND
4. Shared-decision-making.

This description invokes and extends the view which Valerie, Kerry and others articulated—the view that particular instructional arrangements can, and should, serve as

vehicles by which to cultivate and deepen interpersonal relationships. Although this certainly was not a consensus perspective—this section of the rubric was drafted by a subgroup of the ALT and then edited by Ellery and Suzanne—the fact that it was codified by the rubric nonetheless suggests that the school’s leadership was beginning to treat the relational emphasis of RJ as a lens by which to more sharply define what counted as RJ-aligned instruction. This interpretation is bolstered by the Guide to Restorative Instruction website, which a subset of the ALT drafted late in the schoolyear.

“Collaborative learning is restorative in nature because it develops social-emotional skills and positions students to take responsibility for their own and others’ learning,” read the cover page to one of the guide’s resource folders.

These two artifacts paint a fairly granular picture of how teacher-student and student-student relationships can be supported through practices such as shared decision-making and arrangements such as peer-to-peer learning. This picture has much in common with Gilbert et al’s (2013) portrait of “restorative andragogy,” in which “teachers and students are actively engaged in collaborative decision-making . . . [and] students take responsibility for their own learning, rather than relying on their teacher and the institution to determine their fate” (pp. 51). Strikingly, however, no individual leader or teacher articulated these connections with such clarity in conversation; instead, when it came to describing what RJ’s relational emphasis might look like at the level of specific instructional practices, many faltered, returning to the more general characterizations described above.

Glimmers of a third perspective. Toward the end of the academic year, the contrast between the two perspectives described above, as well as a possible third

perspective on the question of relationships, was highlighted by a brief debate which flared up during an ALT meeting. It was a meeting devoted to discussing how to continue moving forward with change-work around the restorative approach, and Theo, always eager to propose innovations, suggested that perhaps the two Peabody Street Campuses should launch the upcoming schoolyear with a set of experiences that focused solely on developing positive relationships. He cited the fact that OCA's Early Childhood Campus had experienced great success when it decided to spend the first month of school focusing mainly on routines and culture-building, and then connected this to his own teaching alma mater, a progressive public high school founded by Ted Sizer. "I come from a place where every year the first few days was a retreat with the kids and faculty signing songs and roasting marshmallows and making things," he said. "So I'm just wondering: at the secondary level, where our kids can be feistier, what would it be like at the start of school for things to be more about relationships only?"

The room was silent for a few moments. Several ALT members nodded thoughtfully. Toward one corner of the room, however, Valerie was frowning intensely. Next to her, Nora, the Collegiate Institute's Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction, was shaking her head as well. Often quiet during meetings, Nora spoke up with a response to Theo. "I don't think that's a good idea at all," she said, firmly. "We definitely need to help teachers focus on building relationships in those first weeks, but there has to be something interesting and worth talking about at the center—some kind of academic content. Otherwise it's just hollow." Valerie nodded her agreement for this perspective. Theo nodded thoughtfully and did not pursue the topic further.

Although this exchange lasted for only five minutes, the differences between Theo's and Nora's viewpoints serve to crystallize the contrasting perspectives described above. To wit, although Theo did not say it explicitly, his suggestion gestured toward a vision of relationships as an instrumental input into instruction. Nora's response, by contrast, gestured toward a belief that teacher-student relationships can be mediated by the experience of joint engagement with academic content. Nora thus conjures up the third node of Hawkins's (1964/2007) iconic "I-thou-it" triangle: the "it" of the curriculum. This is particularly striking because despite the ubiquity of leaders' and teachers' emphasis on restorative instruction as relational instruction, nobody except for Nora construed the relationships between students and *content* as fertile space for restoration and/or transformation. As I will explore in greater depth in chapter 4, attending to these relationships was central to Nora's efforts to practice restorative instruction in the context of her own classroom; she saw restorative instruction as being about repairing relationships not only through the *how* of pedagogy but also through the *what* of the curriculum. In this, her work resonated with the views offered by Winn (2013) and Christenson (2012), both of whom argue that RJ-aligned instruction must attend to the ways in which relational power dynamics can be mediated through choices about content. In this, however, Nora was unique among her peers.

Drawing on the Social Discipline Window

A second major theme which surfaced during interviews as well during meetings was a widespread reliance on McCold and Wachtel's (2003) "social discipline window" when it came to defining restorative instruction. OCA's leaders generally referred to a modified version of this diagram which had been used during professional development

sessions and which was in some cases displayed on office and classroom walls. In this version, the labels of the axes have been changed from the original version, with the x-axis indicating levels of support and the y-axis indicating the levels of accountability. The key descriptors associated with each of the four quadrants remain mostly the same as the original, with the upper left-hand quadrant (high accountability paired with low support) characterized as *punitive / TO*, the lower-right-hand quadrant (low accountability paired with high support) characterized as *permissive / FOR*, and the upper-right-hand quadrant (high accountability paired with high support) characterized as *restorative / WITH*. Over time, Suzanne and others also had added a series of descriptors intended to “thicken” the descriptions of each quadrant. (See Figure 1, below.)

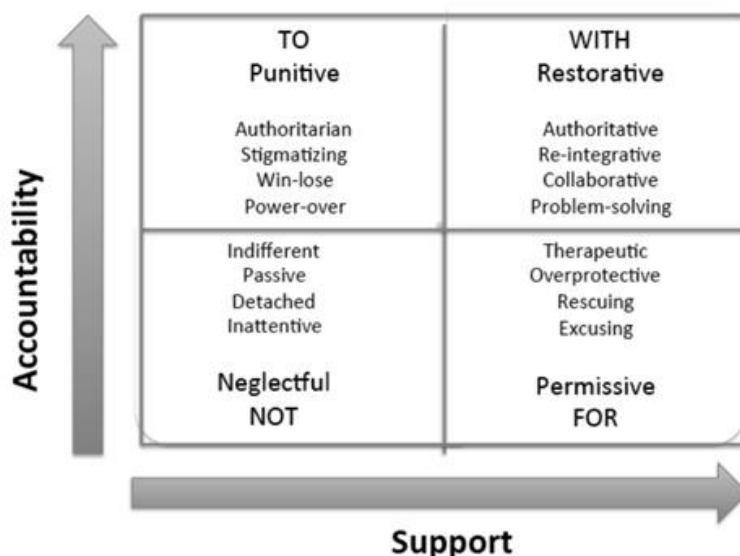


Figure 1. OCA In-Use Version of the Social Discipline Window

A large portion of those interviewed (10/14 leaders and 2/6 teachers) referred explicitly to this diagram when talking about the notion of restorative instruction. Interestingly, however, virtually all of those who did so altered the y-axis to reflect the language of

“expectations” rather than “accountability.” Although the only printed version of the diagram which formalized this shift was the one that Ellery presented to the ALT in the meeting described in this chapter’s opening, leaders and teachers almost universally seemed to have accepted the premise that this alteration in language made the diagram more relevant to discussions about instructional quality.

Broadly speaking, leaders and teachers who evoked the social discipline window in interviews did so in order to compare restorative instruction with the less desirable alternatives specified in the diagram’s other quadrants: punitive instruction, permissive instruction, and neglectful instruction. Beneath this general umbrella, however, there were interesting variations in sense-making. In particular, interview participants seemed to cluster into two main groups with respect to the features of the social discipline window that they emphasized most heavily. In the first group were those who focused mainly on the imperative for high expectations and high support, using this as evidence that restorative instruction involves the same kind of skills-focused, test-oriented, tightly micromanaged vision of instruction which OCA had previously endorsed. In the second group were those who mainly emphasized the key descriptors associated with each quadrant: “not/neglectful,” “to/punitive” “for/permissive,” and “with/restorative”—an emphasis which led many of these leaders and teachers to conclude that restorative instruction requires profound shifts in stance and practice. In the following pages, I explore these perspectives in more depth.

Pairing high expectation with high support. Of the 12 leaders and teachers who referred explicitly to the social discipline window in interviews, 8 focused heavily or exclusively on the diagram’s axes, evoking the pairing of high expectations with high

support as a central trait of restorative instruction. As a typical member of this group, the literacy coordinator at the OCA's Upper School, put it, "[Restorative instruction] means having high expectations and lots of supports so that students can meet those expectations." When pressed to unpack the key terms here, this leader explained that in her view holding high expectations involves expecting all students to master the skills and knowledge associated with the Common Core State Standards as measured by the PAARC test; providing high levels of support involves creating scaffolds which allow for differentiation. Perhaps not surprisingly, this leader was one who was adamant that the mode of instruction which had dominated during the school's "No Excuses" era was not particularly problematic; in her view, rather than spending their energy trying to imagine a new kind of instruction, leaders should be focused on helping teachers to get better at what they were already shooting for. Many of this leader's colleagues voiced similar beliefs, similarly interpreting the social discipline window as evidence of the alignment between the RJ framework and the "No Excuses" model of micromanagement-heavy, skills-focused, test-oriented instruction.

In light of these responses, it is worth returning to a comment made by Katie. Expressing her frustration with what she perceived as a misdirected amount of energy spent discussing the RJ framework's implications for pedagogy, Katie asserted her belief that "good instruction...by nature would be restorative because you're empowering students by educating them well." Later in the same interview, she added that she did not believe that "the word restorative should change our discussion about what good teaching is" and made a case that the combination of high expectations with high support

constitutes a “baseline” characteristic of all effective classrooms, regardless of whether they are nestled within a restorative school or not.

As discussed earlier, few of Katie’s colleagues admitted to sharing her doubt about the value of exploring the implications of the RJ framework for instruction. However, several of those who dwelled on the high expectations / high support view did seem to share her general belief that restorative instruction is a generic term which could encompass any number of “good” pedagogical models. This, in turn, led them to conclude that applying the social discipline window to situations of instruction was of limited value. “I think ‘restorative’ is so non-specific that it’s kind of like—people just use the word good. Like, restorative teaching is good teaching. It’s this implied all-inclusive broad word that sounds great but doesn’t really mean anything,” commented one system-level leader. Later he alluded more directly to the social discipline window’s axes, asking rhetorically, “Does anyone *not* believe in high expectations and high support?” These two skeptics suggest that the two axes of the social discipline window do not in and of themselves help to create a granular view of restorative instruction. In so doing, they underscore the fact that focusing exclusively on the diagram’s axes easily supports a perspective which finds high levels of compatibility between RJ-aligned instruction and any preexisting vision of “good practice”—in OCA’s case, a vision of tightly micromanaged, skill-focused, test-oriented pedagogy.

For some of OCA’s leaders, however, focusing on the social discipline window’s axes provided a powerfully simple way to understand, and to help teachers to understand, why instructional outcomes often fall short of instructional aspirations. Ellery, OCA’s Director of Teacher Training and Development, talked at length about this phenomenon:

What I've been teaching people to think for better or worse is that at the most basic, good teaching is clear expectations that are high for everyone and the differentiated support that people need to meet those expectations. What's convenient about the [social discipline] window is that visually, graphically, it supports that idea. What's difficult in reality is that that is what's so hard about being an effective teacher. Like, how clear are those expectations? Oh, maybe they're crystal clear, but are you really supporting that student or are you just blaming them for being lazy?

Interestingly, it was Ellery who, in the context of the ALT meeting described in the opening of this chapter, suggested that OCA's new instructional vision was more restorative than the vision which it sought to replace. Still, over the course of a one-on-one interview, she focused less on the potential alignments between RJ and the elements described on the "green monster" than on the broader construction of the social discipline window. To this end, as the quote above suggests, she argued that the most powerful aspect of the diagram is the way in which it can help teachers begin to see students' "failures" as the result of an imbalance between expectations and support, rather than as a reflection of individual inadequacies. This perspective perhaps reflected Ellery's recognition that novice teachers need clear, simple, blunt frames through which to think about their work, as well as her inner struggle about whether or not the OCA community in fact was ready to move in the direction of deeper learning.

Ellery's "reading" of the social discipline window was echoed by several other leaders. The Upper School math coordinator, for example, reflected that one of the core components of his job was to help teachers to understand that "we have this idea of high expectations for students but then we don't always have the supports there to happen, and so for that reason we end up with students that have not met our goals for them." Strikingly, this perspective is also one which resonates with the world of "No Excuses" schools, which insist with unprecedented intensity that students' backgrounds should

never be treated as an “excuse” for holding low expectations, and which place the onus of providing intensive supports on schools and teachers. Indeed, many of the most well-known “No Excuses” schools refer to themselves as “high expectations, high support” schools (Leonhardt, 2016). It is unclear whether or not they are intentionally drawing on the language of the social discipline window, but it is still striking that these schools, which many in the RJ world likely would characterize as authoritarian, see themselves as working in the same vein as those who intentionally strive to work within the “restorative window.”

Undertaking instruction *with* students. Of the 12 leaders and teachers who talked about the social discipline window, 4 did not dwell on the diagram’s axes but rather emphasized the key descriptors associated with each quadrant: “not/neglectful,” “to/punitive” “for/permissive,” and “with/restorative.” By contrast to the group described above, these participants tended to evoke the underlying philosophy associated with RJ framework, and, accordingly, to see grounds for a more profound shift away from the “No Excuses” instructional model than those who focused mainly on the notion of high accountability and high support. Similar to their peers, however, they generally faltered when it came to providing granular accounts of what restorative instruction might entail at the level of observable practice.

Kerry, the Principal of the Upper Elementary Campus, was among those who most explicitly connected the social discipline window’s descriptors to the humanistic stance which undergirds the RJ framework. After describing the instructional sea-change that had been underway at her campus this year—a shift toward student-centered and

constructivist instruction which, by all accounts, was further along than at OCA's other campuses—she reflected:

For me, restorative instruction means just being more *humane* than what we were doing before. I think a lot of what we had been doing in the past with kids—and with adults—wasn't humane. I mean, in terms of like the whole restorative window, it was either punitive or it was permissive. Like: things aren't going very well for you, so, "Oh, we're going to put you on an improvement plan, we're going to do this to you, we're going to do that to you." Or maybe we're just going to act like there isn't a problem.

Nora, the Collegiate Institute's Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction, voiced a similar perspective. As she saw it, the underlying goal of the restorative approach is to shift the power dynamics which play out within hallways and classrooms "so that school isn't something being done *to* [students]." Later, she elaborated on what this meant for the yearlong Gender Studies elective course which she taught, describing how the restorative approach had solidified her commitment to soliciting students' input at regular intervals. "I ask the kids to help me plan the class. I do that periodically. At the end of each unit, I ask them what worked, what didn't work, what did you learn, what do you want to do more of and why," she said. "So I really try to plan the course *with* them." (For more about how Nora tried to enact her understandings of the restorative approach through her practices as a teacher and leader, see Chapter 4.)

Jeremy, an upper-grades English teacher who had spent the entirety of his decade-long teaching career at OCA, shared a similar perspective. Like Nora, with whom he worked closely, he emphasized the word "with," elaborating that he believed that restorative instruction demanded that he adopt a collaborative approach to problem-solving in the classroom, be it about interpersonal conflicts or about students' unwillingness to engage in academic discussions. He also, like Ellery and others,

described the broader framework of the RJ as one which demanded that adults move away from a logic of individual deficits. “To me the basis of restorative principles is recognizing that if a student or somebody in general cannot function safely successfully in a community then something is not working for the kid, not that the *person* isn’t working,” he said. “So for me in my class it’s about figuring out what doesn’t work, and doing that with the students, and then trying to make it work.” Like Kerry and Nora, Jeremy evokes restorative instruction as instruction whose central characteristic involves a shift in *stance*. While on one level this could be seen as equally vague as the “high expectations, high support” view—teacher stance, after all, is extremely difficult to pin down—on another level it seems to suggest a belief that restorative instruction differs in its foundational orientation from traditionally hierarchical, teacher-centric, authoritarian instruction. In turn, this suggests that RJ-aligned instruction might differ in more fundamental ways from the “No Excuses” status quo than many of OCA’s other leaders and teachers seemed to believe.

Theo subscribed to a related view. Interestingly, he agreed in some ways with Katie’s perspective that the term restorative instruction was not an enormously useful one, insisting across several interviews that labelling instruction as “restorative” involves assigning a new label to an old phenomenon. The phenomenon to which he believed that the phrase restorative instruction referred, however, is one which involves the notion of teacher *stance*. “I think that one interpretation of our evolution to being restorative is really just about branding and packaging... I would say that our best teachers long before we started labeling the pedagogy as restorative are restorative simply because it’s about intuitive holding of children as partners in the learning process,” he reflected. While Theo

does not explicitly refer to the social discipline window here, the language of teacher-student partnerships is highly aligned to a several of the descriptors in the restorative quadrant, in particular “with” and collaborative.” For Theo, however, the more salient point of origin for his understanding of restorative instruction was the notion of Deweyian student-centered pedagogy as he had encountered it during his time at the Parker School. To this end, at various points during both interviews and ALT meetings, Theo explicitly connected the RJ framework to Sizer’s metaphor of “student as worker, teacher as coach.” Later, when Suzanne asked ALT members to view a video of a restorative problem-solving conference and then to reflect on what made the conference restorative, Theo responded: “To me it was that students were at the center of their own experience—they were at the center of their own meaning-making.”

All four of these participants—Kerry, Nora, Jeremy, and Theo—were among the subset of OCA’s leaders and teachers who saw themselves as most deeply committed to moving away from a “No Excuses” model of instruction and toward a vision of deeper learning. In their different ways and different roles, all of these were striving to push the school’s instructional model in the direction of deeper learning: Kerry by encouraging the Upper Elementary School’s teachers to engage students in more open-ended tasks, Nora through her experimentation with the “thinking routines” from *Making Thinking Visible*, Jeremy through his efforts to engage students in reading non-canonical texts, and Theo through the kind of system-level leadership which resulted in the development of the “green monster.” Strikingly, however, these participants rarely made explicit connections between the RJ framework and these other instructionally-specific strands of their work. For example, when I asked Kerry to talk about how, if at all, she saw the notion of

restorative instruction connecting to the seven elements on the “green monster,” she balked. “Yeah: no,” she joked, suggesting that this conceptual task was not one that she relished. After a pause, however, she grew more serious and puzzled her way through a response.

I guess [hesitates]—I guess with restorative instruction there’s an element of cultural proficiency in understanding student identity and how that’s incorporated into not just the curriculum but also like the honoring of the individual person in the classroom. Like, there’s room for multiple ways for multiple kids, and room for acknowledging that there’s difference and that there’s not always one and only one way of doing something. [Pause] And it [restorative instruction] is also just—just more collaborative.

By the end of the academic year, Kerry had come to a place of more clarity with respect to the connections between the restorative approach and collaborative learning. Still, the hesitation that she and many of her colleagues exhibited when it came to positing connections between the restorative approach and specific pedagogical strategies and frameworks was striking. Their various notions of restorative instruction, it seems, operated more at the level of *gestalt* than at the level of granular practice: being restorative, for them, was about orienting around the “whole child” by being “humane,” “intuitive,” and “collaborative”—but not, at least as yet, about deploying particular kinds of pedagogies. This aligns with an assertion that Theo made toward the end of the year. “People use [the term restorative instruction] to mean whatever they want it to mean...I don’t think at the tactical level that people understand or agree on what it actually means,” he said. A number of leaders agreed with this diagnosis and saw grounds for a more concerted effort to discuss and cohere their thinking with respect to the “observable practices” dimensions of restorative instruction. “We started to move in that direction

with the [rubric work], but then we backed off,” one leader said. “I think that has to be the next conversation.”

Conclusion

Stepping back, it is interesting to note that the patterns of sense-making that emerged from analyzing interviews and observations mirror many of the patterns which characterize the literature about RJ in education. As described earlier in this chapter, this literature tends to acknowledge *that* the RJ framework has implications for instructional practice but does not treat these implications with much depth, suggesting only that RJ outcomes such as classroom connectedness can serve as a platform for effective instruction. Positive culture and healthy interpersonal relationships are thus seen as an instrumental input into instructional efficacy, with little attention to the question of whether and how certain instructional practices might be more—and less—aligned to the underlying philosophy and epistemology associated with RJ. Broadly speaking, these trends were reflected in the data. A majority of the leaders and teachers who participated in interviews focused on the notion that taking a restorative approach to instruction means making time and space for building and repairing relationships; this was seen as an instrumental input which could support generically “high expectations, high support” instruction. Thus, the modal way of understanding restorative instruction was as instruction that represented a more relationally-aware version of the “No Excuses” model which came before, with the authoritarian elements of this model remaining unexamined. This is strikingly similar to the patterns identified in the literature. It also resonates with a statement written by Dewey (1952), who, at the end of his career, reflected on how the movement for progressive education had failed to penetrate the instructional core. “The

personal relations between teachers and students have been to a noticeable extent humanized and democratized. But the success in these respects is as yet limited; it is largely atmospheric...the fundamental authoritarianism of the old education persists in various modified forms,” he wrote (pp. 127).

At OCA, as in the research literature, this pattern had several notable exceptions. To wit, a handful of leaders and teachers focused more pointedly on the underlying philosophy of RJ, theorizing that RJ-aligned instruction would need to depart from the status quo not only in terms of its “atmospheric” dimensions but also in terms of its specific curricular and pedagogical dimensions. Although few leaders had developed a fully fleshed-out portrait of what restorative or RJ-aligned instruction might look and sound like at the level of daily practice, several had begun to draw connections between the goals of the RJ framework and instructional traditions such as collaborative learning and culturally responsive pedagogy; they also emphasized the ways in which RJ demanded instruction which was at its essence more humanistic and attentive to students as “whole” beings than the alternative. In turn, these leaders saw the implementation of the restorative approach as providing grounds for more profound shifts in instructional approach than did many of their peers. Strikingly, however, all but one of these participants were silent when it came to the rich relationships between the RJ framework and the tradition of critical pedagogy as outlined by Friere, hooks, and others—relationships which theorists such as Vaandering, Christenson, Toews, and Winn see as being central to the conceptualization of RJ-aligned instruction.

One way to interpret these patterns in the data is to argue that they speak to the powerful forces of *assimilation* which so often thwart the acceptance and full

implementation of new paradigms. A core tenet of constructivist theory as outlined by Piaget, assimilation refers to the process by which individuals bring their existing beliefs and conceptual frameworks to bear on new information and experiences, modifying the latter to fit the former. In many respects, this process accurately seems to describe the ways that many of OCA's leaders made sense of the idea of restorative instruction; they assimilated the RJ framework into their existing views about what constituted good pedagogical practice, focusing on the elements of RJ which were most compatible with these views and downplaying those which were not. This would help to explain, for example, why "No Excuses"-inclined leaders like Katie did not focus on the descriptors provided in the quadrants of the social discipline window but instead emphasized the labels of the axes. It would also help to explain why deeper-learning-oriented leaders like Kerry focused on the emphasis that the RJ framework places on collaboration and perspective-taking, viewing these as warrants for seeing the RJ framework as demanding the kind of student-centered instruction they already had been hoping to create. In this light, all of the "helix" work accomplished very little in the way of changed perspectives, instead reinforcing leaders' and teachers' previous commitments.

I would like to argue, however, that the picture is not so quite as bleak as all that. There certainly is evidence to suggest that leaders tended to define restorative instruction in ways which were compatible with their backgrounds, roles, and preexisting beliefs. There is also evidence, however, that leaders were beginning to experience some shifts in their thinking—perhaps not the kinds of dramatic shifts which are associated with paradigm-changes, but important ones nonetheless. Recall, for example, how Liane talked about how it was "so enlightening" for her to think about the importance of

proactive relationship-building in classrooms, how Theo realized that he had drifted too far from the holistic perspectives which are more “in the water” at progressive schools like Parker, and how Valerie gradually began to feel more confident in asserting that “collaborative learning *is* a restorative approach to instruction.” Thus, while the discourses around the meaning of restorative instruction may not have produced many—or any—dramatic changes in perspective or practice, it did seem to galvanize a slow but nevertheless consequential shift in how some leaders and teachers thought about the relationships between culture and instruction.

Stepping back from the particular nature of these shifts, I also would like to argue that the leaders and teachers at OCA—or at least the subset of these adults that I interviewed and observed—collectively offer a window into the state of the field with respect to (re)organizing classrooms around the principles, practices, and philosophy associated with RJ. Said differently, these participants help to illuminate the current state of a rapidly expanding field of theory and practice. As such, their efforts to conceptualize the idea of restorative instruction have several potentially important implications. I sketch out three such implications here.

First, findings from this work demonstrate that it is necessary but not sufficient for educators merely to acknowledge the abstract notion that the RJ framework might have implications for instruction. Rather, they need to be supported in collectively considering how the specific curricula, pedagogies, and instructional routines with which they are most familiar do and/or do not align with the underlying goals of the RJ framework. Given that many of the most widely used approaches in the field are not highly aligned with RJ, educators also need to be supported in exploring less familiar

traditions and routines—for example, those associated with critical pedagogy—which might make for a better “fit” with RJ. Such explorations, in turn, can serve as a platform for moving in the direction of a philosophically coherent program which, broadly, unites the goals of cultural and instructional change. As the experiences of OCA’s leaders and teachers suggest, this is likely to be slow, uphill, resource-intensive work, but it is work which could yield high returns when it comes to making progress toward sustainable institutional transformation. As an added benefit, such work might also help those involved to recognize—and hopefully account for—the ways in which choices about curriculum and pedagogy impact classroom relationships, culture, and power dynamics.

Second, it is worth briefly dwelling on the ubiquity of participants’ reliance on the social discipline window as a frame for their thinking. As the data suggest, leaders and teachers focused, perhaps as a matter of course, on the features of the diagram which most aligned with their preexisting beliefs and perspectives. Still, the extent to which the language and framework of the social discipline window had permeated the OCA community lends credence to Vaandering’s (2013) argument that the field needs to pay closer attention to the core tools which are used to support the work of RJ in schools—and to modify these tool so that they more explicitly reflect RJ’s essential philosophical and epistemological orientation. To this end, the social discipline window as McCold and Wachtel formulated it, and as OCA had modified it, does not reflect the central value that RJ places on relationality, on subject-to-object shifts, or on the goal of liberation from oppressive structures. While changes that play up these dimensions might not in and of themselves cause a shift in perspective, they could open up avenues of sense-making and inquiry that might not otherwise be undertaken. In particular, emphasizing the Freirian

underpinnings of the RJ framework might help educators to hone in on the rich connections between RJ and the tradition of critical pedagogy—connections which, as OCA’s leaders demonstrate, might otherwise get overlooked.

Finally, in a broader sense, this chapter suggests that it is critically important for the field to develop a knowledge-base which includes a set of thickly-described portraits which illustrate what restorative classrooms might look like at the level of daily practice. Such a resource-base could help educators to embark on the important but difficult work of operationalizing the theories to which they and/or their institutions aspire to enact. It also would promote the important work of helping educators to move beyond siloed thinking, toward a more integrated view which accounts for the dynamic interrelationships between culture and instruction. In the next chapter, I offer one such portrait—a portrait of a teacher-leader who, more so than any of her peers, had begun to work out through her practice what it might look like to take a restorative approach to leadership and teaching.

Chapter 4

**Living the Helix: Authenticity, conviction, and critical-restorative pedagogy
in the work of one teacher-leader**

“Teachers and children can associate well only in worthy interests and pursuits, only through a community of subject-matter and engagement which extends beyond the circle of their intimacy... then they have a common theme for discussion, they are involved together in the world.”

--Hawkins, “I, Thou, It,” 1964

The first time that I watch Nora teach is an overcast morning in early March. The temperature hovers around forty degrees and an inch of slush has fallen overnight, coating the dirt-blackened mounds of snow and delaying the subway. As I hurry toward the main entrance of Outlook Collegiate Academy’s (OCA’s) Peabody Street campus, I hear the security guard stationed at the door cheerfully greeting students in her flat New England accent. Pointing to my thick winter boots, she remarks, with only a touch of irony, “You won’t need those much longer—it feels like summah!”

Nora stands near the front desk, chatting with a colleague. She breaks into a smile when she sees me. “You made it!” she says. She wears faded black jeans with chunky leopard-print ankle boots and an oversized olive green sweater. Her short brown hair is pulled into a ponytail and her pale face is accented by dark-framed glasses and a pair of large wooden hoop earrings. As usual, I find myself admiring her style. She has an unconventional way of dressing that is at once careful and unstudied, mature and playful. Her physical presence, too, commands attention; although she is not tall, she is lithe and dancerly. I find out later that some of OCA’s student share my admiration. “Miss, I just want to say that I think you’re really pretty and I love your clothes,” a ninth-grade student

blurts out as she passes us in the hallway. Nora looks taken aback but pleased. “Thanks,” she answers graciously.

With only a few minutes remaining until the first period bell, there is not much time to talk. Nora hustles me back to her office to pick up some photocopies, offering a brief description of the class that I am about to observe as we walk. The class—the only one that she still teaches given the responsibilities entailed in her role as the Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator of the Collegiate Institute (CI)—is a yearlong Gender Studies elective open to 11th and 12th graders. It is a space, she tells me, where she tries to support her students in applying theoretical frameworks to things that they see as “normal and natural,” such as the policing of race, class, and gender in their school and neighborhood communities. It is also a space where she experiments with new practices—especially practices which she hopes to support the CI’s teachers in enacting. Today, she tells me as we make our way to her classroom, students will be reading and discussing a text about the second wave of feminism. By design, she has chosen a college-level text that likely will be “a stretch” for many of the students in the class; thus, she plans on giving them much of the period to work through it using a group-reading protocol she has created. “Also, you should know that this group is kind of a handful,” she adds. “You’ll see.”

Despite this comment, Nora’s pleasure in anticipating my role as an observer of her teaching is evident. From our two initial interviews, I know that her Gender Studies course is off the radar when it comes to observation and support, and that she is hungry to have someone with whom to reflect about her teaching. I also know that she sees her unique role as a teacher-leader—she is the only one of the twenty-five-member Academic Leadership Team (ALT) who is still in the classroom—as central to her professional

identity. “I’m still a teacher,” she insists during our first interview, pausing me mid-sentence after I refer to her for the second time as a leader. “That’s really important to me.” After a moment, she adds, “It means a lot to teachers too. I think they trust me as an instructional leader because I’m in the work with them, and I’m figuring it out with them, and figuring it out with them by doing it myself.”

The prospect of spending time with Nora brings me pleasure, too. After having observed her in ALT meetings for six months, I am convinced that she is an enormous asset to the team. In particular, her poise, thoughtfulness, and willingness to listen before speaking seems to help to temper the group’s tendency toward impassioned debate. I also find myself drawn to Nora on a more personal level. At forty-two, she is ten years my senior, and during interviews I find myself more tempted than usual to stray into personal territory: to ask her questions about the novels that she is reading in her spare time, about how she manages to balance her commitments to work and family, about who she is as a partner and parent. She seems, I tell my husband one evening, like someone whose values I would like to emulate, and whose friendship I would cherish were I not in the somewhat bounded role of ethnographer and portraitist.

On this particular morning, however, I am less curious about Nora’s personal life than about the ways that her practices as a teacher and teacher-leader might begin to answer the questions about symmetry and boundaries which the ALT’s work has surfaced. In interviews, as well as through her participation in Tuesday morning leadership meetings, she has communicated that she is deeply committed to both of OCA’s new goals: the goal of healing school culture by implementing the restorative approach and the goal of transforming student learning by creating deeper instruction.

How does this play out in contexts beyond Tuesday mornings? Can her work as a teacher help to thicken the picture of what restorative instruction might mean and look like at the level of practice? Can her work as a campus leader do the same when it comes to restorative leadership? Although I know better than to imagine that Nora's practice will be devoid of flaws, and although I recognize that it will take far more than a day to understand its character and range, I anticipate that her unique role positions her to shed important light on these questions.

The morning bell rings, a four-tone electronic peal. Outside of Nora's first-floor classroom we encounter Juan, a tall Latino junior who sports aviator-style glasses, tweed pants, and high-top sneakers with images of the Simpsons on the sides. Nora pauses to look him up and down and breaks into a smile. "Creative, but not dress code," she says, pointing to his pants. Juan grins sheepishly back. He explains that he was in a hurry this morning and didn't have time to pick out a pair of dress-code-appropriate sweatpants. "Somehow I don't think there's a lack of clothes in your closet," Nora says. "You know how I know? Because you and I are really alike." She gestures for him to enter the classroom, adding that she will deal with his dress code violation at the end of class.

There are twenty students in the room, roughly two-thirds of whom appear to be Black or Latino/a, and around one-third of whom appear to be White. Most are wearing sweatpants and sweatshirts with OCA's logo. A Black student near the back of the classroom slumps over his desk with a hood pulled up. As Nora walks past him, she pauses for a moment. "Are you okay?" she asks. The student murmurs something inaudible and sits up.

Nora stations herself at a podium toward the side of the classroom. She greets the class and then projects a power-point onto the whiteboard with this morning's "do now" prompt, which asks: *What do you think the rules are about sex in our culture today?* "Five minutes of silent journaling," Nora says. "You're going to have a lot to say about this topic but keep it in your journal for now," she adds. Ignoring this warning, a female student named Azure—a senior who I later learn is viewed as one of the school's most persistent discipline cases—blurts out, "Only missionary position!" Nora raises a cautionary eyebrow in Azure's direction. There is a brief chorus of giggles, but the room quickly becomes silent as the students, including Azure, get to work writing. The only sound is the intermittent clanking of the radiator.

As I observe Nora quietly circulating around the room, the word that comes to mind is "authoritative." Her presence is calm and serious, and, perhaps as a result, the students appear focused. The fact that this class is a "handful" is by no means obvious. It seems, I note to myself, that there is a great deal of ritual and context which undergirds what I am seeing.

After five minutes have elapsed, Nora reconvenes the group and asks me to introduce myself. Not wanting to draw attention to myself, I keep my explanation to a sentence, saying that I am a researcher who is interested in powerful learning in high schools and that Gender Studies seems like a good space to study that topic. Several students nod. Nora, however, does not seem satisfied. She explains to students that I have been helping OCA's leadership team to "get more clear on what we want classrooms to look like." She adds that as part of this effort she is going to be experimenting with some new instructional routines, and that she will want their feedback "so that I know what you

need to make them work.” In this, I can hear an echo of a conversation that Nora and I had earlier about how she has been trying more actively to solicit and respond to her students’ needs, a hallmark of the restorative framework (Zehr, 2002). I also infer that in giving students a window into the work of the school’s leadership and into her own learning—realities which might otherwise remain opaque to them—Nora is striving to create transparency, also a key part of “liv[ing] restoratively” (Vaandering, 2010, p. 161).

The class moves on to a discussion of the journal prompt. For a few minutes, groups of three share their responses with each other; Nora then asks the groups to share out highlights from their discussions. She stands at the podium, facilitating and listening with interest to what unfolds. The students offer a variety of perspectives, but many focus on the idea of double standards. One girl offers: “We talked about how there’s a lot of slut-shaming. A guy can talk about how they had sex with all these girls, and that makes him cool, but if a girl says one little word about having sex it’s like you’re a slut.” There are some nods and murmurs. Another female student pipes up: “We talked about how two guys having sex is pretty weird, but two girls having sex is pretty much okay, because people think that two girls having sex isn’t really sex.” After a pause, the boy sitting next to me says, “The pressure is always on the woman to take birth control. Maybe there’s scientific reasons but it’s also in the culture, putting the burden on the women. Oh, and to the point that [the previous student] made, there’s also a double standard with masturbation: it’s normal for guys to do it, but not for girls.”

The mention of masturbation causes an outburst from several students, and for a moment the room devolves into chaos. Nora appears unruffled. She moves to the front of the room and waves a cautionary hand; the students quiet down. After the room is mostly

silent, she says, “In order to have this conversation I need you guys to stay mature and focused. If you have legitimate questions, I’d be happy to collect those at the end and figure out how to factor them into future lessons. Okay?” Her tone is firm but not patronizing; to me, her offer comes across as authentic. Several students nod. “Great,” she says. “Now: what does the conversation that we just had have to do with the second wave of the women’s movement? Take two minutes to write down two sentences where you try to make some connections.” Once again, the room grows quiet as the students hunch over their notebooks.

After asking two volunteers to share their responses to the second prompt, Nora delivers a ten-minute mini-lecture on the second wave of feminism, emphasizing the idea that “the personal is political” and connecting this to the 1960s-era debate about the development of the birth control pill—a key issue where feminists and social conservatives found themselves butting heads. As Nora talks, she asks that students take non-verbatim notes, adding, “If you feel that you know all of this, you don’t need to write anything down.” Despite this offer, most students appear to be writing. After Nora finishes, she asks a few students to share what they have written down—a decision, she tells me later, which is connected to her ongoing work with the group on “college-critical skills” such as distilling key information from oral lectures.

Nora then passes out the new reading: a chapter from Gail Collins’s (2010) recent book about feminism and the sexual revolution. Following a protocol which they often use to tackle complex texts, students form groups of four and decide on roles: time-keeper, summarizer, “master builder” who connects the article to other texts, and “Socrates” who poses questions to the group. While they work through the article—some

out loud, some silently, as per the choice offered to them—Nora and I circulate around the classroom. Listening to the conversations, I am reminded that Nora has told me that the skill-levels in this class range enormously: some students make sophisticated connections between first- and second-wave feminism, while other struggle to identify the main ideas of each paragraph. All appear to be persisting through the task. When the bell rings, however, only a few students have made it to the end of the reading. Nora tells them that their homework is to finish it, adding that tomorrow they will connect the chapter to their “warm-up” discussion by comparing the controversies around sexuality from the 1960s with those of today.

Later in the day, as I annotate my notes, I realize that in some senses I am disappointed. I note, for example, that like countless other humanities lessons I have observed, the fifty-minute period had a “hook,” a mini-lecture, and a reading: a well-trodden and, to me, fairly uninspired sequence. I also note that although Nora made room for students to share some of their thinking out loud at the beginning of class, she did little in the way of pushing them to build off of each other’s ideas or to connect subsequent content back to their discussion. As a result, their talk never took on the quality of “barn-raising” synthesis that is the hallmark of the most powerful class discussions (McCormick & Kahn, 1982). Finally, although the next day’s lesson promised to involve more opportunities for analysis and synthesis, it struck me that most of the fifty minutes was taken up by an instructional task which could be categorized as “comprehension,” situated near the bottom of traditional learning taxonomies (Marzano & Kendall, 2006).

In other senses, however, I find myself enormously taken with Nora's practice. From the moment I see her playfully engage with Juan over his dress code violation all the way through to the end-of-period bell, it seems evident that students see her as someone who not only demands but also deserves their respect. Her presence in the classroom is poised and mature; she conveys her seriousness about the endeavor of teaching and learning without resorting to threats or theatrics. I am particularly struck by Nora's brief interaction with the student who had his head down on the desk. Offhanded as it was, her *sotto voce* query—"Are you okay?"—conveyed both care and expectation; it opened space for the student to articulate his needs if necessary but also reminded him of his responsibility to be fully present during class. It is all too easy for me to imagine the more authoritarian ways that Nora might have treated this situation, and the more antagonistic responses that might have resulted on the part of the student in question.

Nora's *stance* toward her students also excited me. It seems clear that she understands that asking students to discuss their experiences of the cultural expectations around sex is an invitingly transgressive invitation. She also seems to be making a deliberate effort to acknowledge and legitimate a range of reactions to the content being discussed, and to offer real—if small—opportunities for students to make decisions about their needs. Finally, I can see that Nora is seeking to hold high expectations, enacted through the insistence that students discuss sex in mature ways as well as through the choice of a rigorous and contemporary text; I can see also that she seeks to pair these expectations with support and scaffolding, enacted through tools such as the text discussion protocol. In this pairing of expectations and support, I can make out the

outline of McCold and Wachtel's (2003) social discipline window, a framework which I know to be central to how OCA's leaders understand the RJ framework.

Most importantly, in both the implied frame and the anticipated follow-up to the lesson, I can see a Freirian desire to elevate everyday life—and students' experiences of it—to the status of “text”: something which can be analyzed and deconstructed; something which can be put in conversation with history and with theory; something which is brought from the periphery to the center. Perhaps this is what explains why Nora's students, despite their varying skill-levels and their reputation for being a management challenge, so rarely wavered in their focus during class. They seemed to trust that the lecture and reading were not intended as disjointed exercises in skill-building; their engagement suggested that they knew the lesson was building toward something interesting and worthwhile. In this light, one of the key issues at play might be *time*: with a more spacious period, the lesson might have had more of an arc, more opportunities to draw out connections, more of an analytic or conceptual destination.

While this more generous reading of Nora's practice does not fully eclipse my initial critiques, it nourishes the sense of hope that has stayed with me all day. The pedagogy that I witnessed is in its form fairly conventional, but it nevertheless seems to reflect an aspiration to be *critical*—to help students identify, analyze, critique, and ultimately transform the oppressive cultures and structures which frame their experiences (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1968/2000). And, in turn, this critical intention seems to open the door for cultivating the kind of authoritative, relational, engaged teacher stance which both restorative justice and deeper learning require.

What, I find myself wondering, motivates Nora to teach this way? In what ways is her practice the reflection of her biography, beliefs, and past experiences, and in what ways does it reflect a deliberate effort to enact the new goals that OCA has taken up? How might the practice of critical pedagogy—a practice which, despite its rich connections to the RJ framework, has not come up in the ALT’s work—draw together the two strands of the “helix” which represents OCA’s new cultural and instructional priorities? And, finally, how, if at all, does Nora attempt to translate her experiences and learning in the Gender Studies course into her work supervising and supporting the CI’s teachers?

I decide that these questions are well worth trying to understand.

From Survival to Conviction: Coming into a philosophy of teaching

Early on, much of what I know about Nora is based on her frequent postings on Facebook. I know that she enjoys novels and wine. I know that she and her husband and two daughters spend every weekend that they can in Vermont, building a micro-house and learning to grow their own food. I know that she and her eleven-year-old share a deep love of cats, and that they like to exchange feline-themed outfit suggestions: sneakers with embossed cat-faces, tee-shirts with noses and whiskers. I know that at OCA she serves as a faculty sponsor to the Gay-Straight Alliance as well as to an afterschool knitting club.

I also know that Nora practices the kind of activism that she teaches (Picower, 2012). In the October, following a summer of outrage and violence provoked by the death of Michael Brown, she invites me and the rest of her local Facebook community to a series of events sponsored by the Black Lives Matter movement. In December, she posts

a photo of herself and her two daughters—the younger one just seven—at a protest following the Richmond County grand jury’s decision not to indict the officer who killed Eric Garner. Later in the year, as the Supreme Court is deliberating on the constitutionality of state bans on same-sex marriage, she uploads a photo of a rainbow-colored crosswalk near her house, in the city that OCA’s Peabody Street campus calls home. “I love this city,” she writes beneath the image. She also is constantly posting pieces about contemporary issues: institutional racism, the gender pay-gap, transgender rights. Although my feed is flooded with content, I almost always pause to read these pieces; they are invariably substantive and thought-provoking commentaries, many from sources that lie beyond the mainstream media.

What I don’t know until later is that Nora is living a life that departs dramatically from the one that she experienced as a child and young adult. She was born in the early 1970s into what she describes as a “working-poor” family that lived in a semi-rural and predominantly White town in upstate New York. Her mother worked at a grocery store; her father worked as a facilities manager at a local air-force base. Neither held a college degree. For her part, despite a passion and talent for reading and writing, Nora did not find school to be a particularly engaging place. She characterizes her elementary and middle school years as benign but unremarkable, a blur punctuated by a few inspiring teachers. High school, by contrast, was actively painful for her. Nora tested into honors English but was “dumped” into remedial math and science, which ultimately meant that she failed to graduate with a Regents diploma. “I felt very labeled and judged by teachers,” she says. Her younger brother, she adds, felt even more alienated than she did.

“I think there was a mismatch between his identity and school,” she says. “It wasn’t that he didn’t have the skills to do well... but people weren’t trying to figure him out.”

Despite these negative experiences, Nora was intent on attending college so that she could seek job opportunities beyond the ones available to her parents. She pursued a four-year-degree at SUNY Buffalo, graduating with a minor in modern dance and a major in secondary English instruction. “It was the only thing I knew,” she says, noting that her choice to pursue a teaching career might seem surprising given her prior experiences. “As a child in that community, it was like doctor, teacher, or what my parents did... and teacher was the one that felt the most comfortable. I think that’s pretty common for people from working class backgrounds who are moving their way out.”

After spending a year working as a substitute teacher at a large high school in Buffalo, Nora moved to Manhattan, drawn to the more cosmopolitan life offered by the city. For several months she slept on a friend’s sofa and spent her days wandering around the city, hand-delivering her résumé to schools in the hopes of finding a job before her money ran out. In the evenings, she worked as a barista at Starbucks—a job that she retained until she finally received her first paycheck from Wings, an alternative high school in the Bronx where she landed a job teaching dance and, later, ninth-grade humanities. As it happened, Wings was part of Ted Sizer’s Coalition of Essential Schools. Accordingly, students were clustered into advisories that met weekly, there was very little tracking, and teachers had developed a system of portfolio assessments which replaced pen-and-paper tests. When I ask Nora whether she was drawn to Wings because its progressive practices made up for some of the shortcomings of her own high school, she laughs and shakes her head emphatically. “No. I was in survival mode, so I didn’t

have a philosophy of education at all,” she says. “I was looking for a paycheck so that I could eat.” Later, however, she reflects that she carried the Coalition’s vision and values with her into her future teaching positions.

Although Nora generally enjoyed the four years she spent at Wings, the most profound and formative part of her time teaching in New York was the eight-year period that she spent teaching at The Young Women’s Leadership School (YWLS) in East Harlem. “That was when I really fell in love with teaching,” she says. YWLS, a middle and high school serving a predominantly Black population, was the first all-girls public school to open in the United States since the passage of Title IX in 1972. As such, it sat at the center of a heated controversy around the merits and drawbacks of single-sex education. As Nora describes it, “You had to have this fierce commitment both as a teacher and as a student to work or attend the school.” She goes on to describe how, although united by this commitment, teachers were given latitude to teach however they chose so long as their work supported the goal of getting students to college. For Nora, this autonomy meant that she could continue experimenting with project-based curricula—curricula that she tried to tie to the identities and experiences of her students. One semester, for example, she designed a unit around a recent documentary, *War Zone* (1998), which was about street harassment of women in U.S. cities. “We screened it and kids did a whole project around the objectification of women and what they experienced on the streets and how it made them feel,” she says. In this description, brief as it is, I can see the outline of the kind of pedagogy that Nora has carried with her to the present—a pedagogy which embraces the contemporary over the canonical, which seeks to draw

students' everyday experiences into conversation with art and theory, and which is unapologetically critical and feminist in its stance.

By this point, Nora had met and married her husband, who was pursuing his doctorate in English at NYU. Shortly before the birth of their second child, he landed a tenure-track job that would take them to New England. Too pregnant to travel back and forth looking for a new teaching position, Nora decided to take the upcoming year off. By the following spring, however, she was ready to get back into the classroom, and after interviewing at several local schools she decided to accept a job teaching English at OCA's Upper School. In some respects, Nora tell me, this decision was a pragmatic one; OCA was willing to give her a part-time position and the Peabody Street campus was a four-minute walk from her new home, which suited her commitments as a parent of small children. In other respects, however, she was genuinely drawn to the school, especially its small size and its commitment to teacher collaboration. Plus, after many years teaching seventh grade at YWLS, she would be teaching high schoolers. "I had kind of missed the more abstract and intellectual work of being a high school teacher," she says.

After nearly fifteen years in the classroom, Nora did not anticipate a rough transition to her new professional home. By the end of her first semester at OCA in the 2008-09 academic year, however, she was readier than she had ever been to quit her job. The school, which had recently been restructured, was in the midst of a major transition: the formerly self-contained middle school had been moved to the Peabody street campus, Theo had recently left his role as Upper School Principal to become the K-12 Head of School, and a number of longtime faculty-members had left. Students were taking their sense of abandonment out on teachers, especially those who were new to the community.

“It was the hardest year I’ve ever had,” Nora says. “I felt more tested and challenged by students than I had ever felt before. Like, on the first day of school, students were giving me fake names, that kind of stuff. It was harder than starting out in the Bronx.” Things got better only gradually, she says, as she began to demonstrate to her students that she cared about them as learners and as people.

When I ask Nora to describe what she seeks to achieve through her teaching, she draws a connection between her core beliefs, her experience of being “tested” by students during her first year at OCA, and the goals of the Gender Studies class which she developed several years later.

When we talk about skills, we usually are talking about reading and writing and math, and I think that there’s not enough of an emphasis on those other types of skills like advocating for yourself, asking questions, making connections, challenging authority in a way that doesn’t undermine your position, which I think our kids don’t know how to do, and which is related to [OCA’s] school culture problems. Thinking back to the way I was challenged in my first year, there was legitimacy in what [students] were feeling towards this new person standing in front of them, but the way that they were challenging my authority was undermining their own power and effectiveness and potential. So now I do a unit on activism in my class because I want them to understand what it means to be an activist versus what it means to just be a disruptor.

Like other practitioners of critical pedagogy in urban high school contexts, Nora insists that classroom cannot be places of empowerment without an attention to foundational literacies and numeracies (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). However, rather than seeing this foundation as the be-all-end-all—a ticket to college and, by extension, into the middle class—she treats it as a point of departure, something which can and should coexist with a less instrumental set of aspirations grounded in the belief that schools should be places where students learn how to understand, navigate, and transform the power structures of the world around them. To this end, Nora does not suggest that the

reason to teach skills such as “self-advocacy” and “making connections” is because they are valued in the twenty-first century economy. Rather, she suggests that doing so represents a way to support students in channeling their frustrations and disappointments into actions that might position them to make positive changes to their realities. She thus eschews the instrumental logic that often characterizes the way that “No Excuses” schools treat “non-cognitive” skills (Golann, 2015; Thiesen-Homer, in process), adopting instead a logic that is fundamentally *critical* in its belief that schooling can and should serve as an instrument by which to promote both individual transformation and socio-political change (Freire, 1968/2000; Kincheloe, 1993; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007).

The goal of teaching students “what it means to be an activist versus what it means to just be a disruptor,” in particular, serves as a powerful shorthand for the type of pedagogy that Nora is striving to enact: a pedagogy which strives to respond to the social-emotional needs that she perceives in her students, and which simultaneously strives to engage students in complex thinking organized around what curriculum designers might call “understanding goals” (Blythe, 1998). Recognizing this, I ask Nora to tell me more about the activism unit. As I piece together the story of why and how she taught this unit, I realize that the unit as it played out earlier during this academic year reflects her most deliberate—and, by her own estimation, her most successful—effort to draw together the RJ framework with critical pedagogy in service of instruction that is both affectively powerful and intellectually rich.

Re-experiencing School as Harm

The story of the activism unit begins, Nora tells me, with her decision to “be” an OCA student for a day earlier during this academic year. It was late October of 2014; a

few weeks earlier, a blog post written by a veteran teacher-turned-instructional-coach (Wiggins & Strauss, 2014) had been making the rounds on social media. In the post, the coach described her experience of spending two days shadowing students around the high school where she had worked for many years: sitting with them in classes and during lunch, completing all classwork, taking tests. The experience, the coach wrote, was sobering: she felt disengaged from the curriculum, condescended to by adults, and exhausted by the passivity of sitting and listening all day.

Nora read the post several times over. Intrigued by the proposition of experiencing school from a different perspective, and feeling frustrated by the disruptive behavior of some of the students in her Gender Studies class, she decided to clear her schedule and spend a day as an OCA junior. “Typically I’m feeling more empathetic towards the teacher and really thinking about what is the teacher doing, what can a teacher be doing differently, almost thinking technically about teaching,” she says. “I knew that wearing a very different hat might change the takeaway.”

Nora’s quickness to incorporate this experiment into her work doesn’t surprise me. Despite her wealth of experience, she is, I have learned, a sponge when it comes to new ideas. When the ALT’s momentum around exploring constructivist teaching practices slows to a halt in January, she is the only one who continues actively to pursue the topic on her own time. When I refer to a book that I have found to be a useful curriculum planning resource, she asks to borrow my copy, reads it overnight, and brings it into our conversation the next day. Later, when a science teacher who she has been coaching shows her a new graphic organizer designed to support students in discussing a nonfiction text, Nora suggests, with genuine enthusiasm, that they each try using it on

their own. “I want to do it tonight myself with the book, and then we could compare—that would be really fun!” She flashes her colleague a smile, a sincere and almost guileless expression that lights up her whole face. This is one of many times that I see Nora welcome new ideas with eager receptivity.

Nora took pains to make sure that the day she spent as a student would be “the real deal.” The afternoon beforehand, she collected the homework assignments for the classes that she planned to attend and completed them. The next morning, she turned off her phone and deliberately left her office keys at home. She showed up to school in uniform and avoided talking to her colleagues; she ate lunch in the cafeteria and used only the student bathrooms. She instructed the teachers whose classes she attended to treat her like they would any other student, making sure that they knew she had no intention of evaluating them based on her experiences. At the end of the day, back at home, she opened a bottle of wine and took stock.

What Nora felt most acutely at first was a sense of despair. Being a student at OCA, as she had experienced it, was not merely boring or passive; it was alienating to the point of being dehumanizing.

It was a really depressing experience. I felt like I spent a day trying not to look dumb, trying to read the minds of teachers, like what answers did the teacher want me to give. Like I did all the homework the night before and I had to read an excerpt from Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the 19th Century*, which I love, and I just read the new biography of Margaret Fuller over the summer so I was like, “Oh good, I get to read Margaret Fuller and write about Margaret Fuller. I’m going to nail this.” And I had to write a thesis statement because I think they were kind of in the beginning stages of writing an essay about it. I can’t remember the exact prompt, but I remember sitting at home thinking like, “Oh, this is fun. I get to write about Margaret Fuller,” and I wrote out my answer and I got a terrible grade. [Laughs] I handed it in to the teacher in advance and I got a low score on the rubric and I didn’t understand why, because I felt like my answer to the question was so sincere and I was so sincerely excited about reading and writing

about Margaret Fuller, and it just felt like, “Oh, my thinking wasn’t [the teacher’s] thinking or I wasn’t thinking the right thing and that I don’t know what the right thing is.” And that was a really kind of hard moment for me as a teacher, it just made me think how many times kids are having that experience in my class and just how so much of school is like that. I sat there in AP biology class, and I can’t remember what the lecture but it was a lecture, and I was taking notes. I was being a completely compliant and dutiful student all day and I even asked some questions, like raised my hand and asked a couple of questions, and I walked away from the lecture thinking, “I don’t really think I learned anything.” If you ask me a couple of facts about what she just said, I could tell you but I don’t really understand those ideas. I don’t really understand anything. And it just felt like a lot of transitions. It was like seven periods of the day and like five do-nows. Five times I had to think about the learning objectives and go through this typical rhythm of a class. At the end of the day, I was exhausted. I didn’t feel like who I was as a human being mattered at all throughout that day, like my background, my identity, my ideas about the world weren’t applicable to any of the classes that I attended. And that was really sad. And so I feel like I developed so much more empathy for students and it kind of just made me feel like school was bullshit. Like, so much of school, it was this thing being done *to* you. And that was really hard.

This account underscores many of the patterns that my work with Dr. Mehta has surfaced: the emphasis that high schools tend to place on compliance over engagement (Fine, 2014); the choppiness and constraints on inquiry imposed by traditional seven-period scheduling (Mehta & Fine, 2015b); the reliance on knowledge-centered instruction that positions teachers as experts who “profess” content to their students (Mehta & Fine, 2012); and the predominance of closed-ended, low-cognitive-demand tasks (Mehta & Fine, In Press). What Nora describes, however, is in some ways even worse: a set of schooling and teaching practices which do not merely fail to nurture and deepen her engagement with academic content, but in fact *extinguish* a genuine interest that has kindled. As I listen to her account of her day, I remember how Nora has described her own experiences in high school: the ways that she felt stigmatized by teachers because she struggled in math; the ways that her brother foundered because “people weren’t

trying to figure him out”; the ways that she came to believe that school was destined to feel “fake.” I remember, too, one leader’s description of how in its “No Excuses” phase, OCA became a “soul-sucking” place which forgot to attend to students as whole people, and find myself wondering if perhaps the school has not made as much progress away from this identity as leaders might hope.

Whether consciously or not, Nora’s account of her day as a student also serves to recast the RJ framework in a way that brings it into direct conversation with issues of curriculum, instruction, and pedagogy. To this end, the “harm” that her description evokes is not only about the brokenness of the relationships between teachers and students but also about *the brokenness of the relationship between the learners and what they are supposed to be learning*—the relationship between the “I” and the “It” of the instructional triangle (Hawkins, 1964/2007). It is this relationship which Nora is most hungry to deepen; it is this relationship which the emphasis on rote knowledge and right answers systematically forecloses; and, ultimately, it is the foreclosure of this relationship which makes Nora conclude, angrily, that school “was this thing being done *to* you.” Her description thus draws a straight line between shallow, coverage-focused, teacher-centric pedagogy and the kinds of emotional responses which so often land students in the discipline system. In turn, this suggests a new application of the restorative perspective: one that sees curriculum and pedagogy as a space which is often replete with broken agreements and unmet needs, and which, as such, represents a fertile space for the work of healing and transformation.

This language and perspective is mine; it is not, at least consciously, Nora’s. However, when she describes what happened in the time that followed her day as a

student—the time that has led up to and overlapped with the start of my work with her—Nora affirms that it reflected her renewed commitment to become a restorative practitioner: to meet her students’ emotional and intellectual needs by building a classroom culture of trust and transparency, by adjusting her planning and pedagogy, and, ultimately, by devoting her work as a leader to the task of redesigning the school experience from the ground up.

Responding to Needs

What happened first was that things in Gender Studies got worse. The year prior, Nora tells me, the group of students who elected to take the class was “awesome”: articulate, engaged, and generally enthusiastic about the idea of taking a class that normally would be open to them only in college. This year’s group, however, presented a much greater challenge. Azure in particular was constantly derailing class discussions, and on Mondays, when the course met right after lunch, the whole group was often disengaged or rowdy. On the dreary November Monday following her day as a student, things hit a new low. Nora found herself unable to control her frustration. “I just exploded on them,” she says. “I just got really angry in a way that I try not to get in the classroom. I can’t remember what I said to them, but I was angry and scolding.” Her students, she said, responded by shutting down; the last few minutes of class were spent in tense and impenetrable silence.

The class did not meet on Tuesday, and Nora spent the day trying to figure out what to do. Finally, in the wee hours of the next morning, she drafted a letter that she shared with her students the next day. “Dear Gender Studies Scholars,” it began, “I wanted to start class today by apologizing.” The letter continued for two single-spaced

pages. At the beginning, Nora owned up to her behavior at the end of the last class session, acknowledging that she should have had individual conversations with the students whose behavior was bothering her instead of yelling at the whole class. She explained her goals in designing the Gender Studies course in the first place, and then went on to describe her recent experience of being an eleventh-grader for the day. In a series of bullet-points, she summarized what she took away from the experience, dwelling on how alienated she felt from the curriculum. “No one ever asked me to do anything, write anything, say anything that felt relevant to my life, to what I believe or that connected to my sense of who I am as a human being,” she wrote. Finally, she connected this experience to her frustrated outburst on Monday:

I don’t want any of you to walk away from this class feeling like your ideas about the world and your life experiences don’t count or have a place in the academic environment. I think this is why I lost it on Monday: I want so much for you all and for this class. You deserve a place where you can become stronger readers and writers and reflect on who you are and who you want to become.

Nora closed the letter with two lists: a list of what she needed from her students (“come to class on time,” “come prepared,” “respect the silent thinking and writing time built into the start of class,” “engage with me and others about ideas, not about behavior”), and a list of questions that she wanted her students to consider as they drafted a letter in response. “What do you need from me in order to thrive and learn?” the letter asked. “What do you want me to know about who you are as a student and as a person as I plan this class?”

Although it never uses the word “restorative,” Nora’s letter—which she shares with me during one of our conversations—strikes me as being an “ideal-type” example of the perspectives and aspirations of the RJ framework. To wit, it calls on nearly all of the

key components of RJ: the emphasis on taking responsibility for harms that have transpired; the focus on the needs of those who have been harmed as well as on the root causes that might have spurred the harmful actions; the effort to rectify these harms through facilitated dialogue (in this case dialogic writing); and, finally, the co-construction of new agreements based in a framework of reciprocal obligations.

When I ask Nora whether the decision to write and share the letter with her students reflected a deliberate attempt to address the Gender Studies situation in a restorative way, Nora affirms that it was. “Modelling for kids like that is one way that I’ve come to understand what it means to be a restorative teacher,” she says. She goes on to describe how her students responded after reading her letter and drafting their own letters back to her, saying that the ensuing conversation was productive and healing.

Students really appreciated my honesty and my apology and we had a conversation about the class and what they wanted to change and what they liked about it and I made sure that I was implementing their feedback. I think that it’s really hard for adults who work with kids who are hard: to apologize for our own mistakes. And kids hold onto a sense of being wronged, and adults hold onto this idea of authority. I could have treated it like I’m going to crack down on the class and on Mondays I’m going to make them sit down in their seat. But I didn’t want to do that. I wanted to pose it as a problem to them. I was making mistakes and they were making mistakes and we needed to solve it together. And things did get better.

Taken out of context, this account of the situation’s resolution might seem like it has little to do with pedagogy or instruction at all. Instead, it might come across as a story of what some would call a classroom “reset”: the culture of the room had turned toxic; the teacher lashed out in frustration; transparent dialogue helped to set things right. Understanding the backstory, however, illuminates that what was at stake in this situation for Nora was not only the desire to reestablish behavioral norms but also the desire to help students

develop authentic, meaningful, lasting relationships with what they were studying—to transform their relationships with the curriculum.

What did Nora’s Gender Studies students need in order to achieve these transformed relationships? What about the rest of OCA’s eleventh- and twelfth-graders? How could Nora, in her dual role as teacher and teacher-leader, help to transform the CI into a place where students would no longer experience school as “this thing being done *to you*”? As it turned out, the quest to answer these questions would shape Nora’s work for the rest of the year, and well into the future.

Treating Experience as Text

I remember November 25th, 2014, quite clearly. It was a chilly and damp Tuesday. As usual, I left my house by 6am so that I could catch the first train into the city. On board, I tried to review the agenda for the ALT meeting that I would be facilitating at in an hour’s time, but instead found myself obsessively scrolling through the sea of headlines posted by the *Associated Press* and *The New York Times*. Late the evening before, St. Louis County prosecuting attorney Robert McCulloch had announced that the grand jury assigned to Michael Brown’s case had decided not to indict Darren Wilson, the white police officer who had shot the unarmed Black teenager a few months earlier; the night had brought riots, fires, and violence in Ferguson and beyond. As I read, anger and horror competed with a growing anxiety about the meeting that I was about to lead. Was it reasonable to ask OCA’s twenty-five leaders to spend two hours talking about the next steps of their work around instructional improvement, given the intensity of the situation and the ways in which it likely would be rippling throughout classrooms and hallways? Should we cancel the meeting? Should I change the agenda?

Nora, too, found herself trying to figure out how to respond to the situation. It already was clear to her that the issue of institutional racism was not only “out there”; for months, she had been hearing from teachers that some of them—namely those who identified as people of color—found OCA’s professional culture to be oppressive. “They were coming to me and saying, ‘This is a really hard place to be a person of color. We feel alienated from our colleagues. We are experiencing microaggressions,’” Nora reveals. “It became pretty clear that this was not a culturally responsive institution.” She adds that she herself has found it difficult to work with teachers who are “predominantly young and novice and privileged” given that she identifies as none of these things. Although Nora recognized that the events in Ferguson lent even greater urgency to the task of addressing OCA’s professional culture issues, however, she found herself uncertain about how to undertake such work.

She felt much clearer when it came to her students. After the letter and the ensuing dialogue a few weeks earlier, things in Gender Studies had gotten better; students generally were focused and engaged. Now, however, she could see that strictly adhering to her pre-planned curriculum—a curriculum which asked students to engage in a historical study of gender-based activism throughout the twentieth century—would be setting things up for failure. Her students, she could sense, desperately needed a space to process the hurt and anger were feeling, and she felt responsible for creating it. “Their need was palpable,” she says. “I mean, it was absolutely there. They were just waiting for adults to make it okay to talk about it.”

At first, Nora treated the discussions about Ferguson as a kind of add-on, a strand that ran in parallel to the lessons that she had planned. Quickly, however, it became clear

that the need to talk about recent events was, for many of her students, a kind of bottomless hunger. The Eric Garner grand jury decision, released ten days after the Michael Brown decision, intensified the situation. By treating the two grand jury decisions only superficially, Nora realized, she would be falling into the trap of alienating students from what happened in school and, in so doing, recreating the tensions that had dogged the class for the past months. She also realized that discussing structural racism was a way to engage her students in the kind of critically aware thinking that she had been trying to support in Gender Studies all along. Last but not least, she herself was deeply troubled about the grand jury decisions, and making space to discuss them in more depth seemed like a good way to steer into the intersection between her own experiences and perspectives and those of her students.

Abandoning several weeks' worth of plans, Nora decided to make the grand jury decisions and the Black Lives Matter movement a much more central part of the activism unit. She also decided to add in a project component—a performance task which asked students to *practice* activism, and which, in so doing, opened the door for some of them to transform their outrage into productive action. She explains her decision:

I shifted a lot about the course in response to who the kids were and what they were asking not just of me personally but of the school. I saw and understood that [the two grand jury decisions] had a huge impact on all of my kids and I wanted to give them an opportunity to make sense of that and apply theoretical frameworks and ways of understanding structural inequality to what was happening around them. So we talked about how to understand that in the context of a gender studies class and how, you know, like the whole first unit of the class was about understanding gender as a social construct and understanding that you can't talk about gender without also talking about race and class, like interlocking hierarchies, and then looking at the way gender, race and class are policed in our society. And we talked about how to understand what happened and understand our reactions to what happened and the different versions of those reactions in the context of understanding race and class and gender as social constructs. We talked

about the hyper-sexualization of black male masculinity and the way that's policed, and they talked a lot about how that's policed in the hallways by teachers. That wasn't part of the class last year. So the project and a lot of that unit became central to the course, and it was because the kids were hurting and I needed to respond to that and give them a way to feel like they had some control in the world and could actually be agents of change. And, I mean, some of those activism projects were explicitly about the impact that those grand jury decisions had on our students.

The language that Nora uses here has two distinct registers. Much of it is academic, emphasizing the concepts that she seeks to support her students in understanding: “interlocking hierarchies,” “hyper-sexualization of black male masculinity,” “race and class and gender as social constructs.” This is the language of planning and of pedagogy; it is tied to cognitive goals involving understanding and mastery. Nora also draws on a much simpler register: “I shifted a lot about the course in response to who the kids were...they were hurting and I needed to respond.” This is the language of intuition and empathy; it is tied to affective goals involving meeting students' social-emotional needs. Nora's description of the activism unit thus gestures toward the ways in which the particular kind of instruction that she practices draws together the emphasis that the RJ framework places on affective experiences with the emphasis that the DL framework places on conceptual understandings.

As Nora had hoped, the activism projects allowed many of her students to process the situation “out there” in ways that brought it into conversation with realities of their experiences both inside and outside of school. For some, this meant simply paying the situation more attention. One student, a Black senior who admits that his initial response to the grand jury decisions was a superficial one, reflected in an analytic essay on the lasting impact that co-writing and recording a rap song about them had on his self-perception:

The project taught me that I actually have more to speak of the issue than I thought. Initially, my thoughts were mundane because I simply said, ‘that’s messed up.’ Then when I began to work on this project I became more interested in not only police brutality, but also other acts of social injustice. Personally, what motivated me to do the song was Tamir Rice, a twelve-year-old kid who was shot for playing with a toy. His death especially gets to my mind because he was younger than my little brother, so I started to fear for his life. What politically motivated me was seeing the shooters of Mike Brown and Eric Gardner [sic] getting set free. [...] So I went from being barely interested into making personal songs on the matter.

For other students, the project offered a space for them to transform anger and outrage into a course of targeted action. This was particularly true for the group of Gender Studies students who got involved in the process of organizing a protest and “die in” downtown—an event which involved more than 100 students from OCA and two other schools. One group, a trio of boys who all identify as students of color, made a five-minute documentary film in which they showed photographs from the protest, screened clips of interviews they had conducted with students and faculty about race relations at the school, and challenged the school community to talk about race and racism more openly. “Dear [OCA],” the scrolling text in the opening of the film reads, “Your silence scares me.”

At points, the film seems to lose its through-line; the students who made it clearly have a long way to go when it comes to understanding how to craft an argumentative arc. Even so, the emotional intensity which undergirded the film’s making comes through clearly, as does the meta-level intent of the project: the filmmakers quite literally have turned their experiences into texts. As one student tells me in a focus group later:

The activism project—that’s something I won’t forget.... Like for the first time since I’ve been at [OCA] I was actually in a class where it’s not just learning about addition or subtraction, it’s not just binary ideas. It’s everything interlocking. Like, you’re learning, but you’re using what you’re learning to learn about something else or to do something. You’re using *everything*.

The activism project thus serves as a living illustration of the power and richness of Nora’s critical-restorative pedagogy—and an example which suggests how students might experience school differently if more teachers were able to capitalize on the synergies between RJ and deeper learning.

When I later describe this interpretation to Nora and ask if it resonates with her own thinking—what qualitative researchers call a “member check” (Creswell & Miller, 2000)—she does not immediately respond. Characteristically serious and thoughtful, she sits in silence for what feels like a long time, and I find myself wondering if perhaps my efforts at theory-building feel overly remote from her lived experiences. Knowing Nora quite well at this point, however, it is clear to me that she sees the role of theory within her work as an important one; this suggests to me that the act of theorizing *about* her work is something she likely will take seriously. Her response affirms this prediction. “Yes, I think that that’s where I am in my understanding of restorative instruction,” she finally says. “It’s about the relationships that I have with my students as individuals both inside and outside of the classroom and about somehow creating space in the context of teaching and planning for students to share what they need and who they are and for you to respond to that and sometimes let them drive.” She adds, after another pause, “I think I’ve learned a lot about that this year.”

Redesign as Restoration

Letting them drive. It is this phrase that returns to me as I sit in a narrow first-floor classroom with Nora and two of the CI English teachers that she will be supervising next year, Jeremy and John. It’s a bright morning in late April. Outside the windows, the

maples are heavy with yellow-green blooms. After such an endless winter, the light and color come as an enormous relief, and in OCA's hallways I can sense a return of hope.

A lot has happened since I first began observing and talking with Nora. The ALT has been wading through the rubric creation process and has, at long last, reached some tentative clarity about how the tool will be used. A cross-campus stakeholder group has begun the search for a new Upper School principal; a different group has been interviewing candidates for the new Head of School. Across all of these happenings, the conversation about "restorative instruction" has continued to evolve, although there is nothing that yet resembles clarity.

My work with Nora has continued to evolve, too. In Gender Studies, as a way of deepening her understanding of constructivist teaching practices so that she can focus on these practices in her coaching work next year, she has been experimenting with some of the instructional routines outlined in *Making Thinking Visible* (Ritchhart et al., 2011)—routines which seek to organize instruction around students' sense-making processes. Although I initially tried to remain in the role of participant-observer, Nora made it clear that she was hungry for a thought-partner, and so I found myself drawn into the process of supporting her. Most recently, she has been piloting the "claim-support-question" routine as students discuss the landmark feminist film *Thelma and Louise* (1991), trying to help them learn to interrogate and push each other's thinking more deliberately and strategically. It is complex but rewarding work, and as it proceeds I am continually impressed with how Nora balances an eagerness to expand her repertoire of pedagogical tools with an unwillingness to compromise her core convictions about the importance of

situating course content within critical discourses and asking students what they need in order to feel connected to what they study.

The meeting I am watching today is about a strand of work which, at least on its face, is connected more to Nora's leadership than to her teaching: the redesign of OCA's Peabody Street campus. Although the redesign has come to involve nearly half of the ALT's members, it was originally conceived and proposed by Nora and her colleague Valerie, the Principal of the CI, as a way both to address the persistent discipline and culture problems at the Upper School and to bolster the CI's efforts to offer rigorous, engaging, college-like classes. To this end, the redesign involves three main components: physically separating the campuses by shifting how the two Peabody street buildings are used; creating a fully-staffed RJ resource center that can support restorative discipline at both campuses; and overhauling the CI's schedule and curricular offerings so that students choose among semester-long, block-scheduled, thematically-organized English, social studies, and science courses.

This last component of the redesign is the one that Nora has been most involved in supporting, and it is directly related to the philosophy and practices that she has developed in the context of her own teaching. To this end, she tells me, the goal of the CI redesign is not just to make the eleventh- and twelfth-grade experience look and feel more like college; it is to move toward a model of instruction which emphasizes not only skills but also conceptual understandings, and which gives students more opportunities to exercise agency. "Students will have more choice, they'll have fewer classes in the day, and there will be more opportunities to do project-based learning," she tells me. For teachers, too, she continues, the redesign entails a significant shift. In particular, she

seeks to support teachers in thinking differently about the goals of their courses, and about the responsiveness of these goals to student-articulated needs:

It involves thinking differently about content, thinking differently about unit design, assessments, implementation...we want the skills to still be a thread that runs throughout—that has to be a part of schooling—but we want the classes to also be about themes and ideas. Like, not just what do we want [students] to be able to *do*, but what do we want them to know and understand? And what do *they* want to know and understand? What interests them, what’s relevant to them, what engages them?

What Nora doesn’t say, but what comes through clearly in her description, is that the CI’s new structure will open the door for more courses to become like Gender Studies: spaces which value students’ backgrounds and ideas about the world, which invite them to bring their experiences into ongoing conversation with course content, and which offer them opportunities to “drive.”

As I reflect on it, I also notice that there seems to be a striking parallel between Nora’s work on the redesign and her students’ work on their activism projects. To wit, in the same ways that Nora’s students were able to channel their hurt and anger into activism, Nora has found a way to channel her recent experience of “school [being] bullshit” into an effort at change leadership. This work is not mainly guided by OCA’s new vision, she tells me, although the list of descriptors on the “green monster” document are “a part of what we’re trying to move towards.” Rather, the redesign is guided by her experiences teaching over the years, and in particular her recent experiences with her Gender Studies students; these have become key “texts” on which she relies as she engages in the complex and sometimes tedious task of transforming the CI into a different kind of school.

This morning's meeting promises to be an interesting one. A few days ago, Nora met briefly with Jeremy and John to launch the process of discussing the CI's new goals and structures; now, she has found a way to release them from their morning teaching responsibilities so that they can engage in a three-period-long retreat to decide on the topics, themes, and essential questions for the courses that they will teach next fall. From my perspective, I am eager to observe this work, since it presents an opportunity to see how Nora attempts to translate what she is striving to do as a teacher into her work as an instructional leader.

I settle in for the session. The four of us sit around a rectangular table toward the front of the classroom, chatting about the warmer weather and our plans for the upcoming school vacation. Jeremy, a native New Englander in his early thirties who is known around campus for being a Brad Pitt look-alike, has taught upper-grade English at OCA for eight years. He is wearing a striped gray tie and a sky-blue button-down that mirrors the intense hue of his eyes. John, a Brit in his mid-twenties, has been teaching middle school social studies for four years. He dresses more casually than his colleague and sports a scraggly beard. Both are White men from upper-middle-class backgrounds. They have never worked together before, and in their initial interactions there is an undercurrent of uncertainty and guardedness.

Nora, for her part, is wearing a colorful southwestern poncho over a long-sleeved black shirt. She has recently cropped her hair short, a bold and slightly edgy cut that accentuates her cheekbones. She opens the meeting with characteristic seriousness and purposefulness. She thanks Jeremy and John for taking time away from their students to do this work, then jumps right to talking about the ways that she wants instruction at the

redesigned CI to be different. “Since I’ve been here, skills have been the driver of our instruction and our pedagogical choices. They have reigned supreme,” she says. “What we’re trying to do is to balance that with understandings—with *ideas*. We don’t want to throw away all of the things we’ve done around helping kids to be stronger readers and writers, but we need to give kids more frameworks for understanding the world around them and the world inside the texts they read.” Jeremy and John nod; this is a review from the conversation they had with Nora a few days back. Gesturing to the google document that the three of them have created, which she has pulled up on her laptop, Nora says that the goal by the end of the three-hour session is for them to have populated the document with some first stabs at course overviews, including course-catalogue descriptions, understanding goals, essential questions, and possible texts.

Nora turns to me and explains that Jeremy and John spent last Saturday at a workshop about “design thinking,” and that they are excited about the idea of trying to apply the process to the course-planning task. “I’m not planning to say too much or facilitate, because you guys know a lot more about this design thinking stuff than I do,” she says. Jeremy nods, but requests that Nora not censor herself when it comes to offering input along the way. “We want your thoughts—as an English teacher,” he says, with a slight smile that seems to indicate his awareness of the multiple roles that she is balancing. He then pulls up a document on his computer and shares it with John and Nora. In order to adopt the user-centered perspective that is the hallmark of design thinking, he says, he conducted “empathy interviews” with his current 11th grade students in which he asked them to describe books that they have enjoyed reading, books that have challenged them to become stronger readers and thinkers, and genres/topics/themes for

books that they would be “excited to read” next year. As they talked, he scribed notes on what they said; these notes are what he has shared with John and Nora.

The three colleagues take a few minutes to look over the data. Afterward, they share out some of the patterns that they see: most students seemed to report enjoying texts that connected to their lives; some students talked highly of texts that asked them to “think really hard” while others wanted to tackle stories that were more “relatable”; students ranged widely in the kinds of genres that they report enjoying. “I don’t know how helpful this is,” Jeremy comments after the group has finished sharing out, “but I like the idea of starting this process with the ‘users.’” Nora nods emphatically. Later, she asks Jeremy to share the resources that he has on design thinking—another indication of her eagerness to find tools which align with her perspectives and goals.

The group moves on to the “ideate” phase of the design process: the phase devoted to generating as many ideas as possible before selecting a path forward. Jeremy says that in order to do this, he needs an answer to a question that the group began discussing in their first meeting: how much, if at all, should canonical literature factor into their course-planning? He looks quizzically at Nora, inviting her to move temporarily back into her role as a leader. She says that she has been puzzling over this question for several days, and that she asked her husband, an English professor at a local university, whether he has noticed a difference between undergraduates who do and don’t enter his class with deep knowledge of the canon. “He said that it really didn’t make much difference—what matters a lot more is their ability to close-read and write analytically,” she says. “I’m curious, though: did either of you have more thoughts about that question since we talked?” After a moment, Jeremy responds. “I think I’ve decided

that the only real argument for knowing the canon is the emotional impact of being in a college class with a bunch of White kids who are referencing books that you haven't read—but I think our students are always going to feel like they're playing catch-up with that," he says. "Plus, it would be cool to embolden our kids to represent texts that aren't already in the canon." Nora looks at John, who nods in agreement. She waits to see if he wants to add anything. "Great," she says, after a pause. "We'll have to have a serious conversation down the line about the text *features* we want to make sure all kids are familiar with, but for now let's agree that you'll let yourselves range really widely when you think about what texts you might teach."

For the next thirty minutes, Jeremy, John, and Nora work rapidly to develop a "flurry" of possible topics and structures around which to organize their courses. They write down ideas on sticky-notes and put them up on the whiteboard, adding things as they think of them. The possibilities for topics range widely: journalism, immigration, travel, war, government, sports, violence, dystopia, money, community, empire, love and flirtation, race. John floats the idea that perhaps one of the courses could revolve around literature circles rather than shared whole-class texts. Jeremy proposes the idea of structuring a course that has no pre-set texts at all; instead, students would gather "stories of their communities and the people around them" and use these to decide what books to read. John, riffing off of this idea, says that he can imagine a course whose content evolved in relation to whatever current events were "hottest" and most salient to students' lives. "That would be really authentic and possibly really constructivist," Jeremy says enthusiastically, flashing his colleague a smile that is warm and—for the first time this

morning—completely unguarded. Jeremy adds their new ideas to the list: “choice texts,” “community as text,” “current events / anything that appears.”

Nora, who has remained quiet, chimes in. “This is great,” she says. “As I’m thinking about it, I’m thinking that you could take any of these topics and have some of what kids read be teacher-generated and some of it be kid-generated so that it’s connected to the world that they live in.” Jeremy and John nod energetically. Jeremy gestures to the board, saying, “This is such a good list—are we supposed to erase some of these now?” He looks at John questioningly, seeking an answer about how the design process is supposed to unfold. John says that maybe they should each put check-marks next to two topics that they want to build out as prototypes. Nora adds that it might be useful for them to think about what they are personally excited to teach. “Think about where who you are overlaps with what you think the kids will get excited about,” she says. Jeremy says that he would be excited to teach a course on love stories or on race, adding that he recently read a novel about the Dominican Republic—Díaz’s *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*—that he adored and wants to teach. John says that he is drawn to teaching war or “post-colonial stuff,” since it involves his personal background as a citizen of the United Kingdom. He adds that the socioracial legacy of colonial power-structures is a topic that he thinks students will find “engaging” and “relevant.”

Several things strike me as I observe this portion of the process. First, it is clear that the three teachers are in agreement that the main goal of this work is to figure out how they can make their courses more reflective of students’ identities and needs—to set up the conditions for restoring students’ relationships with the curriculum. This suggests that Nora—and perhaps also Valerie, who initially presented the CI’s faculty with the

plans to make changes to the two Peabody street campuses—has done a good job of communicating the underlying values that motivate the CI redesign. It is also clear that the process of imagining how to actualize these values through course design is in some senses restorative for Jeremy and John as professionals; their increasingly energetic engagement suggests a sense of renewed excitement about teaching as an act centered on connections and creativity, rather than on constraints and compliance. This engagement is nourished, it seems, by Nora's willingness to step back; she sets up clear parameters for the work, but then allows the two teachers to "drive." Finally, I am struck by how Nora encourages the two men to consider the intersection between their own identities, interests, and needs and those of their students. Without being overly prescriptive, she encourages her colleagues to conceptualize powerful teaching as teaching which, beyond the necessary but prosaic questions of standards and sub-skills, involves finding a broadly-conceived "best fit" between the needs and identities of teachers and learners—a conception that she herself strives to live in her Gender Studies class.

The next phase of the process is the prototype phase. John and Jeremy each choose one of their topics of interest to build out into a rapidly-developed skeleton syllabus. They work silently for thirty minutes and then, somewhat tentatively, present their work to each other. The task of translating vague ideas into actual syllabi is a difficult one; the tone of their dialogue is more sober than before. "I definitely didn't meet my own expectations for this," says Jeremy doubtfully as he projects his brainstorming document onto the whiteboard. "You know, coming up with the best class I could ever imagine." "It's a judgement-free zone, dude," John responds wryly. Jeremy

laughs. In their banter, I can sense a fragile but growing sense of collegiality—a kernel that might, with time, grow into a robust and trusting partnership.

Nora is gone for this portion of the retreat; she is substituting for Jeremy's second-period class. I find it striking that she is willing to treat the unglorified work of substitute-teaching as a way to support the teachers in her charge. Her willingness to let Jeremy and John continue the work on their own also conveys an implicit sense of trust in their ability to move forward without her guidance. Still, when she returns, the two teachers recap to her what they have presented to each other. John's course is titled "Ideas and Empire: A study of post-colonial literature." He has come up with one possibility for an essential question—"To what extent can you change and challenge a narrative that has already been accepted?"—and has listed some core texts: Said's *Orientalism*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The performance task, he describes, would be a presentation on an emerging country. "It has relevance because some of our students come from other parts of the world," he says.

Nora listens carefully and hesitates before responding. I wonder if she, like me, has some doubts about the geographically wide-ranging nature of the texts, as well as about Jeremy's ability to make a fairly conventional research task feel meaningful to students. "I think you could get some really engaged thinking around this topic," she says, finally. "The biggest challenge for this class is getting kids into the texts, though. If they're about cultures that kids are unfamiliar with and they draw on histories that kids are unfamiliar with I can imagine kids just feeling lost. So getting them a lot of the historical and contextual information that allows them to grapple with the ideas inside the texts is the trick." She echoes a suggestion that Jeremy has made, which is to focus on

post-colonialism as it plays out in one particular geographic area. The three of them play around with some possibilities, dwelling on the Caribbean, a region where many of OCA's families have roots. John seems open to these ideas, but expresses some hesitation about the idea of going "deep" rather than broad. "I just want to make sure that they have some choice," he says.

Jeremy's course prototype is titled "American Literature: Racial conflict and legacy." He says that he hasn't found the right wording for the essential question, but that it would be something along the lines of "Who is secretly controlling you?" "That's a little too basic," he says, apologetically. "I'm trying to get at the idea of institutionalized racism and what you're born into—like the idea that there are invisible forces that have dictated who you are or who you could eventually become. Something about that concept is just really compelling to students." He says he is stuck on the question of texts; he knows that he wants to teach Wright's *Native Son* and *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, but he also wants to include some choice texts and also possibly a play. As an end-of-course performance assessment, he imagines having student construct case studies of themselves or people that they know as a way to explore and answer the essential question. John comments enthusiastically on these ideas. "Straight away, the rationale and the overview is so relevant to our students, they live and breathe it, so you wouldn't need to sell it," he says. Nora says that she agrees. Jeremy seems reluctant to accept the praise. "I'm just really stuck on the question of texts—I want to find a contemporary text about race in America which might get at institutionalized racism," he says. Nora says that she has some nonfiction anthologies that would work; she also suggests Kincaid's *A Small Place*. "Those stories are so amazing," she says with a kind

of reverent appreciation. “I mean you as a reader end up feeling totally implicated—like you become the antagonist in those stories.” As it so often is, her enthusiasm and intellectual seriousness is contagious. Jeremy says that he’d love to borrow a copy of the book to vet it for the course.

By this point, the three hours are up. As the three colleagues pack up their laptops, they discuss the question of standardization across the humanities courses. Nora shares some of her own confusions: “We definitely want the books to be rigorous—what does that mean, I don’t know, we have to figure it out—and one class shouldn’t be wildly easier in terms of reading and writing. But I think text features and text variety are important. I’ll keep thinking about it and you should too,” she says to Jeremy and John. The two teachers nod, and the three of them agree to initiate a scheduling conversation by email to find a time to continue this work together. Without much fanfare, they hustle off into the bustling hallway to make their way to their next obligations.

Alone in the empty classroom, I have a few minutes to take stock of this last portion of the retreat and I find myself pondering the way that Nora so rapidly and seamlessly seems to move back and forth across the teacher/leader boundary. On the one hand, I note to myself, this movement is perhaps a bit problematic. To wit, were I a teacher in Jeremy and John’s position, I might find myself slightly frustrated by the lack of clear parameters and non-negotiables—a similar dilemma as the one which plagued the ALT’s work on the new rubric. How, for example, is it possible to forge forward with the task of course-design without a clear answer about what genres of text need to be included in the syllabi? And shouldn’t establishing a shared definition of rigor come *before* digging into the particulars of course design?

On the other hand, Nora's openness about the uncertainties that still surround the redesign seems reasonable given the circumstances—and her stance is pitch-perfect. With these two seasoned teachers, she is transparent and collaborative, inviting them into the process of thinking about how to resolve some of the big questions involved in redesigning the CI's model of humanities teaching. In this sense, she is undertaking this work *with* her colleagues, rather than doing it *to* them or *for* them; she thus embraces the power-sharing model that RJ so often requires. At the same time, however, she exudes a quiet authority; her vision and values, though understated, seem to anchor and guide the work, steering both John and Jeremy in the direction of the kind of critical-restorative pedagogy that she aspires to practice in her own classroom. Her words from one of our first interviews return to me, imbued with a new sense of importance: "I think teachers trust me as an instructional leader because I'm in the work with them, and I'm figuring it out with them, and I'm figuring it out with them by doing it myself."

Humanism and the blurring of boundaries

What warrants are there for using the term "critical-restorative" to describe the kind of pedagogy that Nora is striving to enact and to support her colleagues in enacting? How, in other words, does Nora's approach depart from other versions of "good" teaching?

The simplest answer to the first question is that the choice of terminology reflects the ways that Nora herself sees her work. With regard to the word "critical," the way that Nora describes the goals of her Gender Studies course vividly evokes the work of Freire, whose practice of problematizing sociopolitical power structures by asking learners to view their experiences as texts has become a hallmark of critical pedagogy (Freire,

1968/2000; Riordan & Callier, In Press). Nora's teaching also evokes the work of feminist philosopher-educator bell hooks, whose notion of "engaged pedagogy" is generally viewed as an extension of and/or variation on Freirian pedagogy (1994, 2000). A similar set of resonances holds true with respect to the term "restorative." To wit, as described earlier, Nora affirms that her focus on being attentive and responsive to her students' needs, as well as her decision to "let them drive" and her emphasis on helping them to achieve transformed relationships with the curriculum, reflects a deliberate effort to bring her practice into alignment with the values of the RJ framework. Thus, to label Nora's instruction as critical-restorative is to honor "native" understandings, regardless of how these interpretations do or do not conform to external criteria (Geertz, 1977).

That said, Nora is not alone in drawing connections between the perspectives and practices associated with the RJ framework and those associated with critical pedagogy. As explored at length in Chapter 3, the small amount of writing which tackles the implications of the RJ framework for curriculum and instruction virtually all emphasizes the notion that RJ is deeply rooted in the emancipatory vision associated with Freire and hooks. Vaandering, for example, insists that the frameworks which anchor the work of restorative educators must emphasize the primacy of Freirian humanism:

Is a transmissive model of education employed where students take in knowledge simply for the purpose of performing well on tests so that department standards are upheld? Or are transformative models of education employed which honour the insights and ability of the students so that teachers and students walk *with* each other? [...] Do [students] recognise what they are learning as significant for how they and others engage with all aspects of this world? Do they see their responsibility in interacting with teachers and peers as holding potential for supporting and encouraging their humanity? (2013, p. 329).

These questions, which deliberately draw together the perspectives and values of critical pedagogy with those of RJ, are certainly ones that Nora seems to be asking herself. This

is not to say that her inclination and ability to teach in the ways that she does evolved *because* she works in school that has adopted RJ; there is ample evidence that the seeds of her current practice are rooted in experiences which predate her time at OCA, as well as evidence that her experimentation with project-based learning was spurred by broader public events rather than solely by a desire to become a more restorative practitioner. However, perhaps by happy coincidence, the RJ framework makes for a particularly good epistemological fit with her vision and values, and as such it has given her a productive set of lenses by which to interrogate, deepen, and transform her work.

None of this contradicts the fact that Nora's practice is "good" in ways which transcend the specific worlds of RJ and critical pedagogy. Her work resonates, for example, with notions of goodness as they are constructed by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983): it is self-conscious and self-critical; it is not static or self-satisfied; it is anchored in clear and coherent values but also focused on growth. Nora's teaching also conforms to the tripartite conception of "good work" that Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon (2002) describe: it involves dimensions of technical mastery; it is grounded in a clear sense of moral obligation; and it proves deeply absorbing, if also sometimes frustrating. It also aligns to a number of domain-specific notions of excellence. In its effort to make transparent the teacher's role as a co-learner, it meets several of the criteria that Ladson-Billings (1995) attaches to her theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, as well as to the criteria for "culturally sustaining" pedagogy that subsequent theorists have offered in response (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). In its aspiration to support collaborative sense-making which empowers students to think of themselves actively in relation to what they are learning, it resonates with Lampert's richly constructivist view of "deeper

teaching” (2015). Finally, Nora’s work in the Gender Studies course aligns with the deeper learning framework described in Chapter 1 (Mehta & Fine, 2015b, In Press): it asks learners to work toward mastery within a given domain of knowledge; it seeks to both reflect and influence learners’ beliefs about who they are; and, finally, it asks learners to deploy and deepen their knowledge through acts of creative contribution.

These connections do not negate the particular salience of critical pedagogy and the RJ in Nora’s practice. Rather, they serve to illustrate the fact that her practice reflects an effort to attend holistically to a multidimensional set of goals. As a teacher and a leader of teachers, Nora is striving to actualize a vision of instruction which, by balancing concerns about relevance and authenticity with concerns about foundational skills and rigor, meets both the academic and social-emotional needs of her students. She is, in short, seeking to attend simultaneously to the cold and the warm, the cognitive and the affective, the instructional and the cultural. As a result, even as it remains anchored in two specific frameworks, her work is able to achieve many of the aspirations described by those who seek to imagine what classrooms can be at their best.

This multidimensionality is reflected in Nora’s interpretation of OCA’s new instructional vision. Early in our work, when I bring this vision up in conversation, she laughs somewhat dismissively. “I don’t think that the green piece of paper is a vision; I think it’s just a list of things, and it’s not clear to me how all of those things work together to form a vision as opposed to a list of menu items.” Later, however, when I ask her to talk about the priorities that guided her work during a recent Gender Studies lesson, she points to three of the vision’s descriptors: social-emotional, culturally responsive, and student-centered. “It’s really hard for me to talk about those things in

isolation from one another,” she says. When I ask her why this is the case, her response is a resounding affirmation of humanism. “I think it’s for the same reason I can’t separate race, class and gender,” she says. “Ultimately, we’re talking about *people*.”

It is a splendid Tuesday morning in early June. The ALT as a whole is not meeting this morning; instead, Ellery, Nora, and one of the Upper School’s instructional coaches have convened to start working on the development of a website where OCA’s instructional leaders can download resources, videos, and other teaching tools aligned with the school’s new vision. The site will be called the “Guide to Restorative Instruction,” and, as determined by the campus leaders, it will focus on three specific strands are linked to the school’s new priorities: collaborative learning strategies, visible thinking strategies, and restorative classroom culture and management strategies.

Although the group is small, they start with “connections,” a culture-building routine which many leaders across the school use at the beginnings of meetings to open space for participants to talk about what is going on in their lives. It was during a round of connections several weeks ago when I learned that Nora’s younger child—Julia, the seven-year-old—is in the process of changing genders. Julia long has identified more as a boy than as a girl, Nora tells me in private afterward, and now s/he is ready to begin assuming a new identity: Julius. Although Nora is not enormously forthcoming with me about her experience of the transition process, her eyes well up as she talks, and I can sense how much intensity and confusion it involves even despite her many years as a vocal champion of LGTBQ rights.

This morning it is Ellery who has the most to say during connections. She talks about how last night she had dinner at Nora's house along with five OCA alums who just returned from completing their freshman year of college. Along with me and several CI teachers, these alums recently served as panelists to whom Nora's Gender Studies students presented their portfolios. The dinner, apparently, was Nora's way of thanking the alums for their participation. "It was really amazing and moving to hear how enraged they are at the state of humanity," Ellery says, with almost reverent enthusiasm. "They're just so 'over it' when people aren't up to speed on race or class or gender or privilege." She meets Nora's eye. "I give you total credit for giving them the words for those things," she says.

Nora shrugs dismissively. "It wasn't just me or my class," she says in response to Ellery's compliment. After a moment, however, she breaks into a smile. "I have to say, though, it was pretty great when [student name] walked in. She didn't even say hello, she was just like, [Nora], guess what we were talking about on the way over here? *Gender!*"

I am not surprised at this point to hear that Nora has chosen to spend her after-hours time this way. It is clear that her relationships with students don't end after they have graduated, nor do her relationships with the work of spreading feminism and enacting social transformation end after the last bell of the day has rung. The boundaries between who she is as a professional and who she is as a person are, by design, blurry; she carries her convictions and her commitments with her wherever she goes. She is, as one of my own colleagues likes to say, fearlessly authentic—and her authenticity inspires those around her to stay engaged, stay "enraged," and stay attentive to each other's needs.

Epilogue

Toward a Broader View of School Coherence

“It is impossible to change very much without changing most of everything.”

--TheodoreSizer, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 1983

When I began drafting this manuscript in June of 2016, my outlook on the world was a relatively optimistic one. The U.S.’s first Black president, a model of intellect and integrity, was wrapping up the final months of a productive eight-year term. The first woman to become a major political party’s presidential nominee seemed poised take his place. Even the world of education policy seemed a bit brighter than usual, with the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act suggesting that American public schools might be able to move toward a healthier balance between autonomy and accountability.

Then, on the evening of November 8th, 2016, the unthinkable happened: a racist, xenophobic, misogynistic, and in all other respects socially and politically retrogressive candidate won the presidential election.

In the days and weeks which followed, reports of surging hate crimes flooded my inbox and social media feeds. Muslim women were being heckled on subways. Swastikas were appearing in public spaces. Hostile comments aimed at just about every marginalized group were being made in bars and banks and grocery-stores. Horrifyingly, this surge of harassment and bigotry also was sweeping the nation’s schools. At DeWitt Junior High School in Michigan, for example, a group of White male students, echoing the president-elect’s promises to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, reportedly formed a human wall to block minority students from reaching their lockers (Durr, 2016).

This was one among a seemingly endless string of similar election-related incidents in schools across the country.

When I read about what happened in DeWitt, the first thing I felt was a resurgence of the nausea that had swept over me on the night of the election. The second thing I felt, close on the heels of the first, was an intense skepticism that the school's administration possessed the tools to handle the incident adequately. Knowing nothing about the DeWitt JHS community but knowing too well the ways that American schools tend to approach discipline, I imagined that administrators would round up the offenders, give them a talking-to, dole out suspensions to the ringleaders, and, perhaps, issue a statement. I also knew that if this was how things went down, it wouldn't be enough. Not enough to stem the tide of mistrust and fear which likely would continue to rise in the school and the broader community. Not enough to help the victims to heal. Not enough to support the offenders in developing greater capacities for perspective-taking as they grew into card-carrying, power-wielding, vote-casting adults.

In my opinion, what DeWitt Junior High needed—what *all* of the schools that I was reading about in the news needed—was restorative justice.

On Facebook, I posted an article which described what had happened at DeWitt. I prefaced the link to the piece with the following comment:

THIS is why schools need restorative justice and restorative practices—and beyond fancy names, why we need a whole generation of educators who recognize the imperative for schools to be places of empathy and peacemaking and skillfully facilitated encounters between children (and adults) who “other” each other. Because I have ZERO trust that the response of the administration here means anything. Likely the offenders of the “disrespect” will be excluded briefly from school, which will do nothing but inflame their sense of righteousness and collective identity as budding white supremacist oppressors. And the victims, in their turn, will get nothing, least of all the chance to sit down

face-to-face with those who have harmed them and demonstrate that they are, in fact, human.

I was startled by the force of my own conviction. Even after a year spent observing a school which was trying to become more restorative and another year spent teasing out the “goodness” of its efforts (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), I had not thought of myself as a restorative justice (RJ) advocate per se. When asked about my opinions of the framework, I articulated a carefully balanced set of beliefs: namely, that I saw RJ as a promising vehicle by which schools can pursue equity and focus on the relational dimensions of teaching and learning, but that I did not see it as the be-all-end-all way to do these things, and that I also had questions about whether many U.S. schools were ready to make the kinds of commitments required to do RJ well.

Now, however, all traces of hesitation had vanished. Literally overnight, I had come to view RJ, with its emphasis on interconnectedness, its elevation of love and empathy over control and fear, and its insistence on disrupting structural inequalities, as being *exactly* what U.S. schools need to become more humanizing and (small “d”) democratic institutions—ready or not as they might be to do so. Perhaps I would have arrived at this conclusion at some point regardless, but the election forced the issue.

Less surprising was that the election also reinforced my commitment to transforming schools into places where students regularly engage in deeper learning (DL). It seemed beyond obvious to me that in this new era, more so than ever before, schools would need to equip students with a range of lenses by which to understand, navigate, and question the world around them. After all, a widespread lack of critical thinking was arguably one of the reasons that the country had landed in this situation in the first place.

In short, two and a half years after my first meeting with Theo, I have found myself fully embracing the twin goals which the OCA community has been striving so earnestly to enact. In turn, this has led me to feel renewed admiration for OCA's leaders, as uncertain and embattled as they were—and likely still are—about the best path forward. They are indeed fighting the good fight. I am more certain of this than I ever have been before.

My work on this project has not only served to enlarge and deepen my beliefs about the priorities that should guide the work of school reform over the next decades; it has also changed how I think about the relationship between these priorities. To this end, I am quite certain that even if I had encountered and embraced RJ earlier in my career, I likely would have thought about it as being largely unrelated to DL. The process of observing, analyzing, and writing about the OCA community, however, has led me to adopt a much more complex view of the interrelationships between culture and instruction. This, in turn, has prompted me to reimagine what it means for schools to be truly coherent institutions, and to rethink some of the basic assumptions that I and others have been making about the sufficiency of DL to serve as a guiding aspiration for those who seek to expand the reach of progressive education.

In these final pages, I outline these views and explore their implications for the field. Although I resist the impulse to bemoan the state of the country—there is more than enough of that to go around—I offer these conclusions out of the conviction that recent events make the work of transforming U.S. schools into more just, equitable, and intellectually vital institutions more urgent than ever.

With that as a frame, the first point that I would like to make is that *restorative justice in education not only can support but also can enact certain elements of deeper learning*.

The first component of this argument—the notion that RJ provides a stronger platform for pursuing DL than do traditionally authoritarian approaches to discipline and culture—is an idea which several of OCA’s leaders began to articulate over the course of this study. Recall, for example, that leaders who participated in interviews almost universally voiced a belief that prioritizing the building and repairing of relationships would minimize behavior issues and thus allow teachers and students to focus on the learning at hand; some also believed that RJ’s relational focus demands that teachers include more opportunities for collaborative learning and allow students greater “voice and choice” when it comes to what and how they learn. While it is certainly true that strong relational culture can serve as an instrument for effective instruction, it is the latter group of perspectives which most powerfully captures the ways in which attending to the concerns of the restorative framework can support teachers in becoming more truly learner-centered in their practice—and thus in creating riper conditions for DL.

The notion that RJ also can *enact* certain elements of DL is not something that leaders brought up in conversation, but it is nevertheless an idea which my time at OCA helped to clarify. In illustrating it, I would like to return briefly to an Academic Leadership Team meeting which took place at the very end of the 2014-15 schoolyear. At the start of the meeting, in an effort to celebrate and make visible the school’s work around RJ to the newly hired Head of School, Suzanne screened a short video. The video documented the second half of a “restorative conference” during which five fifth-grade

boys at OCA's Upper Elementary Campus worked through a conflict which had arisen in their classroom earlier in the day. When the footage began, the participants had all had a chance to describe their experiences of the incident, and the conversation was shifting from defensiveness to expressions of remorse and gratitude. They sat in a circle and passed around a "talking piece" to minimize interruptions, their dialogue seeming to follow a loose script. Toward the end, one of the boys thanked his peer, who apparently had cursed at him and later pushed him, for "telling the truth about his anger and where his anger came from." Another participant added that he was proud of the group for working through the issue. The others shook half-closed hands: a school-wide gesture indicating that they agreed.

After screening this video, Suzanne posed several questions to her peers. "What do you notice?" she asked. "And what makes what the students are doing restorative?" In the ensuing discussion, leaders focused mainly on the ways in which the video exemplified the core principles and goals of RJ. Several leaders noted, for example, that the conference involved all of the students who were involved in the incident, including those who could be considered victims. Others dwelled on the fact that the experience was "empowering instead of shameful" for the perpetrator, that the relationships among the participants seemed truly to have been "healed" and "restored," and that the conference seemed to produce greater understanding and empathy for all participants. Toward the end of the discussion, one leader emphasized that the conference would provide a platform for classroom learning, positing that "the boys could go back and learn together, and that's healthy."

These comments struck me as being valid and useful, especially given that the meeting's unstated goal was to introduce Theo's replacement to the core perspectives and processes associated with RJ. From my perspective, however, what was most striking of all about the video was what it excluded: namely, the voices of Kerry and her colleague Rebecca, who were facilitating the conference. For seven full minutes, the two administrators hardly said a word. It was the students who directed the conversation and moved it forward; the routines of restorative conferencing, with which they seemed deeply familiar, enabled them to engage in a conversation that was structured but not scripted. There was not a single moment where they turned to the adults present in the room to seek input or to ask what to do next—and as a result, the sense of collective pride that they expressed toward the end of the conference came across as being all their own.

The reason I found these aspects of the video to be so striking was that they mirrored so much of what Dr. Mehta and I have observed in classrooms where powerful learning is happening. As described in Chapter 1, in such places, students are actively engaged in constructing their own meanings of the content at hand. Routines and frameworks provide structure for open-ended inquiry. Dialogue is a key part of the process; there is often a sense that students are participating together in a “community of practice.” Teachers serve less as controllers-in-chief than as facilitators and expert listeners. When things go well, students develop a deep sense of pride and ownership over their work.

A comment made by Rebecca during the ALT's discussion of the video underscored just how deep these parallels between RJ and DL run. In describing her journey toward becoming a restorative educator, she talked not only about needing to

master new practices but also about needing to unlearn deeply-rooted habits of control.

“One of the lessons I’ve learned in implementing restorative circles is that when I insert myself the focus is no longer on the relationships among the kids or the social-emotional learning,” she said. “And it can be so hard to do...you’ve got to have an open agenda, not a closed one, and you’ve got to be patient. You’ve got to get it out of your mind what you want them to say.” Listening to her speak, I had an intense sense of déjà-vu. Her descriptions echoed countless interviews that Dr. Mehta and I have conducted in which teachers have described their transition from traditional to DL-oriented pedagogies—a transition which similarly requires them to trust the capacity of students to take the reins when provided with the right tools and support, to attend to the fact that learning is often social in nature, and to rethink the traditionally top-down relationships between themselves and the students in their charge.

This resonance serves as further fuel for the argument that RJ can provide a strong platform for creating the kind of student-centered culture which supports DL. More importantly, it suggests that although the content of the learning which happens in the context of RJ is more explicitly social-emotional than “academic” in nature, RJ should be seen as itself being a kind of pedagogy—and a distinctively “deeper” one at that. In this light, it is not surprising that RJ and DL require educators to make similar shifts in their thinking and practice, nor that the outcomes which RJ can produce involve the development of DL-related skills such as perspective-taking.

As a second and related point, I would like to argue that the inverse of this argument is true as well: *instruction which is organized to support deeper learning not only can benefit from restorative culture, but also can help to create it.*

The root of this argument lies in a more general point, which is that when students engage in classrooms, they not only are developing new skills and knowledge but also are encountering implicit messages about their roles in relation to each other, the adults around them, and the traditions of knowledge with which they are asked to engage. These messages, and the ways in which students interpret and respond to them, serve as a foundation for the beliefs and ways of being/doing which constitute classroom culture (Hollins, 1996). In highly traditional classrooms, where teachers serve as controllers-in-chief who “profess” fixed bodies of knowledge and direct the process of micro-skill development, these messages reinforce binary notions of “right” and “wrong” answers and emphasize the importance of passivity, compliance, and submission (Cohen, 1988; Freire, 2005; Golann, 2015). In short, as Nora noted when she reflected on her experiences of “being” a high schooler for a day, learning is something being done *to* students by those in positions of authority. By contrast, in DL-oriented classrooms, where teachers invite students to engage in open-ended tasks which require them to think critically and to engage with each other’s perspectives, these messages assert that the process of knowledge-creation is dynamic and social in nature and underscore notions of agency, contribution, and connectedness; learning is a collaborative endeavor that must necessarily be undertaken *with* students (Lampert, 2015; Mehta & Fine, 2015b).

As I hope is becoming evident, the latter form of instruction is startlingly aligned with the underlying philosophy and epistemology of RJ, as well as with some of its specific goals and frameworks. Thus, while teaching for DL might not focus on dealing justly with wrongful behavior, it can in fact help to reinforce—and even create—the kind of culture that RJ advocates label as being restorative.

The most powerful illustration of this idea that this dissertation has provided is Nora's Gender Studies classroom. In this space, as Chapter 4 demonstrated, students not only engaged with high-level academic content but also drew this content into ongoing conversations with their experiences both inside and outside of school and leveraged the resulting learning into collaborative, creative, action-oriented projects. In order to support this work, Nora served as a masterful designer and facilitator, teaching from a place of expertise and conviction while also inviting students to participate actively in constructing their own meanings and in shaping the "what" and "how" of the work. In the process, she modelled Freire's notion of *humility* in teaching, which requires "courage, self-confidence, self-respect, and respect for others" as well as an unwavering commitment to resist perpetuating patterns of educator-student authoritarianism (Freire, 1998/2005, p. 39). The implicit messages that students received in this process were ones which resonate with the RJ framework: that their experiences matter; that theory and critical analysis can help them to understand and problematize these experiences; that those in positions of power can be authoritative without being authoritarian; and that those in disempowered positions, including adolescents like themselves, have a real and important role to play in helping to dismantle oppression. These messages, which were inextricably connected to both the content and pedagogy of the course, helped to establish a positive and relational culture—one which supported many students in experiencing a transformation in their relationship to the curriculum, as well as to themselves, to each other, and to Nora.

It is certainly possible that classrooms devoted to the core academic disciplines can produce similarly restorative cultures. In "deeper" math classrooms, for example, a

focus on sense-making as constructed through student-to-student discourse can serve not only to help students grasp the underlying epistemology of mathematics but also to demonstrate to them the value of perspective-taking and sustained deliberation (Lampert, 2003, 2015). However, the critical lens which Nora brought to the Gender Studies course made the course particularly resonant with the goals and values of RJ—and, in addition, particularly promising in terms of the learning it could produce for students. Nora's skillful deployment of critical pedagogy meant that restorative culture and deeper learning became mutually reinforcing priorities.

This gestures toward a larger point, which is that critical pedagogy represents a powerful potential vehicle by which to capitalize on the synergies between the two frameworks. As Vaandering (2010) writes about at length, and as explored in Chapter 3, the connections between RJ and critical theory are rich and deep. When it comes to the context of pedagogy, these connections are especially evident in Freire's (1998/2005) book *Teachers as Cultural Workers*, in which Freire dedicates a whole chapter to the topic of how progressive educators must move from talking *to* and *for* students to talking *with* them—a shift in stance and practice which resonates with the RJ framework as it was subsequently outlined in McCold and Wachtel's (2003) social discipline window. The connections between critical pedagogy and DL, while less well-specified, are also rich; the two traditions have much in the way of common ground, in particular a shared view that learners must be treated as active participants in the process of constructing meaning and knowledge, and that schools should offer students opportunities to engage in personally and socially consequential work in the present rather than focusing myopically on improving their future prospects. Thus, critical pedagogy is situated

squarely at the intersection of RJ and DL, offering educators who seek to capitalize on the synergies between the two frameworks an established pedagogical tradition in which to anchor their work.

Stepping back from the particular concerns of these RJ and DL for a moment, the broader point here is that in the context of schools, the domains of discipline/culture/climate and curriculum/instruction/pedagogy are much more densely interrelated than many in the field tend to treat them as being. Discipline- and culture-related processes enact a kind of pedagogy; pedagogical processes serve as a key input into discipline and culture. In turn, this suggests that these strands have the potential to exert bi-directional influence, reinforcing each other in cases where there is alignment and detracting from each other in cases where there is dissonance.

One significant implication which follows from this perspective is that the field should adopt a broader definition of what has become known as *school coherence*. Encompassing work on “instructional program coherence” (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001; Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, Bryk, & Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2001) and “internal coherence” (Elmore, 2014; Elmore, Forman, Stosich, & Bocala, 2014), the school coherence literature is built on a foundation of research and theory which suggest that having consistent experiences across classrooms and time positively impacts student motivation and achievement. Building on this foundation, coherence advocates emphasize the self-defeating nature of “diffuse [and] scattered improvement efforts” and argue that a more promising approach to lasting reform involves coordinating school processes—including leadership, professional learning, and family engagement—around clear models which specify what should

happen at the level of the instructional core (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001, p. 300). The coherence literature is not entirely inattentive to the affective dimensions of schooling; the internal coherence framework, for example, stresses the importance of psychological safety among groups of collaborating teachers (Elmore et al., 2014). However, it is silent about the role that a school's approach to discipline and culture can play in reinforcing or contradicting the philosophical, epistemological, and cognitive goals associated with its approach to instruction; nor does this literature acknowledge the ways in which extremely authoritarian approaches to instruction, especially when enacted coherently, can produce and/or reinforce negative cultures.

Fueled by the lessons which have emerged from this dissertation project, I would like to propose an expanded definition of school coherence which better reflects the dense interrelationships between culture and instruction. Echoing the model of “whole school reform” which became popular in the 1990s, this view is grounded in the belief that schools must make simultaneous, coordinated, coherent changes to a range of processes and domains (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001). Unlike this model, however, it does not gloss over the critical importance of anchoring such improvement efforts in a sharp, clear, granular vision of instruction. Rather, it posits that the most promising way to pursue sustainable reform at the school level involves developing or adopting a sharp, clear, granular vision of instruction which is philosophically and epistemologically aligned with a sharp, clear, granular approach to discipline and culture. Such alignments, in turn, help to ensure that core values reinforce rather than compete with each other, creating coherence which is not only *instructional* but also more broadly *ecological* in nature.

This expanded form of coherence is particularly important in schools whose aspirations involve deeper learning. To wit, in schools which are mainly pursuing a “basic skills” agenda, ecological coherence is likely to be present in some measure, given the authoritarianism which underscores both traditional skill-and-drill approaches to instruction and traditional rule-centric approaches to discipline and culture (Harber, 2004). This same status quo, however, means that schools which seek to transform themselves into institutions which consistently engage students in DL are not likely to achieve such alignment without making a deliberate and sustained effort to do so. The inverse is true as well: schools which seek to enact progressive approaches to discipline and culture are likely to end up with dissonance across contexts unless they simultaneously strive to transform classrooms into places which value students’ experiences, perspectives, and voices. Disrupting status quo beliefs and practices on *any* institutional front is difficult work which is vulnerable to cooptation (Markoczy, 1994; Tsang & Zahra, 2008). Thus, having ecological coherence, whereby core philosophies and processes reinforce rather than compete with each other, is especially critical for schools which seek to enact unusually lofty ambitions. This perspective departs from that espoused by existing coherence frameworks, which say little about the varying demands associated with particular types of models or aspirations.

Admittedly, to some who are steeped in the traditions and theories which surround progressive schooling, the notion of ecological coherence might seem blindingly obvious. As I have alluded to elsewhere in this manuscript, Dewey and those who followed in his wake were adamant that powerful schools would by nature be designed environments, e.g. places where *all* processes and practices are grounded in a

coherent set of convictions about what it means and what it looks like to support learners in their development (Mehta & Fine, 2015a). Notably, Dewey specifically emphasized that authoritarian forms of behavior management were misaligned with the kind of interdisciplinary, project-based, student-centered inquiry that he imagined to accompany the endeavor of adventurous teaching. “[With this kind of learning] there is not silence; persons are not engaged in maintaining certain fixed physical postures; their arms are not folded, they are not holding their books thus and so,” he wrote (1915, p. 27). Later, building on this line of thinking, Ted Sizer advocated for the notion that schools should be “intentional communities” where everything from the interactions among adults to decisions about how to solve conflicts between students reflected a deliberate and shared set of values (Sizer & Sizer, 2000). This perspective is one of the reasons that for Theo, who saw himself as part of the Dewey-Sizer lineage, the process of coming to see OCA’s two new priorities as part of a coherent unitary agenda felt like a “reawakening” rather than an awakening. It is telling, however, that during his first decade at OCA Theo so quickly found himself losing sight of the ecological perspectives which his time studying with Sizer and teaching at Parker had supported. I would like to argue that this says less about Theo than about the strength of the status quo in large urban public schools—a status quo which reifies patterns of siloing and militates against more integrative views.

Regardless of whether it is new or old, I would like to argue that the notion of ecological coherence has profound implications for the many U.S. schools which recently have decided to “go restorative.” Essentially, if these schools genuinely seek to transform themselves into communities where all students feel valued and included, and where processes aimed at fostering connectedness and empathy replace those which rely on

blame and exclusion, then they must take a hard look at their approaches to curriculum, instruction, and assessment to determine whether these domains match up. Given the continued dominance of authoritarian approaches to knowledge, there is a very good chance that they do not. In turn, this means that the transition to RJ will require much broader-ranging changes than leaders might have anticipated. As Kerry, the principal of OCA's Upper Elementary Campus, put it: "It took us awhile to realize that if we're going to say that this [the philosophy of RJ] is really what we believe, then actually we have to say we believe a whole lot of other things, too."

This point has particular salience for "No Excuses" charter schools, a small but growing number of which, like OCA, recently have decided to replace their (in)famous "tough love" approach to culture and behavior management with RJ (Zappa, 2015). Such schools historically have had extremely high levels of ecological coherence; in fact, the tight alignments among their approaches to culture, discipline, and instruction arguably have played a key role in enabling some of them to produce the high student test scores which have made them famous. Achieving a new form of ecological coherence—one which accommodates the philosophy and values of RJ—is likely to present a difficult task, requiring leaders and teachers to *unlearn* the authoritarian philosophy and practices which have served as the foundation for their approach to instruction, as well as to shift the symmetrically authoritarian ways that they have approached leadership and professional development. Without undertaking this work, however, these schools are likely to find that their efforts to create restorative culture remain only partially realized—the institutional equivalent of trying to accelerate with the brakes on.

This argument is bolstered by common sense as well as by theory. As explored in Chapter 3, students' time might be segmented into periods labelled as "math" or "history" or "lunch," but their experiences are continuous; they move through time and space as whole beings, shaped by what has come before. Given this, what does it tell them if their experiences of school culture and school justice reflect a fundamentally different set of operating assumptions than their experiences of academic learning? If, in the context of their advisory period or their time with an administrator, the message is that they are capable sense-makers who can and should function as agents of their own learning—and then if in science or history they are spend their time answering closed-ended questions and practicing micro-skills which their teachers, and/or a set of standardized assessments, have determined to be important? Or, to flip this scenario on its head, if in classrooms students are expected to "lead their own learning" by engaging in collaborative, creative, performance-driven tasks (Berger, Rugen, & Woodfin, 2014), but in the hallways and cafeteria they are expected to comply passively with rule-based policies and punishments? At best, such dissonance is confusing. At worst, it can lead to frustration and disillusionment, fueling negative culture and contributing to persistent patterns of disengagement.

The notion of ecological coherence suggests that in schools which adopt synergistic cultural and instructional approaches, these vicious cycles can become virtuous ones. In particular, when these approaches involve the pairing of RJ and DL, students get used to the expectation that their role, across the various contexts which collectively constitute the "place called school" (Goodlad, 1984/2004), is to actively and authentically engage with each other, with the adults around them, and with new content

and ideas. In short, students learn to trust that the adults in the building believe in their abilities to self-direct, self-actualize, and contribute—and, in turn, they become more likely to internalize the empowering message that such trust conveys. Given the abundance of opportunities to develop and practice skills such as perspective-taking, they also are more likely to transfer their learning to contexts which lie beyond school walls (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012).

What might it take for more schools to be able achieve this particular—and particularly promising—version of ecological coherence?

One answer to this question is that new schools can be designed to support the pairing of RJ with DL from the start. At the level of structure, this would require creating regular opportunities for collaboration among those whose roles involve supporting restorative culture and those whose roles involve supporting deeper teaching and learning; it also would require organizing adult learning in ways which deliberately create symmetry with the values and processes which organize students' experiences. At the level of content, it would require helping adults across the school to understand and explore the bi-directional relationships between culture and instruction, so that they could see themselves not only as specialists but also as actors in a coherent ecological system. While meeting these various imperatives certainly would be difficult, doing so proactively—rather than retroactively—likely would provide a significant advantage. This point extends my work with Dr. Mehta, which suggests that schools which originate as small and semi-autonomous institutions, such as charters and magnets, are more able to organize their work around clear values and design principles than their traditional district counterparts (Mehta & Fine, 2015a).

Most U.S. public schools, however, are more like OCA: large, complex, multi-pronged institutions with histories that encompass a range of competing values and visions. In such places, the process of creating ecological coherence which pairs RJ with DL is likely to be complex, messy, and resource-intensive. As the case of OCA illustrates, few of the previous certainties will remain unscathed; everything from leadership processes to systems of teacher evaluation and support to the use of time and space likely will be affected. The narrative presented in Chapter 2 also suggests, however, that the process of redesign has the potential to be energizing and unifying, itself serving as a vehicle by which educators engage in deep professional learning and engage in positive professional culture-building which transcends traditional silos. Anticipating this potential upside might help schools to resist the impulse to retreat when the going gets hard.

Regardless of the institutional context, such efforts could be bolstered by an improved and expanded set of resources and tools. One of the core processes associated with internal coherence, for example, is that of “instructional rounds,” during which stakeholders from across a school observe multiple classrooms and use the low-inference data recorded during these observations as a platform for determining a realistic “next level of work” (City, Elmore, Fiarman, Teitel, & Lachman, 2009). In contexts where the goal is to achieve ecological coherence, this process could be expanded so that participants observe not only what happens in classrooms but also what happens in “non-instructional” contexts such as advisory, lunch, and recess. As the leaders at OCA did during their “culture walks,” they could gather low-inference data which would allow them to discuss questions such as the following: What kinds of language, routines, and

power dynamics characterize the ways that adults and students engage with each other in these contexts? To what extent are these things reflective of restorative values? To what extent do they align with the kind of interactions and learning that are—or should be—happening in classrooms? What steps can we take to move toward greater alignment? Such conversations could help educators (and students, too, if they were included) to consider the bi-dimensional relationships between culture and instruction, and thus to think more ecologically about the process of school improvement.

Another way to support these goals would be to develop and disseminate frameworks which more explicitly draw together the discourses around RJ and DL. On the RJ side of the equation, as discussed in Chapter 3, one of the critical frameworks to modify is McCold and Wachtel's (2003) social discipline window, which is used widely to support professional learning around the use of RJ in schools. In its current form, this heuristic does not fully reflect the emphasis that the restorative framework places on relationality, inclusivity, deliberation, collaboration, and the broader goal of dismantling institutional oppression; its key language also fails to invite transfer to the domain of teaching and learning. Vaandering's (2013) proposed "renovation" to the window addresses the former but not the latter issue, suggesting that further renovations are needed to support educators in seeing that teaching restoratively is not just about pairing high expectations with high support but also about transforming classrooms into more equitable and humanizing spaces by treating the instructional core as a vehicle by which to nurture positive relationships between students, teachers, and content.

This gestures toward a broader point, which is that there is an urgent need for theoretical and practice-oriented literature which more seriously attends to the

implications of the RJ framework for curriculum and instruction. Attentive as RJ intends to be when it comes to identifying and addressing root causes (Zehr, 2002), the literature about the use of RJ in schools generally overlooks the ways in which the instructional core mediates students' experiences, producing engagement and connectedness in some cases and contributing to frustration and alienation in others. This oversight makes sense given that RJ is most often introduced as a vehicle by which to reduce school violence and disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline (Vaandering, 2010), but, as I hope this dissertation has begun to demonstrate, it does educators a disservice by reifying simplistic views about the relationships between the domains of discipline and culture and the domains of teaching and learning.

The inverse holds true when it comes to the DL side of the equation: there is not, as yet, enough work which explores the connection between what happens at the level of the instructional core and the broader classroom/school cultures which both frame and result from these happenings. The literatures which deal with constructivist teaching and learning (e.g. Gordon, 2009) and higher-order thinking (e.g. Marzano & Kendall, 2006), for example, tend to privilege cognitive processes over affective ones. To echo a comment made by Liza, the Vice Principal of OCA's Upper School, these literatures treats students more as "brains with feet" than as whole beings whose emotions and relationships mediate their ability and inclination to engage in new learning—and whose learning, in turn, mediates their emotions and relationships. The field certainly would benefit from a greater array of work which explicitly addresses these interconnections; among other things, this might help teachers to recognize the role that they play in supporting positive classroom and school cultures, and thus to avoid the kind of siloed

thinking that leads them to think of their work as separate from those who deal with discipline.

More broadly, it strikes me as imperative that educators who situate their work within the discourse of DL engage in more deliberate and sustained ways with educators who focus on counteracting patterns of institutionalized oppression. Based on the many years that I have spent working within the world of DL, I can say with confidence that many of those in the former group care deeply about issues of equity; they see the task of extending opportunities for DL to historically marginalized groups as one which is fundamentally an equity project. Even so, the movement for DL, unlike the movement for RJ, has not systematically foregrounded issues of structural oppression. It focuses instead on a set of cognitive and social competencies which, while necessary, may not be sufficient to support students in becoming the kinds of change-agents, activists, and upstanders that society so desperately needs. For example, it is entirely possible for students to master “21st-century competencies” such as collaboration and communication without ever using such competencies to challenge politically and/or socio-culturally hegemonic views. Similarly, students might spend years practicing higher-order skills such as analysis, synthesis, and creation, without ever bringing these skills to bear on questions of racism, classism, misogyny, homophobia, ableism, white supremacy, and so on.

These omissions have deep roots in the history of the American progressive education. Dewey, for example, had practically nothing to say about the issue of race and racism; some scholars have argued that he, along with many other early-twentieth-century progressives, subscribed to ethnocentric notions of White supremacy (Fallace,

2015). Regardless of the strength of these claims, it is undeniably true that the first wave of schools which most seriously took up Dewey's "child-centered" philosophy and practices generally served White children from elite cosmopolitan families (Dewey, 1915; Graham, 2005). Subsequent reform efforts sought to expand access to DL; most of these efforts, however, assumed that DL was suited only for those deemed "gifted and talented" without problematizing the processes by which schools identify such students (Mehta & Fine, 2015b). The origins and lineage of the contemporary DL movement thus helps to explain why this movement has not, as yet, fully oriented itself around tackling issues of institutionalized oppression.

But history does not have to determine destiny. As I hope I have begun to demonstrate in this dissertation, there are powerful synergies which can, and should, link the movement for deeper learning with the movement for restorative justice. If they are leveraged deliberately and strategically, these synergies can help to transform schools from places which are at best stultifying and at worst oppressive into places which support everyone, adults and children alike, in becoming more engaged, more connected, and more fully human.

Appendix A: Initial Leader Interview Protocol

Interview objectives: to solicit background information about the participant's background and values; to understand how the participant thinks about her practice as a leader in the context of school change; and to understand how the participant makes sense of what it means to enact OCA's new priorities (specifically restorative justice and deeper learning) through this practice.

Dimension 1: Background & Values

Tell me a little bit about your background and how you came to work at OCA.

- How did you come to education?
- How did you come to the school?
- On a typical day, how do you spend your time?
- Outside of your job, what matters to you? How do you spend your weekends?

What are the skills, knowledge, and/or dispositions that you believe are most important for OCA's students to possess when they graduate?

- Why do you believe that these things are so important?
- In what ways do you believe that OCA currently is achieving these goals? What do you perceive to be the sources of this success?
- In what ways do you believe that OCA is falling short of these goals? What do you perceive to be the sources of this gap?
- What instructional practices support students in reaching these goals?
- How, if at all, do you see your aspirations reflected in OCA's new vision?

Dimension 2: Leadership Practice

What are the main influences on your practice as a leader?

- To whom or what do you feel most accountable?
- To whom or what do you look when you need support?
- Which elements of your role are most important to you? Which are most difficult?
- What puzzles and tensions are most live for you at the moment?

When you are at your best as a leader, what does your work look like?

- Be specific: can you think of a recent instance that went well? What was the evidence of success? What factors might have enabled that success?
- Can you think of a recent instance that was less successful? What evidence leads you to think it was less successful? What factors might have obstructed success?
- How, if at all, does the way that you aspire to support teacher learning mirror the way that you want teachers to support student learning? How do these things differ?

Tell me a little bit about your experience of the change process that is underway at OCA.

- From your vantage point, what is OCA trying to do that is different from the past?

- What do you make of this effort? What parts have been most powerful for you? What parts have been most problematic or difficult for you?
- How, if all, has your thinking and/or practice changed during this process?

Dimension 3: Symmetry

Let's talk about OCA's new priorities, restorative justice and deeper learning.

- How (if at all) does RJ represent a different approach to discipline and culture than what the school has valued before?
 - What do you think OCA's teachers will need to learn and/or change about their practice in order to make headway toward enacting this vision? How about leaders?
- How (if at all) does OCA's new instructional vision, e.g. the "green monster," represent a different conception of strong teaching practice than what the school has valued before?
 - What do you think OCA's teachers will need to learn and/or change about their practice in order to make headway toward enacting this vision? How about leaders?
- How, if at all, do you understand RJ and DL as being related?
 - How do you define the term "restorative instruction?"
 - What would it look and sound like to enact this kind of instruction in classrooms?

As you know, the ALT recently articulated the goal of "supporting OCA's teachers and each other in ways that reflect and enact our vision."

- What does this goal mean to you?
- On a scale of 1-10, how central do you see this goal as being to your current work?
- What parts of the new priorities do you see as already being an integral part of how you work with teachers? What parts represent places for growth? What parts, if any, do you question in relation to working with teachers?
- Since the ALT has been talking about the restorative approach a good deal, let's dig into that concept for a few minutes.
 - In your own words, what does it mean to be a restorative leader? What questions or puzzles do you have about restorative leader?
 - Are there practices on which you rely that you think are incompatible with your understanding of restorative leadership? If so, what are they, and why?
- What do you see as the biggest obstacles to achieving this goal for you personally? For the ALT as a whole?
- How can my observations and our conversations during the next four months help to support you in overcoming these obstacles?

Appendix B: Follow-up Leader Interview Protocol

Interview objectives: to understand how the participant makes sense of recent experiences supporting teacher learning and/or working with the whole ALT; and to interrogate how this sense-making reflects and/or influences their thinking about what it means to enact OCA's new priorities through their practice as a leader of adult learning.

- In general, where are you in your thinking right now in relation to the goal of supporting teachers in ways that enact OCA's new priorities?
- In earlier interviews, you defined RJ and DL as [insert leader's articulation.] What, if anything, would you add or change about these definitions now? Why?
- In earlier interviews, you described [insert leader's articulation] as one of the tensions that you experienced in trying to meet the school's goal. Is that still true? Why or why not? What experiences have shaped your thinking?
- In earlier interviews, you described feeling puzzled/uncertain about [insert leader's articulation]. Does this still puzzle you? How, if at all, have you found more clarity? What experiences have shaped your thinking?
- What new puzzles and/or tensions have emerged for you? What experiences have brought them to the fore for you?

Appendix C: Teacher Interview Protocol

Objective: To understand how teachers experience and make sense of OCA's new priorities.

Tell me a little bit about your background and how you came to work at OCA.

- How did you come to teaching?
- How did you come to OCA?
- How long have you been here?
- When you are at your best as a teacher, what does your classroom look like and sound like? Describe a specific example if you can.

Let's talk about OCA's new priorities, restorative justice and deeper learning.

- How (if at all) does RJ represent a different approach to discipline and culture than what the school has valued before?
 - What do you think you will need to learn and/or change about their practice in order to make headway toward enacting this vision? How about leaders?
- How (if at all) does OCA's new instructional vision, e.g. the "green monster," represent a different conception of strong teaching practice than what the school has valued before?
 - What do you think you will need to learn and/or change about their practice in order to make headway toward enacting this vision? How about leaders?
- How, if at all, do you understand RJ and DL as being related?
 - How do you define the term "restorative instruction?"
 - What would it look and sound like to enact this kind of instruction in your classroom?
 - What do you think you will need to learn and/or change about your practice in order to make headway toward enacting this vision?

Appendix D: List of Codes

Accountability -- lack of it	Good teaching as good management
Accountability -- relational	Granularity -- lack of agreement
Affirmations / kudos	Great quote
Anxiety about being evaluated	High expectations -- it's never good enough
Assigning blame	History of PHA
Authenticity	Important insight
Autonomy	Important quote/interaction
Big questions bubbling up	Inclusiveness as restorative
Both/and	Inclusivity
Building on what exists versus creating something new	Inconsistency
Caring a lot	Infrastructure
Change / breaking with tradition	Innovation
Choice	Instructional vision / green monster
Clarity -- lack of	Institutional identity
Collaborative learning	Instructional leadership
Competition	Internal coherence
Conflict avoidance	Theo -- as a co-learner
Considering the whole landscape	Theo -- as decider/clarifier
Constructivism	Theo -- I don't think talking about it is helpful
Containers	Theo -- lots of equally good options
Core dilemma	Theo -- this should be easy
Critical pedagogy	Theo -- unclear hats
Critical theory	Joy
Cultural proficiency	Lack of transparency
Cultural responsiveness	Leadership failure
Culture	Leadership vacuum
Culture -- broken	Learner-centeredness
Data-driven decisions	Learning edge
Decision-making: consensus	Learning vs. doing
Design as a way to empower	Loss
Designing as a way to achieve granularity	Micromanagement as support
Differentiated pay	Mindset
Differentiation	Mismatch between student and school
Emotional/heated moment	Not restorative
Encouragement / gratitude	Novice teachers
Evaluation culture -- negative	Observables
Exercising our autonomy as a charter	Organizational learning
External pressures	Our issue is cultural
Fairness	Outsourcing
Feeling heard	Performance pay
Formative moment	Politics
Going where the group needed to go	Power grab

Privilege
 Process as critical
 Purpose / values of school
 Questions about what we aim to do
 Race / racism / racial identity
 Real team
 Reinventing the wheel
 Relationship WITH the curriculum
 Relationships as foundational
 Remediation
 Restorative approach
 Restorative approach vs. instructional approach
 Restorative circles
 Restorative justice/discipline
 Restorative leadership
 Restorative pedagogy
 Restorative pedagogy: teacher/leader views
 Restorative window
 Rigor
 Risk-taking
 Roles -- lack of clarity
 Rubric as a tool for evaluation
 Rubric as a tool for support
 Safety
 Seeking / reflecting feedback
 SEL
 Self-protectiveness
 Skill goals vs understanding goals
 Social justice / activism
 Stake in the ground
 Standards-based
 Sticking with it
 Student voice / student needs
 Support / feeling held
 Symmetry -- walking our talk
 Systems / systematicity
 Taking things off the table
 Talking about the work vs. doing the work
 Teacher voice
 Teaching as more than the sum of the parts
 Technical work intersecting with big picture work

Tension
 Testing
 Thickness of mechanisms for enacting vision
 Too many cooks in the kitchen
 Too much too fast
 Transition
 Transparency
 Trust
 Trying to figure out where the connections are
 Trying to meet everybody's needs
 Uncertainty
 Undoing/unlearning
 Unlearning -- individual
 Unlearning -- organizational
 We're on our way
 Who is the decider? / desire for answers

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