Restorative Peacemaking Circles and other Conflict Management Efforts in Three Ontario High Schools

by

Dean Barnes

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Curriculum Studies
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education,
University of Toronto

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Dean Barnes

Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
University of Toronto

Abstract

Violence is pervasive in many schools, and current punitive conflict management approaches in schools tend to be ineffective and disproportionately harmful to marginalized students. Restorative peacemaking circles, also known as conferences, are an alternative for managing conflict designed to improve communication, help people resolve conflicts, and help repair and build relationships among individuals in schools (Morrison, 2007; Pranis, 2005). This thesis is based on theory that such relationship-building and dialogic conflict resolution practices will contribute to reductions in school violence. This qualitative, multiple-case study of the implementation and interpretation of restorative practices at three Ontario high schools analyzed student, teacher, and administrator interviews, school documents, and participant observations. Results indicate that interview participants perceived restorative peacemaking circles (and related peacemaking practices) to be inclusive and fair processes that helped to strengthen participating students’ relationships with peers and adults, contributing to reducing violence. Key factors facilitating implementation of restorative peacemaking circles and peacebuilding approaches included leadership and committed staff, quality training, and implementing responsive and proactive practices. In two schools, external facilitation resulted in limited implementation of restorative practices. This reliance on external facilitators constitutes one way schools can implement restorative practices. However, external facilitation of restorative
practices by only non-school staff depended on outside funding and expertise that could become unavailable at any time, without leaving behind in-school capacity. Conflict management policies in the three schools were largely constrained by a punitive regulatory framework (e.g., suspensions and expulsions), which limited these schools’ adoption of restorative initiatives. Although theorists and researchers advocate whole-school proactive initiatives and conflict-learning opportunities for diverse students, sparse evidence indicated that only one (and, even less so, one other) of the three schools had implemented any proactive peacebuilding approaches. These school-based findings will help administrators, policymakers, and scholars understand how certain restorative practices can be feasibly implemented, and used to strengthen relationships (developing social capital) and reduce school violence.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my advisor, Dr. Kathy Bickmore, for her time, critical thinking, knowledge, and endless support in the completion of this dissertation.

I would also like to extend thanks to Dr. Tara Goldstein and Dr. Lance McCready, who served on my thesis committee. I am also indebted to my fellow administrator colleagues who made it possible for me work full-time and complete this degree part-time. Without your support, I would not have been able to remain effective as a school administrator and remain focused in this scholarly work. Additionally, I am appreciative of the students, teachers, and administrators who shared their experiences in interviews.

I could not have completed this degree without the support of my wife, Brenda, and my children Sydney and Kyla. You have been caring, flexible, and very understanding throughout this endeavour. I am appreciative of the support of my parents: Barbara and Clive Barnes have always and continue to instil the value of education to me.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my master’s thesis supervisor, the late Dr. Alan King, who inspired me a long time ago not only to become a high school principal, but also to consider completing my Ph.D.
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<td>Ocean School (Pacific School District) student</td>
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<tr>
<td>OST</td>
<td>Ocean School (Pacific School District) teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSG</td>
<td>Pine School (Cedar School District) guidance counsellor</td>
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<td>Pine School (Cedar School District) teacher</td>
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Chapter 1:
Introduction

This research investigates how three secondary schools introduced initiatives to help build peaceful climates, through a focus on building and repairing relationships instead of using punitive harsh discipline practices. The literature review presents and discusses research demonstrating that harsh discipline practices have not been effective in preventing and reducing violence (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012; Gladden, 2002; Sacco & Nakhaie, 2007; Skiba & Noam, 2001). I also review research showing that economically and racially marginalized youth have been disproportionately punished in schools (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012; Gonzalez, 2012). Additionally, this literature review chapter introduces restorative justice practices, such as restorative peacemaking circles, in a broader restorative and conflict resolution education framework, and examines how these practices may operate as an alternative to harsh punishment regimes, reducing violence and repairing relationships among diverse individuals and groups in conflict.

In the United States and Canada, popular “get tough” measures that continue to be used to combat the threat of violence in schools closely resemble approaches used to combat violence in society (Melvin, 2011; Noguera, 1995; Sacco & Nakhaie, 2007). Measures include metal detectors at school entrances to prevent students from bringing weapons onto school grounds, zero-tolerance policies expediting the removal of students through suspension, expulsion, or transfer who commit serious acts of violence, and police officers or security guards to monitor student behaviour. School administrators increasingly treat incidents concerning students as criminal offences and involve law enforcement officials and the courts (Noguera, 1995; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Also, some school administrators tend to issue harsh punishments to students even when student infractions are not violent in nature or for defiance (Melvin, 2011; Muschert & Madfís, 2014; Skiba et al, 2002). Harsh punishments have been meted out to students for bringing a picture of a weapon to school or writing a violent story (Gladden, 2002; Melvin, 2011; Muschert & Madfís, 2014). This is partly due to pressure from a public wanting “tough actions” to be taken against offenders. These measures have not produced any significant reduction of violence in schools (Hirschfield, 2010). In contrast, I will show that restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding practices are promising alternatives to handle conflict and violent incidents constructively in comparison to harsh punitive approaches.
1 Perspective as Researcher

My experience as a vice principal and principal in high schools for the past 13 years informs my perspective on the interpretation and effectiveness of restorative and punitive conflict management alternatives in this study. I am currently a secondary school principal in a suburban south Ontario school. My experiences as a vice principal and principal have all been in suburban neighborhoods in the same school district, and my experience includes time in a high school for young offenders, a school combining vocational and academic offerings, and two schools with a high proportion of students taking courses at the “academic” program level. I started to become interested in researching restorative practices because of my experiences as a vice principal at a school for young offenders. Students were directed by the judicial system to attend this school and to be in custody at this facility. The school provided many supports to pupils to help them achieve academically and socially, and teachers, social workers, youth workers, and recreation staff were involved with students in various ways throughout the school day. I observed many interventions to address conflict in less punitive ways, and many of the implemented approaches focused on strengthening relationships between students and teachers. For example, teachers and administrators met every day in what was called the “morning meeting.” Each teacher was assigned to be a prime teacher for a group of eight students whom they counselled, and the prime teacher would meet with students at least every morning and sometimes throughout the day. The prime teacher would often meet with students in times of crisis or conflict. For example, when students were sent out of any classroom for poor behaviour, this person would counsel the student in what was called the quiet room, and when this conflict was resolved with the teacher or other student, the student who was sent out could return to the classroom without intervention by the vice principal. Therefore, in most instances of conflict, relationships were eventually restored to the extent possible between the individuals involved in the conflict. Punitive actions such as withdrawal from the school for the day were used, but only as a progressive disciplinary measure if the issue could not be resolved or the safety of individuals was compromised. This experience revealed to me how relationship repair, prior to or after conflicts, can be an effective strategy in various conflict situations for defusing tension between individuals and reducing the threat of future violence.

I was trained to facilitate traditional restorative peacemaking circles with a talking piece just prior to the time I started this research study. Shortly after my training, I began leading restorative peacemaking circles as vice principal, and was able to successfully use this
innovation to address a number of conflict situations. These situations included harmful words said over a public-address system by a student to a teacher, snowballs thrown that hit a car in the community, racial comments directed by one student at another, and a physical assault of one student by another. My facilitation of restorative peacemaking circles in all cases (except for the snowball incident) did include a punitive response, a suspension, prior to the operation of the peacemaking circle. Each of these circle experiences included the offending student, victim, and parents for both offender and victim, as well as a supporter for the offender. It is my belief that peacemaking circles allow for harm to be repaired between all parties who participate. There was noticeable emotion in the behaviour of most participants in each of these meetings, and the majority of them walked away from this experience with personal closure and greater clarity as to why the incidents had occurred. Also, it appeared that all participants felt I had treated them fairly as the facilitator, as well as the process being fair. Teachers seemed to be satisfied with the outcomes of the experience; however, often this feeling that justice had been facilitated may have been because punitive consequences had already been given to the “offending” students prior to the peacemaking circle experiences. As I became immersed in my research, I began to understand how restorative practices could operate in a proactive fashion, before harm occurs, in addition to post-incident restorative peacemaking. In my role as vice principal and principal, I also found the implementation of proactive and post-incident practices challenging, because of the punitive regulatory framework that exists in schools, and the traditional ways teachers, administrators, and students believe conflicts should be handled. Policies requiring the use of punitive discipline are common in most school districts; such punitive regulatory frameworks pose challenges for the full implementation of restorative justice practices (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). However, I believe that all of my restorative peacemaking circle experiences, primarily as the facilitator, resulted in positive outcomes, including relationship repair and violence prevention, mirroring outcomes found in a limited number of empirical research studies (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey, et al., 2007; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). However, my experience as a facilitator of restorative peacemaking circles should not be overlooked, since the power balance I hold over students as (vice) principal could impact the neutrality that should exist in this process. Restorative justice theory suggests that a facilitator should be neutral and non-coercive, and that decisions should be made by all participants involved in the circle (Pranis, 2005; Boyse-Watson & Pranis, 2014). Based on my experiences as school administrator and researcher, I believe that
with proper training, school administrators should consider implementing restorative peacemaking circles (in addition to or instead of punitive conflict management) in less serious and serious incidents, because this process helps repair relationships. I believe that especially skilled facilitation is required when restorative peacemaking circles replace punitive conflict management, because more care must be taken to ensure that harm to people affected by an incident is repaired to the extent possible (Zehr, 2002).

2 Problem

This study builds on previous theory and research revealing that restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding are promising practices to prevent or reduce violence in high schools as an alternative to punitive consequences (Bickmore, 2011a; Jones, 2004; Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey, et al., 2007; Morrison, 2007). The evidence revealing widespread fear and prevalence of interpersonal, direct forms of violence in schools is well substantiated in comprehensive studies of schools and school districts in the United States and Canada (Government of Ontario, 2008; Greene, 2005; Neiman, DeVoe, & Chandler, 2009; Sacco & Nakhaie, 2007; Wortley, 2008; Yau & O’Reilly, 2007). Also, school administrators’ use of harsh disciplinary consequences, such as expulsions and suspensions, has not adequately addressed continuing concerns related to school violence (Gladden, 2002; Kupchik & Catlaw, 2014; Peterson & Skiba, 2001). Harsh punitive practices also have been found to be inequitable, as they disproportionately punish minority students (also Children’s Defense Fund, 2012; Gonzalez, 2012; Welch & Payne, 2014). Punitive methods can negatively affect targeted students’ academic achievement and sense of belonging to school and fail to build on safety strategies that young people may already be practicing (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012; Gladden, 2002; Sacco & Nakhaie, 2007; Skiba et al., 2002).

The existing research literature, so far, reports only limited findings that explain or document how peacemaking circles, and related restorative practices, are actually implemented in high schools as a violence prevention or reduction approach, or how they work in terms of process and outcomes. It is important to document these processes and outcomes as extant research has shown that social-cognitive violence reduction programs, such as restorative practices, often have not been implemented very well in schools (Gonzalez, 2012; Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey, et al., 2008; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Reimer, 2011; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Surgeon General, 2001; Vaandering, 2009). A limited body of literature also points out the potential implications of restorative practices, such as peacemaking circles and related anti-violence restorative practice measures, for building social
capital, discussed further below, by strengthening relationships and networks of relationships (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004; Stinchcomb et al., 2006).

Schools often address conflict in adversarial ways through the use of punitive practices. This thesis study is based on my assumption that restorative peacemaking circles and related restorative practices should be considered as strategies by school officials to reduce and prevent violence, because of the opportunities they provide for building social capital. This assumption builds on existing theory:

From the perspective of restorative justice, civil society invests in and values social capital, using the strength of social ties to work constructively, and beneficially, through social conflict. In other words, counter to adversarial conflict resolution, the practice of restorative justice seeks to harness the power of relationships to strengthen accountability and support mechanisms within civil society. To this end, restorative justice provides a platform for transforming conflict and rebuilding relationships. (Morrison & Ahmed, 2006, p. 209–210)

In high schools, social interactions occur on a daily basis among students, teachers, parents, and other staff. Conflict resolution education, peacemaking, and peacebuilding approaches will be examined in this thesis, as approaches intended to be equitable and inclusive that may be better suited than punishment to address complex social behaviours such as bullying and bias-based harassment. These approaches provide opportunities to constructively resolve both the presenting problems in particular incidents and the underlying problems causing patterns of conflict and aggression (Bickmore, 2011a). In contrast, prevalent school conflict management approaches, which commonly involve the use of zero tolerance and other punitive measures, generally do not provide opportunities to resolve underlying problems or to build, rebuild or repair relationships. Thus, peacebuilding strategies, such as those studied in this research, may be necessary to reduce or prevent bullying behaviours and destructive relationships found in schools.

3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on theory and research literature related to violence, anti-violence, and conflict resolution education strategies in North American schools, and social capital theory. Elements from each field of literature form the conceptual core of the thesis to explain the process and outcome of peacemaking and peacebuilding how peacebuilding works.
Violence is prevalent in many schools and harsh punitive practices have been shown to have a negative impact on certain populations of students (Kang-Brown, Trone, Fratello, & Daftary-Kapur, 2013). Violence exists, to some extent, in nearly all North American schools. Violence includes physical harm inflicted between two or more people, verbal intimidation, and threats. Violence can also be indirect, implicit in social and institutional structures; this is referred to as systemic violence; for example, zero-tolerance policies (punitive discipline) and the streaming of students are examples of systemic violence that may hurt individuals through the implicit messages they send (Adams, 2000; Bickmore, 2008; Epp, 1996; Greene, 2008; Noguera, 1995).

Conflict resolution education and other dialogic, relational anti-violence approaches have emerged as promising alternatives to punitive discipline over the past few decades (Jones, 2006; Peterson & Skiba, 2001). Broad goals of conflict resolution education, helpful for evaluating the effectiveness of such programs, include creating a safe and constructive learning environment, enhancing students’ social and emotional development, and creating a constructive conflict community (Jones, 2004; Muschert & Peguero, 2010). Similar proactive anti-violence contributions include whole-school responsive regulation approaches, as well as peacebuilding theory (Bickmore, 2004; Blood, 2004; Morrison, 2007). These approaches and concepts are helpful for situating restorative peacemaking circles and related restorative practices in relation to earlier scholarly literature on conflict resolution education, and to explain how these practices may operate in schools.

Jones (2004) outlined a range of conflict resolution and conflict resolution education strategies that can be introduced in schools to prevent and reduce violence. Creating a safe environment requires schools to decrease escalation of conflicts between students, especially difficult conflicts that may result from racial and ethnic differences and inequities. Teaching and practicing conflict resolution dialogue is a way to encourage positive relationships among students, teachers and other community members, which Jones and others showed can reduce suspensions, dropout rates, and absenteeism. Jones argued that a condition for the success of conflict resolution education efforts is to promote constructive, respectful, and caring learning environments with effective classroom management. The modeling that occurs in classrooms sets the tone for interactions between students and with teachers outside of the classroom. Enhancing students’ social and emotional development through the classroom curriculum offers opportunities for problem solving and emotional awareness, both of which help students become
more socially and emotionally competent. Students who understand different perspectives and have good problem-solving skills will likely be better prepared to constructively address conflict when it arises. When input is valued by community members to address destructive conflict, tension can be limited in a school community because individuals are working together to solve problems.

Whole-school violence prevention theory includes approaches that are similar to, and overlap with, the goals of conflict resolution education. These include restorative justice and responsive regulation approaches (Blood, 2004; Braithwaite, 2002; Morrison, 2006; Skiba & Noam, 2001). Whole-school restorative violence prevention approaches may be differentiated as a pyramid of three levels or types of activity (Morrison, 2007). These practices range from broad, proactive immunization strategies directed at the whole school population, to more focused intervention strategies directed at more acute post-incident problem solving among certain individuals. As Morrison explains, at the base or primary level of the pyramid, meant to be the most commonly and broadly used to prevent destructive conflict escalation, are primary or universal (whole-school) relational practices, followed by secondary or targeted practices (managing difficulties and disruptions). The tertiary or top level, ideally to be used least, often where broader levels have prevented escalation, is intensive (mobilizing special resources to restore relationships in the most difficult conflict situations).

Peacebuilding theory mirrors the above typology. A wide spectrum of choices to deal with conflict constructively, instead of through punishment and exclusion, make up peacebuilding (Bickmore, 2007). Peacebuilding, comparable to the primary, whole-school prevention level of Morrison’s restorative practices pyramid just described, refers to a comprehensive set of approaches to constructively address questions of conflict and justice in a school’s curriculum and climate of relationships. It is the “redress of underlying inequities and social conflicts to restore healthy relationships and/or prevent future escalation of conflicts” (Bickmore, 2004, p. 77). Peacemakers attempt to resolve disagreements between individuals or groups after they arise and before these conflicts escalate into aggressive behaviour (Bickmore, 2004). Comprehensive peacebuilding systems emphasize proactive violence prevention, and (as in Morrison’s triangle model) use (but do not overly rely on) post-incident restorative peacemaking and security strategies, where needed.

Social capital theory is central to the conceptual framework of this thesis research, to explain how peacebuilding works.
Social capital is a resource that is embedded in the relationships among people whereupon one can draw in order to facilitate activities of social or personal benefit. Such relationships enable individuals to acquire information, get help and other resources thus allowing them to cope with individual and social problems and to manage everyday life. (Sacco & Nakhaie, 2007, p. 19)

Students can draw on social capital through their relationships with a range of people including teachers, other students, and administrators. These relational resources can provide support or advice for students to help them avoid or face difficult conflict situations. In schools, young people who have a reliable web of social relationships have social resources and networks (social capital) that can benefit them socially and educationally (Morrisson, 2001). This web of social relationships may create a sense of attachment or connectedness to school, fostered by trust and shared understandings, which can lead to patterns of consistent nonviolent behaviours by youth (Putnam, 1993; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Institutional settings in schools, including informal relationships with teachers or friends, may (but often do not) offer broad and equitable access to such sources of support. Some students may not have strong relationships with adults or peers who could support them in times of difficulty, such as in conflict or emotional incidents (Coleman, 1991). Teachers in particular may be helpful to guide young people and serve as protective factors against negative peer pressure, especially if the young person does not connect with a parent or guardian at home in this way.

If a child trusts an adult, whether a parent or a member from the community, and the adult is trustworthy, this relation is a resource on which the child can draw when in difficulties, whether with school-work, with friends, with a teacher, or with other problems. (Coleman, 1991, p. 16–17)

Student access to social capital is an important component of peacebuilding, rooted in a school’s climate of social interactions, which reflect shared norms, shared practices, and shared expectations. These positive networks, if accessible to all students, can help prevent violence and assist school community members to address conflict constructively (Harris & Daley, 2008).

The conceptual framework for my study (see Figure 1) illustrates the intersections of peacebuilding, and restorative peacemaking including circles, in helping to build social capital access for students and community members, thereby helping to reduce violence in schools. A peacemaking circle is the main type of restorative justice practice to be examined in this thesis. Restorative justice, “through its focus on reconnecting people to each other and highlighting
inherent relational qualities, emphasizes social engagement, which also includes addressing violence and aggression in schools” (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012, p. 146).

Figure 1. Barnes Model (2014): Restorative peacemaking circles and related peacebuilding practices, relationship building, and violence reduction.
Chapter 2  
Literature Review

1. Violence in the School Environment

Physical violence is pervasive in many schools, and punitive measures, used in response to reduce school violence, often are ineffective (Noguera, 1995; Skiba, 2000; Skiba, 2008). Overt violence in schools is an intentional form of behaviour characterized by one person attempting to harm or threaten another person, or actually inflicting harm (Greene, 2005). Less serious violence is aggressive behaviour, in verbal or physical form, intended to cause minor harm, psychological distress, intimidation, or fear (Greene, 2005). School violence refers to violence occurring on school grounds or associated with school events (Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Muschert & Madfs, 2014). Most often, less serious violent incidents precede and sometimes escalate into more serious ones; for example, bumping into another person may lead to a physical fight. Institutional policies, including the overuse of punishments such as suspensions and expulsions, can cause stigmatization or exclusion (harm) of targeted students (Adams, 2000; Gladden, 2002; Muschert & Peguero, 2010). This type of unintended violence is called “systemic violence,” defined as “any institutional practice or procedure that adversely impacts on individuals or groups by burdening them psychologically, mentally, culturally, spiritually, economically, or physically” (Epp & Watkinson, 1997, p. 4). For example, suspensions and expulsions can fracture human relationships or push misbehaving students to drop out of school. These types of punishments do not address reasons a student is behaving in such a fashion, and can actually lead to destructive escalation of such behaviour by the student (Gladden, 2002; Noguera, 1995; Skiba, 2008). Some Canadian research shows that the behaviours most often punished in schools may not involve serious or even minor violence: offenses for which students are excluded from school include so-called defiance, drug use, or property issues (Bickmore, 2004). Similarly, the National Education Policy Center in the United States revealed that only 5% of suspensions were for weapons or drugs, compared to 95% for disruptive student behaviour (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012; Losen, 2011).

Students, parents, and school officials harbour widespread fears and concerns because of continued reports of physical violence and schools being unsafe. Perhaps statistics do not really tell us to what degree students or teachers feel safe, but it is important to note that incidents of serious violence, such as fatal shootings, are quite rare in the United States and Canada (Sacco & Nakhaie, 2007): youth crime has become less serious and violent over the past 2 decades (Doob
Research evidence is quite sparse in substantiating the prevailing opinion that harsh punishments or security measures have reduced violence in schools (Gladden, 2002; Hirschfield, 2010). Often, the effectiveness of these punitive measures has been evaluated by the increase or decrease in rates of suspension themselves, which does not explain how safe students and staff members perceive a school to be. School-security measures have been shown to alienate students from school and to harm relationships inside schools (Gladden, 2002; Hirschfield, 2010; Noguera, 1995). Furthermore, researchers of comprehensive studies reported “students in schools with harsh discipline policies report feeling less safe than do schools with moderate policies” (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002, p. 145). Thus, punitive actions may be harmful to good relationships in the school environment, as researchers indicated that punishment may have little positive or even negative impact on ensuring safety in schools, and does not address the underlying causes of misbehaviour (Skiba, 2000; Skiba, 2008; Varnham, 2005).

Very few studies document serious violent school incidents, particularly in Canadian schools, most likely because these incidents are rare (Sacco & Nakhaie, 2007). Bullying aggression is one form of violence that has garnered a lot of attention by scholars and educators in recent years. Bullying involves an imbalance of power of one individual or group over another, intended to harm or intimidate, and usually involves a pattern of repeated aggression over time (Craig, Pepler, & Blais, 2007). As with violence in general, no convincing evidence has emerged that bullying is any more severe in Canada than it was 10 to 20 years ago, although more bullying awareness exists (Bickmore, 2011b).

We have come to understand bullying as a destructive relationship problem: children who bully are learning to use power and aggression to control and distress others; children who are victimized become increasingly powerless and unable to defend themselves from this form of abuse at the hands of peers. Children who are bullied are often told to “solve the problems themselves”; however, when bullying is repeated over time, it becomes increasingly difficult for victimized children to stop the torment because of their relative lack of power compared to the child or group of children doing the bullying. (Craig et al., 2007, p. 466)

Destructive relationships that characterize bullying are difficult for victims to overcome on their own. Traditional punitive approaches used in schools typically limit opportunities for victims and offenders to address underlying problems through dialogue with adult assistance.
The power imbalance between aggressor and target makes it difficult for a victim of bullying to break free from the person doing the harm. For instance, Craig et al. (2007) studied a sample of students aged 4 to 19 who completed a web-based questionnaire. Findings revealed that the number of harm-evasion strategies tried by the victim decreased with the amount of time that bullying was prolonged. Students sometimes saw their own strategies as being effective against bullying. Their research showed the importance of students having support from teachers, other staff members, and parents to address bullying concerns. Punishing individuals who bully may not be an effective way to address these complex relational problems.

Other research illustrates the incidence of verbal aggression in Canadian schools. The World Health Organization Health Behaviours in School-Aged Children survey in 2001–2002 among Canadians approximately 13 years old reported that that 17.8% of boys and 15.1% of girls reported being repeatedly victimized by other children (as cited in Craig et al., 2007). In a 2005-2006 study of youth in over 40 countries, 13.4% of 13-year-old Canadian boys and 14% of 15-year-old boys reported being the victim of repeated direct verbal bullying. For girls, 7.5% of 13-year-old and 8% of 15 year old Canadian girls reported being the victim of repeated direct verbal bullying. A caution regarding this study is that the findings were limited by the reliability of self-reporting by students. Reports based on classroom examples may not include the worst forms of bullying, which often occur outside of school (Craig et al., 2009). The frequent nature of verbal-aggression incidents in schools seems to indicate that the use of traditional punitive exclusionary measures do not promote dialogue to address the issues in conflict between students. Inconsistent responses to aggression, in particular, may not do anything to prevent or reduce these problems from occurring.

Youth in schools commonly experience physical threats. A Toronto District School Board Student Census (of over 105,000 students in Grades 7 through 12) solicited self-reported answers to questions about students’ experiences inside and outside of school. Results revealed that 21% of middle school students and 16% of high school students were sometimes or often threatened by other students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009; Yau & O’Reilly, 2007). Name calling was experienced “sometimes” or “often” by 41% of middle school students (Grades 7 and 8) and 31% of high school students (Grades 9 through 12); 16% of middle school students and 10% of high school students reported they had sometimes or often been physically bullied by an individual at school. In addition, 10% of middle school students, and 7% of high school students had sometimes or often been physically bullied by a group or gang. These reports
reveal the prevalence of interpersonal aggression, continuing until high school. Less serious forms of violence often escalate into more serious forms of violence, so it is important for school officials to identify ways to address such concerns, constructively as an opportunity for learning meaningful change, before aggression escalates (Greene, 2005).

A comprehensive 2008 study investigating violence in a stratified random sample of 3,484 U.S. public primary, middle, and high schools reported more serious violence concerns (Neiman et al., 2009). Researchers asked principals to report the frequency of incidents—including physical attacks, robberies, and thefts—in their schools. Over half the study participants (57%) reported at least one student threat of physical attack (48% without a weapon and 9% with a weapon). These reports of physical threats are of greater magnitude than those found in studies involving Canadian students.

Other research uncovered concerns with less violent behaviours. For example, the rate of distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs tends to be higher in schools with 1,000 or more students (five incidents per 1,000 students) compared to schools with lower enrolments (one to two incidents per 1,000 students; Neiman et al., 2009). Such behaviours may lead to more serious violent behaviours; for example, students may fight because they owe money for drugs. Also, the difference in the frequency of these behaviours between schools with large populations and smaller populations of students is consistent with findings reporting that students can be more alienated from school in schools with larger populations: in larger schools, on average, students are at increased risk of having weaker relationships among themselves, with teachers, and with others in the school community, thereby increasing the risk of being involved in negative behaviours and disengagement from the school (Gladden, 2002). Concerns about the frequency of lack of respect teachers reported experiencing is also important to recognize in the discussion of school violence. Neiman and colleagues (2009) also noted a higher incidence of aggressive behaviours in urban schools:

About 18 percent of city schools reported that student acts of disrespect for teachers (other than verbal abuse) happen daily or at least once a week, a higher percentage than that reported by suburban (9 percent), town (11 percent), or rural schools (5 percent) (Neiman et al., 2009, p. 3)

Teachers can often mediate conflict that occurs between students in the classroom and throughout the school, thus effectively influencing whether peace is promoted in schools through the opportunities they have to converse with students and gain their trust. Thus, relationships that
are not positive between students and teachers may impede efforts to address violence in schools. In other words, where relationships are strong, a simple conversation can help resolve a problem a student may have with others.

2. **Conflict Management Options: Control and Punishment vs. Proactive, Educativ**

**E Efforts to Minimize and Prevent Conflict Escalation**

Schools have historically followed one of two types of approaches in an effort to prevent, reduce, or respond to violence in schools. One approach involves order and control practices, which may lead to student alienation and resistance, and in many cases fails to create safe environments (Epp, 1996; Karp & Breslin, 2001; Hirshfield, 2010; Noguera, 1995). In contrast, proactive conflict resolution education and restorative anti-violence community-building initiatives are promising alternatives to address conflict and the threat of violence in humane ways, as they encourage a positive sense of community and collective responsibility (Bickmore, 2007; Jones, 2004; Morrison, 2007; Noguera, 1995). Restorative peacemaking circles and related peacebuilding practices discussed below are examples of proactive approaches in the conflict resolution literature.

Teachers and administrators have traditionally initiated social-control strategies such as school discipline, as a way to get students to conform (Adams, 2000; Noguera, 1995). These control mechanisms in schools generally rely on peacekeeping (Bickmore, 2011a). Peacekeeping, designed to have a temporary short-term impact on behaviour, includes security, punitive, and disciplinary measures to establish control and limit violence. Peacekeeping differs from peacemaking and peacebuilding because it does not address the social relations which may cause conflicts between individuals or groups (Bickmore & MacDonald, 2010). Since the early 1900s, public schools in North America were theorized to have three purposes: provide a custodial function for children, integrate and acculturate large numbers of European immigrants into the society, and prepare workers for employment (Noguera, 1995). Prior to the baby boom (1946 to 1964), corporal punishment was commonly used with the intent to deter student onlookers from misbehaving (Adams, 2000). During the 1950s to 1970s period that included the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam protests, and student unrest, corporal punishments lost its effectiveness in larger enrolled and hierarchical schools as students were more rebellious and these measures did not seem to deter would be offenders anymore (Adams, 2000). Educators put new discipline approaches in place to replace corporal punishment. The use of student exclusion, through suspension and expulsion, as a response to violence in schools grew in use during the
1960s and 1970s (Adams, 2000). Administrators viewed suspensions as an efficient way to handle large number of students who misbehaved, believed they would provide protection for the large student body, and afforded a sense of control over much larger educational facilities that were emerging (Adams, 2000). Other types of exclusions have emerged since the 1970s in response to lawsuits directed at school districts for not following due process: in-school suspensions keep students on campus so they can keep current in their work. However, implementation of this strategy varied greatly in and between schools, and concerns arose as some teachers were referring students because they lacked appropriate skills to mediate conflict in the classroom (Adams, 2000).

Harsh punishment regimes are forms of discipline employed to deter students from committing violent acts, and to exclude students who have been involved with violence (Gladden, 2002). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, in response to heightened concerns by the public regarding school violence and the violent nature of school disruptions, administrators initiated other approaches (Adams, 2000). Tough punitive measures, referred to as zero tolerance, emerged in large numbers of North American schools (Adams, 2000; Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Skiba, 2008). Over the last 2 decades, increasingly regulations have predetermined punitive consequences for a variety of offences deemed serious, such as drug possession, physical violence, or property damage (Skiba, 2008). This has meant lengthy exclusions or expulsions from schools for students found to have committed these wrongdoings. To varying degrees, zero-tolerance policies continue to exist in many North American school districts.

Surveillance, security and punitive approaches may reduce opportunities for violence to occur inside schools by deterring students with harsh punishments or excluding students from school (Gladden, 2002). However, control and surveillance interventions may also promote unwelcome and intimidating environments for students, because they harm relationships (see also Epp & Watkinson, 1997; Ginwright, Cammarota, & Noguera, 2003). Proactive anti-violence approaches, in contrast, promote dialogue and negotiation and educate students in democratic citizenship, so that violence can be prevented and the root causes of conflict can be addressed (Bickmore, 2007; Jones, 2004; Morrison, 2007; Noguera, 1995; Peterson & Skiba, 2001).

Various scholars (Adams, 2000; Bickmore, 2004, 2007, 2011b; Gladden, 2002; Morrison, 2007; Peterson & Skiba, 2001) explained how schools can use proactive and educative approaches to respond to conflict and the threat of violence. Punitive and proactive approaches assume that school violence may be caused by students’ aggressive urges or problems inside or
outside of school, and are intended to respond to these urges and to deter harmful behaviour (Gladden, 2002). In contrast, proactive, educative approaches respond to problems by building students’ social-cognitive skills and opportunities to use constructive dialogic processes such as negotiation.

Scholarship reviewed below lays out some common elements in proactive approaches that are helpful for making schools safer (Bickmore, 2004, 2011b; Gladden, 2002; Jones, 2004; Morrison, 2007; Peterson & Skiba, 2001). The promotion of quality relationships between staff and students helps bring members of the school community together and develop a strong climate of respect, a strong sense of belonging to the school environment, and strong social and emotional skills (Gladden, 2002; Morrison, 2007). Relationship building and dialogue among students may also provide opportunities so that problems can be constructively addressed and diverse individuals and opinions can be included (Bickmore, 2011a). Some scholars, such as that of Peterson and Skiba (2001), recommended that proactive approaches and peacekeeping control mechanisms be used in combination to keep schools safe. For example, early identification and intervention strategies could identify early warning signs, respond to threats, conduct risk assessment and school-wide screening, and provide early intervention counselling. Effective responses to school disruption, according to these scholars (and peacebuilding theory, cited above) include limited and equitable use of some control-based “security” measures and also restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding approaches including in-school disciplinary alternatives, restitution, anger management, and restorative justice (Peterson & Skiba 2001).

Teaching nonviolence, implicitly or explicitly, also can be helpful to prevent violence (Adams, 2000; Jones, 2004; Muschert & Peguero, 2010). Sprague et. al, (2014) reported in a that more than 25,000 US schools have invested social skills training and violence prevention techniques that teach anger management and conflict-resolution skills. Classroom or co-curricular learning opportunities can teach respect across differences and include marginalized students. These conflict resolution education opportunities also provide opportunities to build strong relationships, while engaging students in discussing or debating issues in a safe environment (Bickmore, 2011a). The modeling that occurs in a classroom sets the tone for interactions that students have with other students and teachers outside the classroom. Opportunities in the classroom curriculum for problem solving and emotional awareness may enhance students’ social and emotional development, and help students become more socially and emotionally competent (Jones, 2004). Students who understand different perspectives and
have good problem-solving skills will likely be better prepared to constructively address conflict when it arises. Teaching nonviolence helps build a constructive conflict community that encourages social justice and values the input of all community members to address destructive conflict when it emerges. Building such capable, constructive communities helps schools limit tension.

Peer mediation is an example of a proactive restorative peacemaking approach that has been shown to reduce destructive aggressive behaviour (Bickmore, 2011b; Harris, 2005). Such restorative practices have been reported to help address harassment, rebuild relationships, and reduce aggressive behaviour (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey, et al., 2007; Morrison, 2007; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). These approaches give students opportunities to solve problems and learn peacemaking skills to solve conflicts (see also Adams, 2000). The typical overreliance on control and punishment in schools likely limits the implementation of such proactive and educative approaches. Where punitive approaches are exclusionary, proactive approaches are inclusionary and provide opportunities to build and repair relationships.

Harsh punishments may have inequitable, exclusionary, and racially disproportionate effects. Systemic violence is produced by institutional policies, including the overuse of punishments such as suspensions and expulsions that exclude students (Epp & Watkinson, 1997). Zero tolerance, as mentioned above, is an approach borrowed from the criminal justice system whereby schools suspend and expel misbehaving students, increase surveillance, and criminally punish students (Gladden, 2002). These policies assume that the suspension and expulsion of a few students makes schools safer (Skiba, 2000). However, these policies do not always consider the reasons students may be misbehaving.

Zero tolerance policies do not consider the underlying causes of student behavior. Although the behavior may stem from disability, hunger, safety concerns at home, trauma, poverty, or simply from the fact that children have never been taught the appropriate behaviors, school authorities focus only on removing students from school. (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012, p. 2)

Zero-tolerance methods include two components: detection and punishment (see Adams, 2000). Detection includes surveillance through the use of cameras, hall monitors, security, and metal detectors, designed to prevent violence from occurring and to help with investigations when a violation occurs. Punishment relies mostly on exclusion, with the more serious offences
receiving long durations of exclusion; for example, a student could be suspended for 5 days for being in a fight, or 15 days for physically assaulting another student.

Punitive discipline and control-oriented security measures in schools have been shown to have discriminatory impacts on students and to promote a climate of fear (McNeely et al., 2002; Skiba, 2008). School security approaches may alienate students from school and negatively impact relationships in schools (Gladden, 2002; Gottfredson et al., 2000; Noguera, 1995; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Control-orientated regulations may also reinforce unequal status between and among students and teachers, while also restricting opportunities for students to constructively handle conflicts themselves (Bickmore, 2011b). Reviews of empirical research have revealed that detentions, suspensions, and exclusions from schools may damage many students’ feelings of inclusion (Adams, 2000; Epp, 1996; Gladden, 2002). Side effects of both in-school and out-of-school suspensions include withdrawal or avoidance of school staff by students, negative impacts on self-respect, and stigma among peers (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). This pattern of inequitably distributed harm constitutes a form of systemic violence.

Reports of disproportionate punitive discipline and exclusion of minority students in Canadian and U.S. schools are well documented (Dei, 2002; Gonzalez, 2012; Losen, 2011). In a comprehensive study, Ruck and Wortley (2002) examined the differential school discipline practices among White, Black, South Asian and Asian Canadian students. They found that minority status appeared to be an extremely important predictor of how students perceived they were treated by school authorities and by police at school. In addition “Black students were 32 times more likely than White students to perceive discrimination with respect to the use of police at school” (p. 192). These findings substantiate the theory that punitive discipline practices produce negative perceptions of fairness by minority students. These feelings of mistrust and inequitable treatment could impede strong relationships between particular populations of students and staff members, including administrators. Adams (2000) documented the disproportionately inequitable impacts of punitive exclusions on particular (racialized) populations of students. Students receiving punitive discipline, such as being dismissed from school, typically need to, and have a right to, be in school. Exclusion works against the pursuit of student achievement, particularly for students who may already have poor attendance and strained relationships with school staff. Zero-tolerance regimes are often inequitable because students are impeded from exercising their rights to due process, as fact finding and decision making are often dominated by school administrators.
Although zero-tolerance policies were originally developed to apply the same harsh consequences to all students for the same offenses, the opposite has occurred. The impact of zero-tolerance policies has been noticeably different for certain U.S. student populations, at least since the 1990s (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012; Fabelo, Thompson, & Plotkin, 2011; Gonzalez, 2012; Kang-Brown et al., 2013). Disproportionality of punishment along lines of disability, race, and economic differences have increased significantly during that time, as punishment regimes have become stricter and more standardized. The impact of punitive discipline in the state of Ohio, for example, showed startling differences among different populations of students during the 2010–2011 school year. Black students made up 16.5% of all children enrolled in Ohio public schools, but accounted for 36.6% of all out-of-school suspensions. White students made up 74.0% of Ohio’s public school enrolment, but accounted for 29.4% of all out-of-school suspensions (Ohio Department of Education, 2010). Almost two-thirds of the suspensions given to Black students were for so-called disruptive or disobedient behaviour, whereas just over half of the suspensions were given to White Students for the same offenses (Ohio Department of Education, 2010). These findings highlight the inequalities resulting from punitive discipline of students. These inequalities constitute discrimination. Research on sources and types of disciplinary referrals reinforce the idea that bias-based discrimination is a major reason for the differential treatment applied to different groups of students, particularly Black students (Skiba et al., 2002). The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2003) report examined whether the Ontario Safe Schools Act was having a disproportional impact on racial-minority students. The study found that almost all interviewees reported that direct and systemic discrimination was the main reason discipline implemented in schools had a disproportionate impact. The Commission report also revealed that Black students may be suspended for more subjective wrongdoings where stereotyping or bias may impact the decision-making process. The report did not include the number of students interviewed in this study.

Students with disabilities and living in poverty represent other populations of students who have been disciplined at different rates than their peers. During the 2010–2011 school year, 14.8% of students with disabilities were enrolled in Ohio public schools, but represented 27.5% of out-of-school suspensions. Children who lived in poverty made up 21.4% of all Ohio children, and were four times more likely to be suspended compared to students who were not low income (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012; Ohio Department of Education, 2010). Thus serious challenges exist in the ways schools typically deal with students, especially less privileged students. The
punitive approaches traditionally used in schools may be repeating patterns of inequity without addressing the underlying issues causing misbehaviour.

For discipline policies to work effectively, they need to be employed transparently, fairly, and consistently by school officials responding to student misbehaviour, and punishments should fit the circumstances of the event (Gladden, 2002). Gladden’s review of research literature shows that implementation of discipline policies has been weak partly because school officials do not enforce these rules consistently in classrooms, the main office, hallways, and with different people: students, teachers, and parents.

3 Social Capital Theory Applied to Violence Prevention and Peacebuilding

Social capital theory purports that relationships are resources that can be developed through restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding anti-violence initiatives. Recent research literature has emphasized the importance of social engagement between and among students and teachers, for creative positive school climates and to prevent school violence (Bickmore, 2011a; McNeely et al., 2002; Morrison, 2007; Morrison, 2010; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Social capital theory emphasizes the value of social-relationship networks created through dialogue and healthy interactions, as well as norms and trust in these networks. This theory presumes that the more people connect with each other, the more they will come to trust each other. Therefore, students who have more and healthier social ties in schools will likely feel more invested in their school and will aspire to achieve well in school (Coleman, 1991; Haff, Fitzpatrick, & Floyd, 2010; Putnam, 1995). In contrast to control and punishment, social-cognitive violence prevention programs, which are non-punitive and focus on negotiation, skill building, and counselling strategies, are promising strategies reported to reduce violence (Bickmore, 2011b; Gladden, 2002; Peterson & Skiba, 2001). Peacemaking (restorative conflict resolution dialogue) and peacebuilding (equity, relational, and educative) opportunities in schools may facilitate students’ development of social capital. These relational learning opportunities can be particularly helpful for students who are typically marginalized and not given opportunities to be autonomous and to constructively deal with conflict.

A robust empirical national longitudinal study of health (McNeely et al., 2002) that surveyed over 75,000 United States students in Grades 7 through 12 at 127 schools provided examples of social networks that students can potentially access in schools. The study was designed to discover interventions that would increase students’ connectedness to their schools. One finding revealed that weak student–teacher relationships can lead to classroom discipline
problems, which ultimately get referred to the school office. The study also showed that school connectedness (sense of belonging) among students was lower in schools that had more difficult classroom climates, larger school enrolments, more severe discipline policies, and few extracurricular opportunities. Participation in co-curricular activities can provide opportunities for young people to interact with one another and with teachers, and to be exposed to diverse opinions and perspectives, thereby broadening awareness and reducing alienation (Gladden, 2002). A teacher who is also the coach of a school team is able to develop strong relationships with students because the coach gets to know them in a different environment in addition to the classroom. A teacher-coach may also get to know the parents of a child or share constructive information about the student with other teachers to help a student succeed in the classroom. Relationship-building opportunities such as these in a school can help develop individuals’ social capital, can improve school climates, and are important to work against the threat of violence in larger enrolled school environments (Craig et al., 2007). Positive student–teacher relationships are also important because they enable teachers to support young people in difficult situations and be a protective factor against negative peer pressure (Coleman, 1991). As noted earlier, bullying aggression involves complex situations that are not effectively addressed through punitive consequences (Bickmore, 2011b).

The power differential in bullying makes it very challenging and intimidating for children to stand up to their aggressors. Unless adults support children and youth, students are likely to do nothing and gain a sense of helplessness about their bullying experiences over time. … If adults do not protect youth, the risk is that the children will come to believe they deserve those experiences and become more passive and accepting of the abuse they experience over time. (Craig et al., 2007)

Too often, administrators use exclusion and punishment to respond to disputes or violence between students. Social capital—the development of strong relationships among students, as well as between students and teachers—can help build peace in schools through proactive and post-incident opportunities that allow for negotiation and dialogue. The more all kinds of diverse students can feel connected with their school, the better chance there is for those students to be invested in their own learning success and to build positive relationships with other students and school staff members (Coleman, 1991; Harris & Daley, 2008; Putnam, 1993; Stanton-Salazar, 1997).
Next, I will introduce the theory of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding refers to a comprehensive system that includes some peacekeeping and peacemaking as well as long-range prevention. Peacebuilding includes proactive changes to the ways people relate to one another and is designed to prevent conflict escalation as well as injustice and systemic violence (Bickmore, 2004, 2007, 2011b). Peacemaking refers to post-incident problem solving and conflict resolution through dialogue (Bickmore, 2011a). Peacekeeping strategies, including codes of conduct, monitoring, and surveillance intended to control and limit violence, address the visible behaviour but not the social relations that may have created the conflict (Bickmore & MacDonald, 2010; Peterson & Skiba, 2001; Stinchcomb et al., 2006).

Some peacekeeping interventions can temporarily prevent violence as part of a peacebuilding system. For example, a peer monitor who identifies student conflicts and notifies a teacher is an example of peacekeeping. Overreliance on peacekeeping tends to limit democratic space, and can unfairly raise or lower the status of certain populations of students by emphasizing hierarchical control (Bickmore & MacDonald, 2010). Peer leaders can also contribute to peacemaking if they facilitate problem-solving conversations during conflicts (Bickmore, 2011b).

Peacemaking is aimed at resolving disagreements after they arise, but before they escalate into aggressive behaviour (Bickmore, 2004; Varnham, 2005). It includes dialogue and negotiation between two or more people, and it is often facilitated by a third party. Examples of peacemaking include peer mediation: restorative problem solving in peacemaking circles or conferences (Bickmore, 2011b; Morrison, 2007; Pranis, 2005). Co-curricular or formal classroom conflict resolution education is aimed at increasing students’ capacity for peacemaking. Teachers play an important role as advisors for peacemaking initiatives, especially when they develop positive relationships and encourage students to voice their opinions and concerns that can be helpful when social tensions occur (Bickmore, 2002; Craig et al., 2007).

Like peacemaking, peacebuilding includes dialogue, negotiation and problem solving, “but it also changes institutional patterns to make these processes inclusive” (Bickmore, 2011a, p. 43). Peacebuilding is a comprehensive approach to constructively address questions of conflict and justice in a school’s curriculum and climate of relationships. It includes peacemaking, through dialogue and resolution of conflict incidents as they arise, and some peacekeeping through safety and security measures. Unlike traditional approaches to school safety,
peacebuilding emphasizes constructive problem solving and redress of injustice, rather than control or punishment (Bickmore, 2004, 2007; Morrison, 2007).

Effective peacebuilding systems in schools include peacekeeping for safety and peacemaking to address daily disagreements, but they also go beyond post-incident conflict interventions by inviting students and teachers to constructively confront conflicts as a way of democratizing the school climate while provoking learning. (Bickmore, 2011a, p. 40)

Peacebuilding climates include a wide spectrum of choices to address conflict that replace punishment and exclusion with education and communication to nurture healthy and equitable relationships (see Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey, et al., 2007; Morrison, 2007; Peterson & Skiba, 2001). An integrated, whole-school approach to restorative peacebuilding will change underlying patterns of exclusion and power imbalances that exacerbate or cause destructive conflict (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Peacebuilding provides inclusive opportunities—rather than reinforcing social hierarchies—to build or rebuild relationships, reduce or eliminate marginalization, and decrease intergroup division. Examples in schools of peacebuilding include dialogues in which diverse individuals have equal voice and the power to resolve their own problems, rather than having punitive policies or violence imposed on them (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Peacebuilding also includes cocurricular opportunities that integrate individuals and potential adversary groups together in cooperative environments, to transform relationships toward mutual respect, acceptance, and constructive coexistence (Bickmore, 2004).

4 Restorative Justice Practices as an Approach to Peacebuilding in Schools

This section documents present restorative justice theory and practice as an approach that can contribute to comprehensive peacebuilding. Various types of restorative practices described embody inclusive relationship-building qualities that build capacities for comprehensive change of social norms and values in a school. Also, I will present empirical evidence on how restorative problem-solving approaches may be implemented, often without the more comprehensive changes recommended for restorative justice in education literature.

No universal consensus exists in defining restorative justice, but researchers agree it includes repairing harm and restoring relationships as consistent themes (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Lockhart & Zammit, 2005; Wearmouth, McKinney, & Glynn, 2007). Varnham (2005) described restorative justice as “a response to wrongdoing which focuses on people and relationships rather than on punishment and retribution” (p. 91). Restorative-justice practices
involve all parties affected by an event coming together to reach a collective resolution. The Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey, et al. (2007) final report of a 2-year pilot-research project described the development of restorative practices in Scotland’s schools. This report included a definition of restorative justice (broadly, beyond schools) from the United Nations.

A problem solving approach to crime that focuses on restoration or repairing the harm done by the crime and the criminal to the extent possible, and involves the victim(s), offender(s) and the community in an active relationship with statutory agencies in developing a resolution. The modes for delivering Restorative Justice include, but are not limited to, restitution or property, restitution to the victim by the offender, reparations. (United Nations, 2003, as cited in Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey, et al., 2007, p. 28)

In schools, punitive approaches typically focus on what authorities believe “should” happen to offenders when they break rules (penalties), and tend to ignore the impact of harm on others in the community (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey, et al., 2008). Restorative justice in a school setting emphasizes transforming policy and practice to be responsive and restorative to the needs of school members, and to foster reconciliation.

The [restorative peacebuilding] approach creates school communities that move beyond the predominant paradigm of regulatory formalism, to a paradigm that is more responsive because it entails giving back the harm or wrongdoing to the community most affected and enables a process for the community to address the harm, through nurturing the human capacity for restitution, resolution, and reconciliation. Through restitution the harm is repaired; through resolution the community reduces the risk of the harm reoccurring; through reconciliation comes emotional healing. (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012, p. 140)

Through restorative justice, members of the school community work together to solve problems and repair harm done to relationships. This process provides an opportunity for relationships to be strengthened and the risk of harm recurring is reduced if healing can take place.

The term restorative practices came into being because many people perceived the term restorative justice negatively, as overemphasizing “offenders” and post-incident redress in education (Morrison, 2007). I theorize that restorative practices contribute to peacebuilding. As mentioned above, restorative practices include post-incident peacemaking dialogue in one-to-one, small-group, mediation, and various formal and informal peacemaking circle forms. In
addition, restorative practices contribute to peacebuilding through proactive, inclusive relationship-building, educational-capacity building, and comprehensive changes in the culture (social norms and values) of the school. The principles of restorative practice commonly prescribed by theorists emphasize the following:

* fostering positive social relationships in a school community of mutual engagement
* taking responsibility and accountability for one’s own actions and their impact on others
* empathy with the feelings or others affected by one’s own actions;
* fairness
* commitment to equitable process
* active involvement of everyone in school with decisions about their own lives
* issues of conflict and difficulty being retained by the participants, rather than the behaviour pathologised; and
* a willingness to create opportunities for reflective change in pupils and staff.

(Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey, et al., 2007 p. 204)

Relationship strengthening, dialogue opportunities, and involving participants in the process of resolving their own conflicts are important aspects of restorative practices that may promote emotional engagement and development in young people. Restorative practices help young people learn how to address conflict and differing opinions in constructive ways.

The comprehensive Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey, et al. (2007) study provided descriptions of types of restorative practices implemented in schools. Their work described less formal restorative practices including the use by school staff and students of restorative language and mediation. Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey, et al. (2007) also described formal restorative practices including conferences among all major stakeholders; normally a facilitator leads these processes with a script of questions. Facilitators use restorative conferences in intensive post-incident conflict resolution (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al, 2007).

The use of restorative language is a post-incident response that is peacemaking and peacebuilding because it encourages dialogue and teaches students about conflict communication proactively, preventing or preceding conflict escalation. Restorative language is a way staff and students may focus on making school climate positive. This process includes promoting effective
listening skills through the use of open-ended questions to address and resolve conflicts constructively and help school members feel they are safe and have been treated equitably.

When a person uses restorative language, they promote effective listening skills, open-ended questions, and empathy, use nonjudgmental words, and incorporate some or all of the questions below into daily interactions.

- What happened?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected by what you did?
- In what way?
- What do you think you need to do to make things right? (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007, p. 59)

Restorative inquiry is active, nonjudgmental listening, generally during informal restorative conversations that allow one or more persons to reflect on a recent experience. For example, teachers can use restorative-inquiry approaches to open discussion in the hallway with a pupil who has been disruptive in class.

“How do you feel about that?” ... [or] “I have a problem that I would like to discuss.”
“Can I tell you what happened from my perspective?”

[Restorative inquiry] aims to resolve issues: “Why don’t you tell me how you see things. I’ll do the same and then we can try and sort this out” (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007, p. 61).

Peacemaking circles have proactive and post-incident applications in schools and are a way to bring people together to explain themselves by telling stories (Pranis, 2005). According to Pranis (2005), facilitators regulate dialogue by allowing only the person holding a talking piece to speak while participants follow ground rules such as listening. Participants sit in a circle with no tables and often the facilitators place objects that have meaning to the group in the centre “to remind participants of shared values and common ground” (Pranis, 2005, p. 11). Proactive circle approaches in schools include talking or checking in, community building, celebration, or honouring circles. In a check-in circle, participants do not attempt to reach consensus and individuals explore a topic from many different perspectives. Classroom teachers can use check-in circles to begin or complete a day or lesson, or help to set a positive tone and open communication. Community-building circles create bonds and relationships between individuals.
Celebration and honouring circles bring people together to recognize the accomplishments of an individual or group. Post-incident circle applications in schools are understanding, healing, support, conflict circles, and reintegration circles. Educators use circles of understanding to gain a more complete picture of the reason for a particular event or behaviour. In healing circles, participants share the pain of a person or persons who have experienced trauma or loss. Support circles bring people together to support a person through a difficulty or challenge they are experiencing. Participants may make agreements and plans in this process but decision making is not likely to occur. Conflict circles or restorative peacemaking circles bring together disputants to resolve their differences (Morrison, 2007; Pranis, 2005)

Restorative post-incident peacemaking circles often follow a form based on the traditions of indigenous people in Canada, the United States, and New Zealand (Morrison, 2007; Palazzo & Hosea, 2004; Pranis, 2005). In restorative peacemaking circles, people who have been involved in or affected by conflict or incidents of harm meet together. Circles include key supporters for each conflict participant, such as friends or family members. The main reason to hold such peacemaking circles is so individuals can be heard, hear from others who have been affected by their behaviour, and find ways to restore and repair relationships and prevent future harm. Formal restorative circles, organized when there is a serious incident, may involve a highly structured, scripted process, in which people directly involved in an incident, along with their parents or other supporters and key school personnel, engage in intensive dialogue. Often, facilitators will plan in advance where everyone should sit in this formal circle. The circle facilitator speaks to everyone involved prior to the meeting to prepare them for the process of answering questions and concerns. Like all restorative-justice practices, the dialogue is voluntary: it is imperative that people who are present volunteer to be part of this process, feel as safe as possible, and take some level of responsibility. Participants may write a consensus agreement after a resolution occurs (Pranis, 2005).

Mediation is a post-incident type of restorative practice that involves one impartial person who facilitates dialogue to help two or more people resolve a problem or repair harm. In shuttle mediation, the mediator goes back and forth between two individuals or groups to facilitate moving toward resolution, during a time when one or both parties may be unwilling or frightened to meet in person. In peer mediation, a trained student or students facilitate dialogue among peers to help them resolve an issue (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007).
The next section reviews the existing scholarly evidence about consequences of post-incident restorative peacemaking, meaning dialogic problem-solving initiatives, in schools. Some of these initiatives are referenced as conflict resolution in education, others as restorative justice practices, but as explained above, they have certain key characteristics. Peer mediation is one of most researched conflict education approaches: implementation of peer mediation may be low cost and require minimal organizational change (Johnson & Johns, 2010; Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007). Peer mediation benefits include positive changes in student skills and understandings, increased student cooperation, improvements in classroom climate, improvements in student self-esteem, and reductions in fighting and other aggression (Jones, 2004; Peterson & Skiba, 2001).

Bickmore (2002) reported on a comprehensive mixed-methods study involving observations and interviews with peer mediators, administrators, programs advisors, and teachers, to investigate the implementation and effects of a peer mediation program in 28 urban elementary schools over a 1-year period in Cleveland, Ohio. This researcher documented various positive consequences of peer mediation implementation, including reductions in suspensions and school absences, improvements in average academic achievement, and improvements in students’ knowledge and attitudes about nonviolent conflict management, the latter measured by a pre- and post-surveys. Bickmore designed qualitative aspects of this study to understand what facilitated and impeded effective conflict resolution program implementation in these elementary schools. This study reported that diverse elementary students’ understanding and likelihood of using nonviolent conflict resolution, as well as their chances to achieve in school, significantly improved after the implementation of peer mediation programming in schools. This reinforces the findings of other studies on how peacemaking and other anti-violence initiatives can contribute to peacebuilding if they provide opportunities for dialogue between diverse students and opinions (Bickmore & MacDonald, 2010; Jones, 2004; Peterson & Skiba, 2001).

In the Cleveland study, students who participated as mediators or conflicting parties in mediation dialogues demonstrated improved understanding of how to resolve conflicts with others. Such practices could help build relationships and improve access to social capital (Putnam, 1995). Students who were prone to fighting could learn different ways of handling conflicts, which demonstrates the educative aspect of this learning. Cohen (2011) argued in a professional newsletter that, through peer mediation, young people have opportunities to speak to one another, which helps them develop conflict resolution skills and make connections to
strengthen relationships so they can develop community. The Cleveland study also revealed that
for schools implementing peer mediation programming, average reading achievement scores
increased, and suspensions went down 25%: this perhaps contributed to an improved sense of
connection to the school community for these students. Also, peer mediation helped students
resolve problems instead of being punished by school administrators or teachers.

Another review of the conflict resolution education research literature found that peer
mediation programming generally improves school climate and reduces violent aggression
according to the perspectives of students and teachers (Skiba & Noam, 2001). Peer mediation
was found to be more successful at reducing violence in schools where there was effective
implementation involving well trained mediators, committed teachers, and administrators who
understand the goals and objectives of the program. The effectiveness of peer mediation and
other restorative practices is enhanced when they are part of a broader framework of school-wide
peacebuilding transformation (Peterson & Skiba, 2001; Morrison, 2007).

Harris’s (2005) comprehensive qualitative and quantitative study, involving pre- and
post-test measures of peer mediation among 51 disputants, 37 peer mediators, and 6 program
staff, explored whether high school disputants would learn skills during the peer mediation
process that could help them resolve future conflicts without the need for third-party
intervention. Harris’s study explored the consequences of post-incident peacemaking alternatives
at three high schools. However, it does not appear that diverse students were involved as peer
mediators or participants in this study, or if they were, the author did not highlight this diversity.
Also, students self-reported their experiences, so some reports of violence reduction may not
have captured the whole picture. As part of the procedure for this research, a staff member was
notified when a student conflict was referred to peer mediation; the staff member would then
determine whether the conflict was appropriate to be mediated by peers. Educators provided
student peer mediators from three high schools who participated in this study 160 hours of
conflict resolution training before they were allowed to mediate.

Harris’ research revealed that more than 90% of conflict cases (17 of 19) were resolved
by disputants with the help of peer mediators, and 2 months after the mediation ended, no further
conflicts between the individuals ensued and they remained satisfied with the outcomes. This
demonstrates that peer mediation can help repair relationships and thereby build social capital
through dialogue between individuals in conflict. This study also reported that well trained peer
mediators were well versed in the peer mediation process, and successfully modeled knowledge,
attitudes, and skills to help disputant peers in future conflicts. This finding indicated the educative benefits of this anti-violence approach and situated it as contributing to longer term peacebuilding, in addition to peacemaking after precipitating conflict incidents. In the programs that Harris and Bickmore studied, peer mediators were limited to small cadres of students; the majority of students did not have access to mediation training, but only to the informal learning opportunities represented by the mediation sessions themselves. Also, little evidence indicated that these peer mediation programs were part of any broader whole-school peacebuilding initiatives, or how this approach was impeded or supported by contexts in various schools.

The importance of professional development to support proactive, restorative anti-violence initiatives was reported in this and other studies (Bickmore, 2011a; McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, et al., 2008). Bickmore’s (2011a) study also demonstrated that allocating periods for mediators to meet was highly important, as it is difficult in schools to release students from their normal classroom activities. Including diverse students as dispute-resolution leaders was also shown to be important because in schools where, instead, mediators had higher status, unconsciously imitated traditional patterns of discipline rather than encouraging participants to autonomously voice their own viewpoints to contribute to resolving their own problems, thereby reinforced typical control and punishment approaches (see also Bickmore & MacDonald, 2010). The study showed that too much overbearing adult support, curtailing students’ autonomy, sometimes stifled student opportunities for autonomous dispute-resolution dialogue; simultaneously, some adult support was required to guide mediators through potentially dangerous situations and to support the full engagement of diverse, lower status students who are often marginalized and not included in dialogue to solve their own conflicts (Noguera, 1995). This outcome demonstrates the importance of positive relationship resources (social capital), in particular the guidance that teachers can provide to students addressing conflict situations. However, these findings are associated with elementary schools, which typically may not experience the same level of serious physical violence as high schools; thus there is a need for research, such as this thesis, in the latter contexts.

The Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., (2007) study of restorative practices implementation in Scotland schools revealed that most secondary schools that confronted resistance (by staff members) in implementing restorative practices tended to introduce restorative practices only on a small scale, and to tie the implementation of restorative practices to existing programming directed at students with what adults viewed as challenging behaviour. Moreover, they found that
secondary schools faced a variety of challenges related to implementation, which included difficulties in adjusting discipline policies and procedures for restorative practices to be used by staff and students.

Stinchcomb et al. (2006) reported on case studies of three urban Minnesota elementary schools (two K–6 and one 7–8) implementing restorative practices, extending from 1998 to 2001. Their exploratory data, examining the short-term impact of restorative interventions, is particularly helpful for identifying types of proactive restorative approaches used in those schools as part of whole-school violence prevention. Researchers selected the study region due to its long-term involvement in implementing comprehensive school-based restorative practices. Qualitative data included observations, interviews, and focus groups; they measured expulsions, suspensions, academic achievement, attendance, and school climate using quantitative pre- and post-test data. The researchers used no comparison groups but conducted repeated pre- and post-test comparisons over several years.

Each school had a restorative justice planner on staff who facilitated circles to repair harm, supported community building in classrooms, and promoted alternatives to violence. All staff received basic training covering restorative justice principles, intensive training on restorative justice practices and school discipline issues, and 60 to 70% also received follow-up training on peacemaking circles. Stinchcomb and colleagues found that an important contextual factor affecting implementation was that the school district had developed a broad vision for implementing the restorative philosophy in all schools.

School-district administrators encouraged participating schools to include restorative principles in the overall learning experience. Other restorative approaches implemented in these elementary schools included daily class meetings in the form of community circles, peer mediation, anti-bullying efforts, and a focus on the social-emotional curriculum: these innovations reflect peacebuilding theory, emphasizing opportunities for relationship development and social capital (Gladden, 2002). Most schools adopted restorative circles as their main restorative process, and administrators tried to integrate traditional disciplinary approaches with the restorative philosophy. In these schools at the time of this study, the more serious the incidents, the less likely it was that restorative practice replaced existing zero-tolerance policies.

Even in the schools included in this analysis, where administrators were willing to consider a restorative process for holding students accountable for their actions, it was not to the exclusion of traditional options. Although comfort with and interest in
restorative procedures has grown, administrators still use a combination of punitive and restorative measures, including circles, conferences, and/or suspensions or expulsions. Given the wide range of students and their behavior, and the wide range of administrators and their philosophies, this multifaceted combination is the most feasible and flexible approach to meeting the equally diverse demands of widely varying situations.

(Stinchcomb et al., 2006, p. 141)

Thus administrators in these schools applied a mixture of restorative and punitive practices, which is quite common in the current environment of control and punishment and goes against the ideals expressed in restorative justice theory (Morrison, 2007; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Pranis, 2005).

The types of incidents referred for restorative conferences varied by school, but included serious racial and sexual harassment, vandalism, assault, theft, and arson. Physical violence such as fighting and classroom incidents were the most frequent infractions addressed using restorative circle conferences. Stinchcomb et al. (2006) reported that half of the staff in participating schools used circles on a daily basis for check-in during homeroom classes, and to respond to school-conduct infractions or interpersonal conflicts. Quantitative school-wide data showed positive outcomes for the use of restorative practices in these three schools. Over the 3-year period, one elementary school saw behavioural referrals drop from 1,143 to 407, and also showed significant reductions in in-school and out-of-school suspensions. The other elementary school did not experience the same reductions, and in-school suspensions increased (a policy required removal of students from class for even the most minor infractions such as temper tantrums), but out-of-school suspensions did decrease from 27 to 4. This school had no separate room with a restorative justice planner who worked out alternative disciplinary plans, as was the case in the other elementary school. The junior high school in this study showed a significant decrease in out-of-school suspensions, from 110 to 55; this was especially significant because in-school suspensions were not an option at this school. Using circles to repair harm was not implemented as frequently in the junior high school as in the elementary schools but teachers and administrators made fewer referrals.

The Stinchcomb et al. (2006) study did not identify the types of students referred to post-incident peacemaking circles, nor exactly who facilitated circles, or how teachers found time to interrupt classes to lead peacemaking circles. They also did not report how frequently teachers implemented proactive educative peacebuilding-learning approaches. The Stinchcomb et al.
findings revealed that restorative circles can take a fair amount of time and are not always quick solutions to resolve conflicts or harmful incidents. Patience is often required for this problem-solving method, and many circle meetings may be needed before arriving at a resolution to some seriously escalated conflicts. Implementation challenges highlighted the importance of everyone on staff receiving training. Ongoing mentoring for teachers was very important to inspire and support staff. The researchers emphasized that leadership to provide vision, time, support, resources, and encouragement for staff was vital for initiating and sustaining restorative practices in schools.

The next section reviews the limited research evidence that exists on the consequences of proactive peacebuilding opportunities provided to students in schools, or their impact (Gladden, 2002; Peterson & Skiba, 2001). Proactive educative implicit and explicit curriculum practices that show promise to positively affect school climate and contribute to peacebuilding include parental involvement, peer monitoring and social skills, bullying prevention, violence-prevention curricula, character education, peer mediation training and programming, student governance and leadership, and affinity support or action groups (Bickmore & MacDonald, 2010; Peterson & Skiba, 2001). These initiatives overlap markedly. The theory of social capital will also be used to examine the strengths and limitations of the evidence under review.

Bickmore and MacDonald (2010) reported on part of a qualitative 4-year study of anti-violence and peacebuilding-related programming in three large diverse Canadian school districts. The study included examining the ways diverse student leaders were involved in efforts to build peaceful environments in these schools, in the context of mandated curriculum and other policy contexts. The researchers analyzed interviews and documents to describe the variety of conflict-management-related programming. Interviews with 89 staff members in three school districts included centrally assigned teachers, administrators, and classroom teachers in elementary and high schools. Bickmore and her research team selected these educators because they led and implemented a variety of peacemaking, peacebuilding, or student-leadership initiatives. This study did not attempt to assess the consequences of programming, but did attempt to make sense of the opportunities various programming provided. Findings revealed that active and explicit opportunities for student-peacebuilding participation, such as school governance and peer leadership, were sparse and mostly available to high-status populations of students. Such scarcity and inequity could limit the opportunities for diverse students to experience opportunities to break through systemic violence (Gladden, 2002). Somewhat more opportunities for conflict
dialogue and citizenship learning for diverse students occurred in extracurricular contexts in older grades, in the form of support and advocacy groups such as multicultural clubs or affinity groups. Two of the three school districts showed some evidence that central staff tangibly helped support school staff to enable the engagement of diverse students in active peacemaking and peacebuilding. School interviews offered evidence that these students, when given such opportunities, were very capable of performing peacemaking and peacebuilding, and that being involved in these activities seemed to improve positive relationships between teachers and students. Elementary peer mediations facilitated some peacekeeping as well as peacemaking, but did not always follow the process to allow students to solve problems autonomously. In such situations where peacekeeping control replaces peacemaking dialogue facilitation, students are deprived of a conflict-learning (peacebuilding) opportunity.

Some obstacles to adequate implementation of student peacemaking and peacebuilding activities were found across the three school districts, such as timetabling, staff availability to support students, and students whose jobs or home responsibilities restricted their opportunity to participate in after-school activities. The findings from this study reinforced recommendations for implementation of various restorative practices in other studies (Bickmore, 2001; Harris, 2005; Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). It appears that training, committed staff, and ongoing support are necessary to increase the implementation and effectiveness of restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding practices.

Peterson and Skiba’s (2001) review of research literature presented some evidence of outcomes from proactive and educative anti-violence approaches such as parent involvement, character education, violence-prevention curricula, and peer mediation. They found that improving communication between parents and school personnel offered parents, students, and teachers greater access to social capital, and therefore can build stronger school communities with improved trust and positive interactions. Examples of such engagement activities are volunteer opportunities for parents, parent-interview nights, and collaboration in school governance in the form of parent councils. These actions can increase interactions and provide opportunities for dialogue. Such processes can work against systemic violence, because they provide opportunities for diverse students to become more engaged in school activities. Outcomes of parent involvement reported in this review include better parent–school staff communication, which may in turn lead to development of social capital for student success, lower suspension rates, and improved parent understanding.
Character education may (although it often does not) include conflict resolution education curriculum or cooperative learning (Peterson & Skiba, 2001). Such proactive approaches include the classroom teaching of ethical values such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Also included in character education may be establishment of school value statements to set a school-wide base of high nonviolent expectations. Character education value statements are different from school or classroom rules because they describe positive traits such as self-discipline and perseverance, and do not lead toward punishment. Little research evidence showed the effectiveness of character education, partly because it is a philosophy that is difficult to associate with one program. Similarly, virtually no evidence shows that value statements can reduce disruptive student behaviours, but they may provide a sense of meaning in students’ prosocial behaviour. Thus, character education may provide opportunities for the development of social capital and peacebuilding. For example, the discussion of character education concepts in the classroom can serve as an opportunity for diverse students to debate and discuss topics, and thereby to be exposed to different opinions in a constructive uncompetitive environment. Similarly, all school members could be given an opportunity to provide input in creating school value statements as part of a community-building exercise. Such opportunities for interaction and dialogue could serve as another opportunity to develop social capital.

Violence prevention and conflict resolution curricula are framed as part of a broader proactive, educative-violence prevention (peacebuilding) approach (Peterson & Skiba, 2001). Such curriculum may teach students alternatives to fighting, build understanding and competence in negotiation-based approaches, and may be connected to school-wide peer mediation programs. Such conflict resolution education provides opportunities for students to interact with other students and teachers in the classroom, to engage in class discussions, to come to appreciate diversity, and to cover topics related to the prevention of violence. Peterson and Skiba’s (2001) review presented evidence of improvements in classroom climates, increased student cooperation, and reductions in violence. Similar to character education, the interactions and dialogue encouraged through conflict resolution curricula provide students with opportunities to access social capital, to develop positive interactions with classmates, and to discuss topics in a safe and constructive environment. Peterson and Skiba’s review did indicate that the effectiveness of violence-prevention curricula depends on how it is implemented by teachers, and their level of commitment to teach this material.
5. Conclusion of Literature Review

The scholarly literature reviewed above is strong in revealing how punitive practices disproportionately harm or exclude less privileged populations of students. The literature review summarized the key ingredients for implementing peacebuilding in schools, as well as pointing to some factors that require further research. The key ingredients are that restorative practices should be supported by staffing, perhaps by a coordinator in the school, and quality training should include overview or restorative principles. Time is required to implement restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding practices effectively. Researchers reported that administrators can implement a mixture of restorative practices alongside punitive practices. The review of the literature also explored the use of restorative practices in schools alongside punitive practices. I argue that much still needs to be learned about the benefits and challenges of peacebuilding approaches and social capital.

This review of literature began by highlighting the prevalence in North America of verbal or physical violence, which can include attempting to harm or harming another individual (Greene, 2005). This review pinpointed violence as a concern in schools that should be addressed, and convincingly revealed how administrators disproportionately punish minority populations and less privileged students in North American schools. I introduced the concept of systemic violence, referring to institutional practices or procedures that adversely burden or harm particular groups or individuals. My review shows that in schools, zero tolerance and other harsh discipline policies limit educational opportunities and success, especially for minority populations of students (Gladden, 2002). This review noted that a higher incidence of violence tends to occur in larger schools.

A comprehensive study of over 2,100 teachers across 84 high schools in the United States reported that students and teachers in some smaller schools more likely develop stronger bonds with each other (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). This camaraderie, by extension, may help reduce violence. The development of social capital through peacemaking, peacebuilding, and related antiviolence initiatives should be considered as strategies to strengthen relationships between teachers and students in schools of any size. The same study reported that regardless of students’ attitudes towards schooling, students in lower socioeconomic schools will be more likely to experience lower levels of trust on behalf of their teachers, compared to students in high socioeconomic schools. This tendency is important; it is possible that peacemaking and
peacebuilding approaches can encourage opportunities for dialogue, build social capital in students, and improve trust between teachers and students.

This review clearly distinguished between two types of choices for conflict management in schools. On one end of the spectrum, schools use control and punishment approaches to respond to or prevent violence. At the other end of the continuum, schools implement comprehensive programs of conflict resolution education, restorative conflict resolution, and other proactive educative approaches to address conflict and the threat of violence (Adams, 2000; Bickmore, 2011b; Gladden, 2002; Morrison, 2007; Noguera, 1995; Peterson & Skiba, 2001). I argue that restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding approaches can foster positive relationships and strengthen ties between and among students and teachers, thereby enhancing students’ social capital resources for building and sustaining peaceful social relations (Haff et al., 2010; Putnam, 1995; Stinchcomb et al., 2006).

Additional research is still needed to strengthen the case for the use of proactive, educative peacemaking and peacebuilding approaches such as restorative peacemaking circles. The existing literature does not go far enough in explaining what is actually implemented, or how those practices intersect with regulatory environments and prior school practices, nor does it adequately identify the consequences of these approaches. Educators increasingly use restorative justice practices as an alternative to punitive discipline. Research reviewed here shows that such practices can help repair and rebuild harm done to relationships as a result of conflicts or violence (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Pranis, 2005). A few studies begin to demonstrate key ingredients for the effective implementation of restorative practices. Dedicated and committed staff have been shown to be very helpful for the implementation of various restorative approaches (McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, et al., 2008; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Also, having sufficient training, and consistently available well trained individuals who are able to facilitate various restorative practices such as check-in circles or peacemaking circles are very important to generate violence reduction outcomes. Not least, leadership is an important factor to provide vision, support, and resources to teachers who are implementing restorative practices.

More research is required to explain how promising post-incident and proactive restorative practices may be implemented in schools, especially with respect to the contexts in which these practices take place, who facilitates these practices, and what policies help or impede the successful implementation of these practices. Another question is to understand the consequences of restorative approaches for various types of conflicts. Researchers must further
substantiate the impact of whole-school peacebuilding initiatives on preventing or reducing violence and strengthening relationships. Very little prior research has explored the particular consequences of restorative practices for diverse participants, including marginalized and at-risk students.

Restorative peacemaking circles and related practices are proactive preventive, community inclusive, and post-incident (intervention) dialogue approaches that may help prevent and reduce violence and strengthen relationships in schools to support sustainable peace. Circles can provide opportunities for dialogue and give community members, including students, a chance to take on responsibility to resolve conflicts collectively. Circle practices also may help model and teach school members about how to constructively resolve conflicts. This thesis study, reported below, focuses on listening to diverse participants’ perspectives about how peacemaking circles were implemented in their high schools, and how they viewed this innovation as promoting positive relationships leading to a reduction in violence. This study will be useful to educators and policy makers who are looking for ways to build positive school climates as part of whole-school violence prevention.
Chapter 3  
Methodology

1  Introduction

This chapter explains and justifies the research methodology, study design, and sources of data for this inquiry. The first section discusses why this thesis project uses a qualitative research method, elaborating the type of qualitative study in relation to the problem to be studied. The second section presents the research design, including the research questions. In the third section, I present all aspects of the data collection, articulating the procedures used to obtain research approval, and the data sources obtained (i.e., the interviews, types of interviewees, observations, and policy documents). The fourth section outlines the data analysis procedures, based on constant comparison guided by the conceptual framework. The fifth section contains a summary.

2  Qualitative Research Method

A qualitative research method was employed for this study. Qualitative researchers are interested in how people experience events, how they make sense of the world, and what it is like to experience particular conditions (Willig, 2001). This method offers opportunities to discover what meanings participants attach to particular events, thereby helping to make sense of the phenomena under investigation. Data presented in qualitative research are facts in a narration instead of statistical results as in quantitative research (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). In this study, the phenomenon to be understood was the implementation of peacemaking circles, related restorative peacebuilding approaches, the potential for improving relationships between individuals and groups, and reducing violence in schools.

A key feature of qualitative research is comparison of data, including the absence or presence of particular phenomena in the accounts of different sets of participants (Ritchie & O’Connor, 2003). School members intervene or experience conflict and violence in many different ways, and their perspectives are also shaped by the contexts in which conflict occurs. For example, some teachers may see student-conflict episodes as potential learning experiences, whereas other educators may believe these experiences should only be addressed in a punitive way.

A qualitative research method was suitable for this study because it was flexible and adaptable to capture multiple perspectives or meanings that diverse youth and adult participants shared from their peacemaking circle and conflict experiences. Also, because questions related to
conflict are quite context driven and situational, a qualitative research design was useful to describe the relational and violence reduction qualities of peacemaking circle processes. A quantitative approach would not capture such nuanced information. For example, diverse participants’ perspectives about how they perceived peacemaking circle-related processes as helping to repair relationships in a school can be captured through a qualitative method. A quantitative method, in contrast, may not be able to determine the reasons why or how. Moreover, a qualitative approach enables the investigator to use probing open-ended questions in interviews, to facilitate exploration of multiple perspectives on the peacemaking circle innovation’s meanings, the influence of violence reduction, and the strengthening of relationships in specific school contexts.

The type of qualitative-research method used was a multiple case study. Case studies are flexible and adaptable to many contexts, processes, and individuals, and allow for emergent development of understanding that allows for each “case” to be studied in depth. “Processes of purposeful sampling, data collection, and partial data analysis are simultaneous and interactive rather than discrete sequential steps” in case study methods (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 374). Case study sample designs are formed around context(s), instead of a series of individual participants, and may focus on processes. Case studies are also designed to facilitate analysis that can be quite complex, often used when no single perspective can provide a “full account or explanation of the research issue, and where understanding needs to be holistic, comprehensive and contextualized” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 52). Educators’ interpretations and the consequences of peacemaking circles and related restorative practices are complex research issues, embedded in particular school contexts that can be better understood using this kind of qualitative approach. The cases in this study are three high schools, specifically the implementation and apparent consequences of alternative (restorative) approaches to conflict management intervention and prevention in those schools.

When multiple cases are studied, comparisons can be made among different participants’ perspectives in cases, across cases, and between groups of participants across cases (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Macmillan & Schumacher, 1993; Silverman, 2000; Yin, 2003). Multiple case studies can require more time and resources than single cases. However, as Merriam (2009) and others pointed out, the benefit of multiple cases, in comparison to single case studies, is that with more cases and more variation across cases, the evidence or analytical conclusions are more compelling than one case can provide.
By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, a researcher can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where, if possible, why it carries on as it does. One can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings. The logic behind multiple cases is that each case must be carefully selected to predict similar or contrasting results for theoretical reasons. (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29, as cited in Merriam, 2009)

As discussed earlier, restorative peacemaking circles and peacebuilding practices such as social inclusion and relationship-building programs are relatively new phenomena. Research is needed about their interpretation, implementation, and role in violence reduction and relationship strengthening in specific bounded school contexts (i.e., case study settings). Thus, this thesis investigation into the characteristics and implications of these important restorative practices in three different high school settings includes diverse participants’ experiences with, and perspectives on, restorative peacemaking circles in relation to goals of violence reduction and relationship-building.

3 Research Design

I collected data on the implementation and perceived impacts of restorative peacemaking circles and related practices from three secondary school case study sites in two school districts. In alignment with a case study research design, I made sure to collect data from several sources, including interviews with staff, students, and resource people; an analysis of school policy and programming documents; and field observations. All three high schools were in the early stages of restorative practice implementation. A small group of staff at one school received expert training in restorative principles and practices. In the other two schools, external facilitators were brought to the school to facilitate restorative peacemaking. The collected data allowed me to compare common and contrasting themes among the three schools, between the two schools in the same district, and across the two school districts.

Because case studies often lead to further inquiry and can be used to elaborate a concept or develop a model, this emergent design enabled the creation of my conceptual model to understand the ways restorative peacemaking circles and related practices could be used in high schools (see Barnes model, Figure 1). My model builds on theories of comprehensive preventative as well as interventionist whole-school approaches to peacebuilding (Morrison, 2007; Peterson & Skiba, 2001) and highlights the capacity of restorative peacemaking circles and
peacebuilding practices to develop participants’ social capital, as a resource for violence reduction and prevention.

4  **Research Questions**

The major research questions and subquestions to help guide this research investigation follow:

1. How were restorative peacemaking circles and related peacebuilding approaches implemented in selected secondary schools as part of an overall conflict management and violence reduction strategy? That is, what did the use of restorative peacemaking circles and related practices look like in each school?
   1a. What helped or hindered implementation of restorative peacemaking circles and peacebuilding practices in each school? What resources helped each school develop and implement these approaches?

2. How may restorative peacemaking circles and peacebuilding approaches help strengthen relationships (social capital) and prevent or reduce violence between individuals and groups?
   2a. For what kinds of conflict incidents did various stakeholders see restorative peacemaking circles as useful or un-useful in reducing or preventing violence? How so, and why?
   2b. What kinds of peacebuilding opportunities did various stakeholders see as useful or un-useful in reducing or preventing violence? How so and why?

5  **Research Site Selection and School Profiles**

In this section I describe my rationale for site selection and provide a brief description of the schools selected as sites. The following section offers detailed information about data gathered throughout this investigation. I used purposive sampling to select information-rich cases for in-depth study (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). I selected schools that they were in the early stages of implementing restorative peacemaking circles. The three schools chosen for inclusion in this case study evidenced restorative peacemaking practices at all three sites, as well as post-incident or proactive peacebuilding practices. Together, the three schools offered an opportunity to collect rich information that would allow for an investigation into factors influencing implementation such as staffing, leadership, and size of school (small versus large). Not all high schools in Canada have these characteristics, and the three selected sites were unique insofar as they offered an opportunity to examine and interpret implementation
of restorative practices. Each school also had a school administrator who was committed to implementing either peacemaking or peacebuilding innovations. In addition, each school was required by Ontario provincial law to have in place, or to be working towards, successful approaches to violence prevention (safe schools; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Therefore, each case study school would have implemented a variety of strategies intended to prevent or reduce violence, perhaps including some restorative practices such as mediation and relationship-building activities. I provide a brief description of the three case study schools next. I provide detailed school-context information related to conflict management and policies in Chapter 4.

All three sites were secondary schools. Because secondary schools tend to be relatively large, they have particular challenges in developing and maintaining positive relationships between and among students and other adults, which is an important aspect of addressing students’ potential alienation and the consequent likelihood of violence (Gladden, 2002). A unique attribute of restorative peacemaking circles and related peacebuilding practices is their attempt to restore relationships between people involved in conflict. To explore the ways implementation of circle processes as a conflict management alternative may affect this relational dynamic in comparable contexts, I selected two midsized secondary schools, Ocean School and River School, each with 1,000 to 1,300 students (using pseudonyms) in the same school district. To maximize what might be learned from variation, the third school, Pine School, had an enrollment of less than 500 students, and was located in a different school district. All three schools fulfilled the key case study selection criteria of having established at least some implementation of restorative peacemaking circles and related whole-school peacebuilding approaches. All three schools had at least two administrators, principal and vice principal). The three secondary schools all had multicultural student populations and were located in metropolitan areas of southern Ontario.

Because of this study’s focus on the relevance and impact of circle processes for diverse students, the schools selected were comprehensive schools, offering courses at the applied (hands-on learning) and academic (more theoretical) levels. I explored diverse participants’ perceptions of the benefits or drawbacks of using restorative circles and related peacebuilding approaches for relationship strengthening and violence reduction. Thus, all schools selected had diverse pools of students (at least 25% of enrollment comprised of language, religious, ethnic, or visible minorities). Last, as a key indicator of implementation of the phenomenon under study,
the three selected schools all had willing participants—teachers, students, and administrators—who had taken part in at least one peacemaking circle experience.

An important difference among the case study schools was that, in two of the schools selected, non-school staff from a community agency led the circles, whereas in one school, in-school staff members facilitated the restorative circles.

6 Data Collection

This section describes the ways I approached school districts and schools and how they agreed to participate in the study, the ethics review process, the data sources and instruments, the types of participants, the type of observation, and the nature of policy and program documents collected.

6.1 Involving Participant School Districts and Schools

In the fall of 2009, I approached a superintendent and the research coordinator of the Cedar School District and asked them informally to help me identify and gain permission to conduct case studies at schools in their district. The Cedar School District is located in the metropolitan area of southern Ontario. Both the superintendent and the research coordinator declared that the proposed thesis research fulfilled the criteria for approved research to be conducted in their school district. In January 2010, the research coordinator of the Pacific School District also indicated they would support this research, explaining that the board had recently adopted an increased awareness of restorative practices. The project obtained University of Toronto ethics approval in March 2010.

I began data collection in March 2010. Visits to the three participating schools occurred over a 3-week period for each school during parts of the day. I continued follow-up visits to schools over a period of 4 months thereafter, depending on the availability of participants. After the research coordinator from the Cedar School District suggested some potential school sites, I e-mailed those schools’ administrators a letter outlining the study (see Appendix H). I contacted the principal of Pine School directly; after agreeing to participate, the principal put me in contact with the Pine School vice principal, who passed out my recruitment letters to potential participants. Interested participants contacted me by telephone or through e-mail, and I made arrangements to interview them. Similarly, the research coordinator for the Pacific School District contacted with the principal of Ocean School, a person who had been instrumental in developing the school board’s partnership with the Spencer Agency, an organization that taught restorative justice principles and facilitated peacemaking circles for various schools. With an
Ocean School vice principal, who coordinated the implementation of circles at this school, these two administrators distributed my study letter to potential research participants, who in turn contacted me; I made arrangements to interview them. In an initial meeting with administrators in each school, I made clear that participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, and that any participant could withdraw from participating in the study at any time.

Given the emotional nature of peacemaking circle experiences, I invited participants to describe these experiences in interviews, while minimizing emotional and psychological risk by not directly describing confidential peacemaking circle processes themselves. Through interviews, participants described these experiences. Although school administrators were aware of the identities of the potential pool of participants, pseudonyms were used to protect their identities. To further protect respondent’s identities, data collected from circle participants focused on the restorative peacemaking circle process, particularly in relation to perceived potential consequences such as relationship strengthening and conflict reduction, rather than on individual roles in the conflict experience.

6.2 Interview Guides Development

6.21 Piloting interviews

As described earlier in Chapter 1, I conducted four peacemaking circles in my role as vice principal at my own school between September 2009 and June 2010. These circles included students, parents, teachers, and administrators (i.e., all those persons impacted by the incidents). After receiving approval for the thesis study from the University of Toronto, I tested my key data collection instruments by conducting pilot interviews with one parent, the principal, and the social worker at my school, because they had been involved in the circles I facilitated. It was not appropriate for me to formally interview these participants or to include their interviews in the primary data analysis because I had a pre-existing relationship with these individuals. Nevertheless, their responses to interview questions were helpful to test the workability, validity, and reliability of the interview questions I eventually used at the three school sites.

In all case study schools, I distributed informed-consent letters and interview questions to interview participants in advance (see Appendices L–P). The interviews were semi-structured, meaning agendas were open ended and had a conversational tone (Flick, 2002; Yin, 2003), although based on a predesigned set of initial questions for each set of participants (administrators, students, and teaching staff; see Appendices B–E). I based the interview guides on my conceptual framework (see Figure 1). This semi-structured interview protocol was
suitable to capture diverse participants’ perspectives, and for probing, clarifying, and encouraging elaboration of their responses so meanings could be understood from the data collected.

It is both a strength and potential limitation that interviews inevitably include the subjectivity and bias of each participant. To improve the reliability of these data, I pilot tested interview guides prior to finalizing the interview questions. Also, after transcribing the interviews, I gave respondents an opportunity to check my perceptions of what they had said.

Interviews can be time consuming and tend to collect much detailed information for later analysis. To make this study feasible, I kept interviews to between 25 and 30 minutes, and audio recorded them. After each interview, I jotted down reflections on elements that stood out from what participants shared. Four criteria implemented in the design and conduct of these semi-structured interview guides (Flick, 2002) were non-direction, specificity, range, and depth of personal contact with the interviewee. To address the non-direction criterion, I began with unstructured questions and introduced more structured questions only later in the interview to avoid imposing my frame of reference on the interviewee’s viewpoints. For example, I asked, “When and how did restorative peacemaking circles come to be implemented at your school,” then probed with follow-up questions with the hope that respondents would choose to elaborate on details of implementation. Initial analysis of findings revealed, however, that insufficient probing had occurred to get at this question (the short duration of most interviews remains a limitation of the study).

Specificity meant the interview questions should bring out specific elements. Thus, for instance, I asked interviewees to describe an event in their circle experience that they believed led to a repaired relationship with at least one individual. I neglected to include in the initial interview guide a specific question inviting administrators to describe how student–student conflicts were addressed at their schools. This critical question for describing conflict management policies and interventions initially was left to teachers and students in their indirect descriptions of these interventions.

The criterion of range is to include all topics relevant to the research in the interview, so that they are treated with detail. To honour these elements, my interview protocol and open-ended prompts invited participants to talk about topics such as peacemaking circles, related restorative practices, and other conflict management approaches. However, initial analysis of pilot and early interviews revealed that insufficient depth and robustness were evident in the data
to answer the research questions. Consequently, I made some revisions to address these concerns.

The last criterion—depth and personal context—encourages a focus on feelings, or restatements of implied or expressed feelings, and a depth of answers using a nondirective style. I encouraged interviewees to continue sharing their responses if I suspected they had more to offer in their responses. Flick (2002) explained that the limitations of such an interview method is that it may be difficult to know which parts of participants’ experiences and potential responses they have left out. I included other data collection methods—observation and document analysis—to help me interpret subjective viewpoints expressed in interviews.

6.22 Data Sources

Table 1 summarizes the sources of data collected from the three schools involved in the research (a more detailed Table can be seen in Appendix C). The discussion that follows presents background about each data source.

The first interview with Mary, who was the restorative justice coordinator for Cedar School District, was not only important in establishing background information about the intended innovations in Pine secondary school, but also allowed me to refine the interview guides. Mary (Cedar School District support worker [CSS]), a teacher on assignment for the school board, supported schools in their implementation of circles and restorative practices. I met Mary (CSS) while observing a staff meeting at Pine School that used an information-circle format. It made sense to interview Mary (CSS) because of her close relationship with Pine School, as well as her overall perspective, awareness, and knowledge of restorative practices in the Cedar School Board.

Because of her depth and breadth of activity in implementing restorative practices, Mary served as a key informant regarding the work she and others had been involved in at the Cedar School Board. This information helped provide the overall picture of how training was delivered to Pine School staff and the priorities for the school board in these restorative initiatives. My experience with this interview also helped me recognize what kinds of probing might encourage other participants to answer the interview questions as fully as possible.
Table 1

Data Sources*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School/school board</th>
<th>Policy and program documents</th>
<th>Interview participants</th>
<th>Support Persons or Resource People (S)**</th>
<th>Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Pine Secondary School/Cedar School Board (less than 500 students)</td>
<td>8 Documents - Code of Conduct - Principal’s Parent Letter - Community, Culture, Caring Team Year-End 2010 Report</td>
<td>Vice principal</td>
<td>1 1 3 2</td>
<td>Pine School staff meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Board’s: - Restorative Practice Training - Restorative Process Brochure - Annual Operating Plan - Safe Schools Pillar Policy Jan 2010 - Restorative Training booklet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cedar School Board Introductory Restorative justice and Circle Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. River Secondary School/Pacific School Board (between 1,000 and 1,300 students)</td>
<td>2 Documents River School: - Growth Plan - Contracts of circle meetings</td>
<td>Principal &amp; vice principal</td>
<td>— — 3 —</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Board Coordinator reported observation of a training session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Ocean Secondary School/Pacific School Board (between 1,000 and 1,300 students)</td>
<td>2 Documents - Spencer Agency Brochures: - “What is a Peer Mediation Conference?” - “Peer Mediation and School Diversion Program.”</td>
<td>— — 2 3 —</td>
<td>None, but recorded that a student incident occurred and participated in a circle the next day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Common documents collected from Schools B and C were Student Handbooks; **Interview questions for Support persons and Resource people is in Appendices B, C, D, and E; Data were collected between March 2010 and April 2011.
6.3 Types of Participants

Restorative peacemaking circle processes and related practices are complex. How they operate in the culture and structures of a secondary school are also complex. The key criterion for selection of study participants (students, administrators, and teachers) was that they needed to have participated in restorative peacemaking circles or related practices addressing student–student conflict in the previous year and a half since January 2009. Focusing the research around only student-to-student conflicts provided the consistency required to describe and compare the peacemaking circle phenomenon in different contexts. Setting the eligibility date this far back provided flexibility in selecting school sites that included the necessary range of participants who had participated in a peacemaking circle or other restorative experience. I anticipated that participant perspectives on these conflict experiences would remain meaningful and remembered in that time period. My experience in restorative peacemaking circles had been that they normally included two student disputants, at least one parent supporter for each disputant, and at least one student supporter or another adult supporter.

The initial case-case study plan was to interview two or three students, two or three teachers, one administrator, and one parent at each school site. During initial discussions with administrators at each site, it became evident that, although involvement of all stakeholders in restorative dialogue is encouraged in the literature and most training programs, as cited in the literature review, actually parents had not been involved in any of their circle experiences. Further, Pine and River Schools had not directly involved teachers, either, in any of their circles. The schools implemented restorative peacemaking circles in informal and formal ways. Even though teachers had not participated in circles at Pine School, they had been involved in leading them along with the vice principal. Ocean School teachers participated in circles, but did not lead them. Individuals from the Spencer Agency, which had a partnership with Ocean School, facilitated circles. River School teachers did not participate in circles, nor did they lead them at the time of this research, as the Spencer Agency facilitated circles. Therefore, as indicated in Table 1, interview participants were students, administrators, and teachers at each of the three southern Ontario high schools. In addition, I interviewed two resource people from the Cedar School District.

Students involved in conflicts do not always have an opportunity to constructively address their disputes in schools. Rumours spread by other students may escalate a conflict. In addition, students may be excluded from school as a form of punishment, may be prohibited
from speaking to the person with whom they are in dispute, and may have other people influenced by the conflict incident involved in the process of resolution and repair of relationships. Thus, I asked students who were interviewed in this thesis research whether they felt that peacemaking circles or related restorative practices had helped reduce violence in their schools. I also asked them to describe situations where they felt circles would be useful. I invited students to describe how they perceived circles or related restorative practices helped or hindered the strengthening of relationships. In relation to conflict experiences where administrators had applied punitive approaches, sometimes followed up by interventions without facilitated dialogue (meaning that relevant adults did not encourage or facilitate conflict participants to speak to one another or to resolve underlying problems), I asked students to answer these same questions. As mentioned above, the majority of students had not had access to restorative alternatives, thus could not draw on these experiences, or if they had, the experience was often long ago, perhaps even in elementary school. Therefore, I conducted follow-up interviews with administrators and teachers to try to more fully capture some of the range of conflict approaches actually used in the preceding year, thereby allowing for comparisons.

My experience has been that administrators often counsel students who misbehave and reintegrate them back into classroom settings with their teachers. Administrators can also encourage students to coexist and respect each other. I asked principals or vice principals to describe implementation methods used in their school for introducing restorative peacemaking circles, as well as to describe any training provided to school members that might have helped initiate or sustain this intervention. In my initial interviews, I probed insufficiently to collect data on related restorative practices, beyond formal circles, or on the styles of conflict management most commonly employed in each school. I used follow-up interviews to address this deficiency. As with other participants, I asked administrators for their perspectives concerning the violence reduction consequences (if any) of peacemaking circles or related restorative practices, and in which situations they thought peacemaking circles would be helpful to reduce violence. Similarly, I asked administrators to share their insights about the possible relationship-strengthening benefits (if any) of the circles or related restorative practices conducted in their schools. In follow-up interviews, I asked administrators to describe in greater detail conflict management experiences in which dialogue was not facilitated, to improve my understanding of their decision making as to whether they used restorative approaches such as circles, and the
apparent consequences of these decisions with regard to relationship-building and violence reduction.

In my role as vice principal, and later principal, I have observed that teachers often are particularly aware of student–student conflict situations that occur in the school day, and that teachers often bring these incidents to the attention of the school administrator. These educators have opportunities to develop relationships with students, for example, as classroom instructors, club advisors, or coaches. They are often supporters or advocates for students involved in conflict situations. However, teachers can also have strained relationships with these students, especially if they misbehave in their classrooms. It was important for me to explore teacher participation in restorative peacemaking circles or related restorative practices, because these innovations may have the capacity to repair and rebuild relationships between individuals. In contrast, opportunities for teacher participation in other conflict management processes, such as traditional non-dialogue, with no facilitated approaches led by administrators or other teachers, are normally limited. The research plan was to have teachers share their experience of participating in circles, in the implementing of peacemaking circles, or in related restorative practices in the school. These data were limited, however, because only Ocean School provided an opportunity to interview teachers who had been involved in such restorative dialogue experiences.

6.4 Participant Observation

I used observational data as another data collection strategy. The initial intent of this study was to conduct direct participant observations in the naturally occurring contexts of peacemaking circles, related restorative practices, and conflict experiences in which resolution dialogue was not facilitated, at all three schools. Such observations would allow me to capture information participants may or may not have introduced in their interview responses, and help mitigate some reliability limitations of respondent bias in interviews (Yin, 2003). However, a restriction in obtaining observational data was due to the nature of conflict episodes in schools, and the ethical considerations of confidentiality and vulnerability of participants. Also, direct participant observations would have intruded and may have altered the normal dynamic of conflict management, thereby changing the outcome and tone of the restorative circle experience. One challenge in using observers is that their presence inevitably affects participant behaviour (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993).
As a consequence of the disadvantages of using participant observation in sensitive, confidential situations that occurred without pre-set timing, this study could not involve the collection of direct observational data during peacemaking circles, related practices, or other dialogue experiences. Instead, observations were limited to training sessions on restorative philosophy and circle processes. These types of observations were appropriate and contributed to the understanding of restorative practice implementation in the three schools. I conducted observations in non-sensitive settings: a check-in circle used at a Pine School staff meeting and later at a Lighthouse program (part of the Cedar School District), as well as a training session for staff at the Cedar School District. In these observations, I sought information to substantiate and explain the context for interview data on restorative processes, and to understand the factors that might support or contradict the claims of relationship-building and violence reduction outcomes of peacemaking circles.

6.5 Document Analysis

Analyzing school policy and programming documents was the third method that allowed contextualization and triangulation of interview and observation data. The non-interactive nature of artefact collection was helpful with regard to information that might normally be sensitive or unnecessary to discuss in interviews, such as school-suspension data, frequency of restorative circle use, or provincial policy specifics. Also, the collection of this type of data through documents allowed me to minimize interview length and not rely on respondents’ exact memories of relevant information. Thus, analysis of documents also allowed the capture of recent historical data in each school case. Document analysis was helpful to understand how peacemaking circles and related practices were implemented, what the peacemaking circle process was designed to look like in each school, which people were expected to be involved in this process, and to embed the study of peacemaking circles and related restorative practices in the contexts of school-wide anti-violence policy and practice at each site. In addition, document analysis facilitated identifying relationship-building characteristics of restorative innovations at the school or board level.

Specifically, my plan was to collect information from the following sources: notes from introductory or ongoing restorative practices and peacemaking circle training, minutes from safety and well-being team meetings, school-effectiveness plans, school-board improvement plans, school codes of conduct, school newsletters, and suspension data. The plan was also to analyze the documentation of past peacemaking circles and related restorative practices, such as
invitations to participants, apology letters from disputants, contracts from circles, or notes to teachers on the resolutions arrived at during circle processes.

Documents actually collected included information about restorative training at the Cedar School Board and some relevant documents related to school-improvement plan from Pine School. In addition, a Spencer Agency report provided background information and evaluations of restorative practices. Documents from the Pacific School Board schools included some background information describing the restorative circle partnership between the school board and this agency.

7 Data Analysis

An analytical category emerges from a theme or pattern in findings or answers to a research question. As recommended by Merriam (2009) and Hammersly and Atkinson (1995), I formed categories to begin the process of data analysis, performed concurrently with and subsequent to data collection. Upon completion of the interviews, I reviewed summary notes, reflections, and observational and documentary data. I used this information iteratively, to develop tentative themes that became categories. At the same time, I revisited the scholarly literature and continued to refine analysis on that basis. I made notes in the columns, using open coding.

The data analysis involved over 50 pages of typed notes transcribed from audio recordings. I then grouped codes and developed a description of research themes on a piece of paper. The next step was analytical or axial coding, which refers to when interpretation and reflection create meaning (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I developed a continuous list of groupings from these codes, and reviewed documents and observations for the same description. This process, described by Ritchie and O’Connor (2003), was beneficial to develop a good understanding of the data to identify recurring themes or ideas.

I refined the initial conceptual framework (presented in Chapter 1) by transferring themes and concepts that emerged onto data cards using a color-coding scheme that compared and contrasted themes, such as evidence of school systemic violence, peacekeeping, and social capital (relationship-building). As my analysis proceeded, a more comprehensive analytical lens incorporated restorative practices examined in the literature on conflict resolution and peacebuilding in schools. This framework facilitated testing the theory suggesting that restorative practices may offer social capital to individuals in conflict, which in turn may lead to violence prevention in schools.
To organize the data addressing the interview-guide questions, I developed codes, as shown in Table 2. I later compiled a separate color-coded list of notes and comments that contributed towards forming these patterns into categories using the constant-comparative method (Merriam, 2009). I continually sorted these categories to capture some recurring patterns that cut across the data. The final categories changed as my understanding of concepts evolved, in relation to the conceptual framework. The category headings were as follows: (a) school conflict management context; (b) initiation and implementation of peacemaking circles and related restorative practices and peacebuilding approaches; (c) types of student–student conflicts where peacemaking circles were used; (d) relationship strengthening or not; (e) violence prevention or reduction or not. I expanded the codes from the categories above.

I followed two stages in my analysis of the multiple case studies: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2009). I treated each case first, and gathered as much information as possible about the factors at work in each context. Then I began cross-case analysis using inductive content analysis. Content analysis involved the analysis of content from all interviews, documents, and observations, and analytical induction tested the tentative hypothesis during ongoing data collection. My initial expected research results, based on the literature review, were that restorative peacemaking circles and peacebuilding practices allow individuals to develop social capital and strengthen relationships (Gladden, 2002; Morrison, 2007; Morrison, Blood, & Thorsborne, 2005). These benefits to youth can then help prevent and reduce violence in schools as part of a whole-school approach to violence prevention. As I worked through the dissertation, I continued to test and reformulate my understandings for the best fit between my conceptual framework and the data.
Table 2

Data-Analysis Categories

How are formal, informal and restorative peacemaking practices implemented? What is implemented? What kind of conflict management practice is implemented?
- peacemaking circle with talking piece
- peacemaking circle no talking piece
- restorative language
- check-in circle with talking piece
- check-in circle no talking piece
- punitive form of practice/top-down discipline

Who participates in conflict management interventions?
- # of students
- # of teachers
- # of administrators
- # of counsellors
- # of outside facilitators

How frequent is the conflict management practice used?
- very frequent—daily
- moderately frequently—once a week
- less frequent—less than once a week

What type of conflict exists for all conflict management episodes?
- student-student
- student-teacher
- student-community or school property

Who facilitates the restorative practice?
- who facilitates?
- how? (e.g., was talking piece circulated)
- kinds of questions used in circle
- script used by facilitator
- no script used

Factors that influence and shape usage or restorative peacemaking?

Training and Resources
- who leads training?
- what types of training?
- how long is training?
- what are they trained to do?

What types constraints influence and shape usage of restorative practices?
- police mandate and constraints
- how were these invoked or interpreted?

Perceived qualities of conflict management practices to help strengthen relationships and among participants (or not)
- perceived qualities related to relationships (positive or negative)

Violence prevention or not between individuals or groups of any restorative justice practice or conflict management intervention
- perceived consequences of intervention between individuals (positive or negative)
- perceived consequence of intervention between groups (positive or negative)
8 Trustworthiness and Limitations

The research design did not allow me to collect much detail reflecting a range of student-conflict experiences that had been addressed by peacemaking circles, related restorative practices, or other conflict management alternatives. One challenge faced in the study was that many of the students I interviewed had not experienced multiple recent conflict episodes that were addressed by a school administrator, either using a dialogue or non-dialogue approach. Consequently, the students usually drew upon only one past experience with a circle or related restorative practice. In an attempt to partially compensate for this, I asked administrators and teachers to share a range of conflict scenarios they had addressed, whether using restorative or non-dialogue approaches.

As mentioned above, I found that only Ocean School had involved teachers as part of peacemaking circle experiences. If I had been able to collect more teachers’ experiences participating in peacemaking circles, it would have provided me with more information to understand the potential relationship-building capacities of peacemaking circles. Also, teachers could have provided deeper perspectives about the ways they viewed the violence-prevention or reduction outcomes of peacemaking circles and related restorative practices. The teachers could also have described when they viewed circles or related restorative practices as having been most useful. In my experiences conducting circles as an administrator, teachers and parents (the latter voices also missing from this study) were very influential participants, as they helped support students tremendously and strengthened the community decisions coming out of the circle. My experience has been that most cases of student-to-student conflicts stems from incidents that begin in the classroom. Teachers have the least flexibility to be released during the day to be part of the conflict resolution process. Most often a student is sent to the office by a teacher, and the same teacher and student are usually not brought together in the office to solve the problem together. Instead, the student is excluded from the classroom and waits for the vice principal to have that conversation. Thus, collecting more data to represent how various teachers perceived any possible differences between restorative practices and nondialogue approaches would have been valuable information, but this proved impossible to obtain in this research project.

Parents may often be excluded from traditional conflict resolution processes in schools. My experience had been that when parents are allowed and motivated to be involved in processes like peacemaking circles, they may become strong supporters of students and may help students address conflict constructively. Parents would have provided valuable insights about
possible relationship-building benefits (or impediments) of peacemaking circles or related restorative practices to participants. Often, in traditional approaches to conflict management, information is communicated incorrectly; therefore, inclusive face-to-face dialogue circles would be helpful to break down such barriers. Parents’ insights about the prevention or violence reduction capabilities (or lack thereof) of restorative peacemaking circles and related practices would also be useful. Many parents have often expressed to me, in the context of my professional work, that they do not feel suspensions work in secondary schools; that they are just days off for students. Thus parents’ views on restorative interventions would have contributed to new knowledge.

Another limitation in the thesis research design was not having been able to directly observe any peacemaking circles. These limitations were mentioned earlier, as they were related to ethical restrictions (i.e., the preservation of confidentiality) and the emotional and private nature of restorative circle experiences. However, my personal reflections based on my experiences facilitating circles as a vice principal were helpful to partially fill this void in the analysis of data. My ability to connect empirical research data with actually having served in this role adds a “real life” lens not often present in school research. Even though I bring some bias (I support restorative practices and relationship-building in schools), my training in peacemaking circle facilitation and my experience as a school administrator have provided a critical eye to help contextualize and validate my findings. Also, based on my professional experiences, I was able to provide insight into how school and district policies related to innovations such as those that were the focus of this study.

Reader or user generalizability involves leaving the extent to which a study’s findings apply to other situations up to the people in those situations. The person who reads the study decides whether the findings can apply to his or her particular situation. This is a common practice in law or medicine, where the applicability of one case to another is determined by the practitioner. Nevertheless, the researcher has an obligation to provide enough detailed description of the study’s context to enable readers to compare the “fit” with their situations. (Merriam, 2009, p. 226)

9 Summary

The selection of a qualitative case study method was useful for exploring the interpretation, implementation, and perceived consequences of restorative practices in different high school contexts where conflict and violence occur. My three research questions guided me
to compare and contrast interview participants’ perspectives related to the implementation of restorative conflict management approaches in and among three high school cases. This research method, juxtaposed with my relevant professional experience, enabled me to build on the limited body of previous research showing how restorative practices are actually implemented in schools, and how such practices can be helpful in reducing or preventing violence in schools and helping students develop social capital.

Chapter 4 of this work describes the broad policy environments shaping the implementation of safe schools, discipline, and conflict management including restorative practices in the selected southern Ontario school districts and each case study school. An examination of the implementation strategies in each case study school, such as training for restorative practices and the ways these innovations were interpreted and implemented at each school site is presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 then analyzes the data more comprehensively to compare the ways each particular conflict management experience was handled, as described by students, teachers, and administrators, and the consequences of these actions as perceived by various interviewees. Chapter 7 sums and concludes the thesis.
Chapter 4
School Contexts

A punitive regulatory framework continues be prevalent in the contexts of most public schools (Adams, 2000; Gladden, 2002; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). This framework employs punitive consequences as a basis for social control. Policies that prescribe harsh penalties for harmful behaviours seem to be ineffective in reducing violence in schools and do not address the root causes of harmful behaviours (Noguera, 1995; Sacco & Nakaie, 2007). Standardized harsh policies emphasizing exclusion of perpetrators from schools are called zero tolerance, which has been shown to disproportionately punish minority students (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012; Skiba et al, 2002).

The three research schools continue to use a punitive approach to address violence, embedded in policies based on the Ontario Safe Schools Act (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). Control and punishment policies limit young people’s opportunities to be autonomous, solve problems, and participate in conflict resolution. Instead, these policies tend to exclude diverse students.

This chapter describes the contexts where restorative initiatives were implemented and explains the school and school-district policies that helped shape conflict management practices at each school. First, I describe each school, including information about socioeconomic and ethnocultural characteristics of students. These include policies guiding the use of punitive consequences or other anti-violence initiatives. Second, I identify the types of restorative approaches implemented at each school, as well as any supports for peacemaking interventions by outside agencies. Third, I present school or school-district policies that shaped how conflict management operated in each school.

1 School Descriptions

In this section I describe each high school where research took place. Each description includes information about the diversity and socioeconomic characteristics of students, academic programs, and administrative leadership. The names, locations, and references to people and places have been changed to pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. The three research sites in this study were secondary schools located in metropolitan southern Ontario. Pine School was located in the Cedar School District, and the two other schools, River and Ocean, were located in the Pacific School District.
Table 3

Overview of School Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School district</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of staff</th>
<th>Program demographics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cedar—30,000 to 60,000 students</td>
<td><strong>Pine School</strong>—under 500 students</td>
<td>Approximately 30 teachers</td>
<td>Mostly non-academic courses, programming that is not offered in regular schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific—30,000 to 60,000 students</td>
<td><strong>River School</strong>—between 700 and 900 students</td>
<td>Approximately 50 teachers</td>
<td>Academic and applied levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific—30,000 to 60,000 students</td>
<td><strong>Ocean School</strong>—between 500 and 800 students</td>
<td>Approximately 50 teachers</td>
<td>Academic and applied levels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pine School was a high school in the Cedar School District. This school district had between 30,000 and 60,000 students enrolled in all schools and served students from diverse countries, speaking many languages. Pine School was located in the working-class area of a large urban area in southern Ontario. Pine School was small (under 500 students) with students from Grades 9 to 12 enrolled, and the student population is comprised of students from lower to middle incomes (Julie, Pine School teacher [PST]). This school offered courses such as nonacademic courses that were not provided to students in regular high schools; instead, students who attended this school, on average, had more learning needs than those in a traditional high school. A large majority of students were bussed to this school because of the special programming provided; some students were even bussed from outside the city because their learning needs had not been met in their own communities. Approximately 30 teachers were on staff and there was one full-time principal, one full-time vice principal, and one guidance counsellor. The school resembled an elementary school in size, and the main office was right beside the main doors.

River School was located in the Pacific School District. Like Cedar School District, Pacific had 30,000 to 60,000 students and served students who came from many countries, speaking many languages. This school was located near the downtown of a small city in southern Ontario. River School had an enrolment between 700 and 900 students from Grades 9 to 12 with approximately 50 teachers on staff, one principal, and one vice principal; at least one full-time guidance counsellor was on staff (a certified teacher). The building was over 60 years old and the school had a diverse population of lower to middle-income students at the applied and academic levels of study (Alan, River School vice principal [RSVP]). Significant portions of students were
bussed in from rural areas to attend River School. Students took courses primarily at the applied and academic levels.

Ocean School was also in the Pacific School District. Student enrolment at Ocean School was between 500 and 800 students from Grades 9 to 12 with approximately 50 teachers on staff. The school had one principal and one vice principal. Ocean School, like River School, was located in an old building (over 60 years old). According to one of the teachers, the school was one of the more culturally diverse schools in the region as it served a diverse population of lower to middle-income students at the applied and academic levels of study. According to Sharon (Ocean School teacher [OST]), the principal of Ocean School was an advocate for using alternative measures other than suspension to keep students in school.

The three schools differed in their academic-program offerings. At River and Ocean schools, students took courses primarily at the applied and academic levels. Pine School offered locally developed courses, offered to students with learning needs that could not be fully met in a traditional secondary school. Another difference between the three schools was that Pine School’s staff and student enrolment was much smaller than that of the other two schools. McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, et al. (2008) reported it is often more challenging to implement restorative practices in a school with a larger staff because it is more difficult to establish relationship-building. In the Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al. (2007) study, the researchers investigate 18 schools situated in suburban, urban, and rural areas of Scotland with a mix between severe poverty and economic wealth (10 primary, 7 secondary, and 1 special school in urban suburban) to explore the way these schools were developing restorative practices. Surveys and interviews of school staff, students, and parents, supplemented by observations of a range of practices and analysis of school policies found that schools with more teachers encompassed more opinions about how student behaviour should be handled, thereby leaving more room for inconsistent approaches in the way teachers or administrators deal with students. Therefore, implementation of programs can be patchier, and the pace of change slow in large secondary schools compared to smaller schools or more simply structured elementary schools (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007).

2 Outside Agency Support for All Three Research Schools

All three schools accessed the services of the Spencer Agency (pseudonym) for some restorative practice training, initiation, and implementation. Previous studies identified the benefits and challenges of outside agency support to assist with the professional development of
teachers in implementing conflict resolution education (Bickmore, 2011b). This section provides an overview of Spencer Agency involvement with the two school districts and all case study schools. According to the agency program book, the Spencer Agency is an organization funded by local, provincial, and federal government and granting agencies, in existence since the mid-20th century. The Spencer Agency helps individuals and families who face imminent risk of coming to conflict with, or who have been in conflict with the law. The Spencer Agency provides prevention and early intervention services, public education, and community partnerships. This Agency had local offices providing services in the Cedar School District and the Pacific School District.

The Cedar School District was part of a collaborative partnership between the Spencer Agency, local police service, and a nearby school board. This relationship had been established about a year before this research took place (Mary, CSS). Funding for this project was allocated to train representatives from partner organizations, including the police and staff at the Cedar School District, in a “train the trainer” restorative justice model. Mary (CSS) explained that the Spencer Agency had originally provided restorative practice training by an outside expert to a group of Cedar School Board support staff (some social workers and instructional coordinator teachers) and some administrators: the plan was then to have these people train others in the school district. The project was expected to be “an innovative and creative restorative justice program targeted to youth who are at risk of being expelled from school. … The restoration of relationships, being accountable for behaviour and identifying community support and involvement” was the focus of this restorative approach. Funding received as part of this partnership did enable the Cedar School District staff to hire support staff (without teaching qualifications) to facilitate restorative practices at one newly created alternative program. These hired nonteaching support staff also trained school staffs in restorative practices (Mary, CSS). The Cedar School District conducted a 2-day restorative practice training once a year from 2009 to 2011 for five to seven key staff at each high school. Despite this training, formal peacemaking circles were not implemented at Pine School by the time of data collection, although trained Cedar School Board support staff did facilitate formal circles at various other schools in the school district, for serious incidents such as severe physical violence or vandalism (Julie, Pine School guidance counsellor [PSG]; Bob, PSVP, and John, PST). Typically, students who had been issued lengthy suspensions (more than 10 days) were referred to the Lighthouse Program, where these formal circles would take place. On one hand, the Cedar School District-system
policy of directing long-term suspended students to the Lighthouse Program provided opportunities for conflict learning and peacemaking to those individual students. However, punitive consequences preceded this post-incident response and the removal of students from their own school constitutes exclusion that could be damaging for many students. At the time of the research, no evidence accrued that Spencer Agency staff had facilitated any restorative peacemaking circles at Pine School. However, Cedar School District central support staff did facilitate many post-incident peacemaking circles at some Cedar School District schools, after serious violent incidents (Mary, CSS). Pine School staff interviewees told me they had not experienced any violent incidents necessitating peacemaking facilitation at the time of the research.

River School and Ocean School were located in the Pacific School District. The Pacific School District was involved in a partnership with the Spencer Agency similar to the relationship between the Cedar School District and the Spencer Agency. However, in the Pacific School District, in contrast to the Cedar School District, Spencer Agency staff did facilitate mediations and restorative peacemaking circles in River and Ocean schools in response to a range of incidents that included fighting and minor disagreements (Alan, RSVP; Sharon, OST). A brochure corroborated the partnership established between the police and another nearby school district to provide restorative practice services. A Spencer Agency program focussed on using restorative practices to address harmful incidents in schools. The goal of this school-based program was to “provide a safe environment, wherein each participant is able to share how they were impacted by the incident; in a diplomatic and non-judgmental manner.” This program promoted restorative practices as a strategy to address behavioural or social issues such as bullying, racial and cultural confrontation, relationship difficulties/harassment, minor assaults and fighting, cheating and stealing, poor impulse control, and anger issues. The types of conflicts the Spencer Agency’s school-based restorative practice program could address, described in the agency document, are consistent with other literature that points out that restorative practices can be proactive or post-incident responses to the threat of violence (Morrison, 2007).

The resource contexts for restorative practices at River and Ocean Schools differed from Pine School in that they had external facilitators to implement post-incident peacemaking circles whereas Pine School used internal facilitation for proactive peacebuilding and peacemaking approaches. The Spencer Agency supported all three schools in different ways. This agency provided funding and capacity building so that an outside expert could train a group of Cedar
School District staff members in restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding practices. Both River and Ocean staff did refer some students to this agency for serious incidents such as bullying and physical assaults. Spencer Agency personnel did not facilitate restorative practices at Pine School and a broader range of restorative practices because there was greater access to in-school facilitation. Pine School implemented a broader range of restorative practices perhaps because they had in-school access to facilitation of these peacemaking practices by four staff members (guidance counsellor, two teachers, and the vice principal; See Chapter 5).

3 Restorative Options That Were Taught and Implemented in This Study

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the types of restorative practices that were taught and implemented across the three case study schools. More specific information related to training (if any) provided to staff at each school is included in Chapter 5. As has been noted, Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al. (2007) explained that restorative practice options range from informal practices (where educators use restorative language in conversations) to more formal peacemaking circles that follow a structure, script, and include many people who were impacted by an incident. I will examine the range of practices that were taught to staff in each school. Similarly, several authors (Blood, 2004; Morrison, 2007; Skiba & Noam, 2001) described a comprehensive whole-school continuum of restorative practices including proactive strategies to prevent the escalation of violence that involved all school members, as well as “targeted” strategies that involve a small to medium group of students viewed by staff as having a particular need for peacemaking and peacebuilding. “Intensive” strategies use facilitated dialogue to address serious incidents involving a small cross section involved in serious incidents. I will also examine the continuum of restorative practices (if any) that were taught to staff at each case study school.

4 Types of Restorative Practices

Pine School staff members received training from an expert in restorative practices philosophy and approaches. This trainer provided training to three to five key teachers and one to two administrators at each Cedar District school (elementary and secondary) about a year before data collection for this research (Mary, CSS; Julie, PSG). Pine School staff members were exposed in this training to informal restorative practices that included facilitating restorative language in conflict resolution conversations, restorative post-incident mediations, restorative proactive class check-in circles, and restorative post-incident peacemaking circles (Julie, PSG; Bob, Pine School vice principal [PSVP]; Mary, CSS; Tina, CSS). I observed a training session
led by Cedar School District support staff, a police officer, and the Cedar School Board vice principal who had previously received expert training. As I describe below, some Pine School teachers and administrators showed signs of beginning the implementation of proactive restorative approaches including restorative language and enquiry, check-in circles, post-incident restorative mediations, and post-incident informal peacemaking circles (Julie, PSG; Bob, PSVP; John, PST). A small group of teachers seemed to use proactive and post-incident practices on a regular basis (exact frequency unknown) at the time of this research.

River School staff members had not been taught any restorative practices at the time of this research. However, the vice principal (Alan, RSVP) was a former law teacher who had participated in peacemaking circles at a previous school. The vice principal therefore had some familiarity with the process, and informed me that he had participated in at least five peacemaking circles. The principal (Lesley, River School principal [RSP]) was also an advocate of restorative practice usage; however, I did not find evidence that she received any restorative practice training from the school district or the Spencer Agency. These two administrators’ familiarity with and interest in the usage of restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding processes probably helped influence the initiation of restorative practices and their enthusiasm to make referrals to the Spencer Agency’s school-based program. Representatives from the Spencer Agency did facilitate formal peacemaking circles and mediations for incidents involving students or teachers at this school (Alan, RSVP; Lesley, RSP). River School staff had also made proactive peacebuilding opportunities such as peer mediation training for a small group of students, as well as school assemblies promoting peacebuilding messages offered to students at River School by staff and administration. Also, Lesley (RSP) and Alan (RSVP) told me in interviews that they did use restorative language in conversations with students at least to a small extent, either prior to or after conflict incidents. I did not find out how frequently post-incident or proactive restorative practices were implemented in general at River School because interviewees mostly reported their own personal experiences. The two administrators (Alan, RSVP; Lesley, RSP) seemed to have made regular referrals to Spencer Agency facilitators around the time of this research, and expressed enthusiasm regarding the Spencer Agency program during interviews.

No Ocean School staff members had been taught any restorative practices at the time of data collection for this research. The Ocean School principal was not formally interviewed, but she mentioned in a side conversation that she was familiar with the restorative conference-facilitation services provided by the Spencer Agency. This participation illustrated her interest in
having Spencer Agency personnel expertise available to respond to student–student and student–
teacher conflict incidents. Spencer Agency staff led restorative peacemaking circles and 
mediations after incidents involving students or teachers at this school (Bryce, OST, Sharon, 
OST). The Ocean School handbook did not identify any proactive peacebuilding activities 
operating in the school and teachers and administrators, although interviewees did not describe 
their own involvement in such activities, instead mostly reporting their own personal experiences 
in post-incident restorative practices.

Thus each of the three case study schools adopted a limited amount of peacemaking, and 
to an even lesser extent, peacebuilding activities. In contrast to River and Ocean School, where I 
found no evidence that any in-school staff facilitated circles or other peacebuilding-dialogue 
activities. One third of Pine School staff led proactive check-in circles in some classrooms once a 
week (Julie, PSG) whereas River and Ocean relied mostly on a few intensive restorative 
practices. River and Ocean School appeared to implement restorative peacemaking circles for 
serious violence incidents, compared to Pine School, perhaps because the Spencer Agency 
provided these schools with expert facilitation to respond to these incidents, or because there 
were more such incidents at River and Ocean Schools. In all three schools, school administrators 
introduced some restorative principles in their dealings with some conflict situations.

5 Government Policies Shaping Conflict Management at All Three Schools

Conflict management approaches and options for all three research schools were guided 
by the Ontario provincial government’s Safe Schools Act which was implemented in all Ontario 
schools in the year 2000 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). The Ontario Safe Schools Act 
discipline and conflict management regulations are not unlike other zero-tolerance policies that 
emerged in North American schools in the 1990s. The provincial code of conduct specifies 
common behavioural expectations and standardized punitive consequences for unacceptable 
behaviours for every Ontario School. For example, the code of conduct prescribes punitive 
consequences such as suspensions or expulsions for inappropriate behaviours such as fighting 
and possession of illegal drugs (Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). 
Mandatory expulsions, suspensions or police involvement are specified for serious student 
violations such as physical assault. Expelled students were required to attend a strict-discipline 
school before they would be permitted to return to a regular publicly funded school (Ontario 
Ministry of Education, 2000). The aforementioned policies guided the decisions teachers and 
administrators used at all three case study schools to respond to student behaviours they deemed
inappropriate. Such harsh disciplinary measures resemble those found to be disproportionately harmful to visible minorities, economically marginalized individuals, and youth with particular special educational needs (Gladden, 2002; Peterson & Skiba, 2001).

The policies guiding conflict management in Ontario schools remain very similar at the time of this research as when the Act was first introduced. However, an amendment in 2007 called Bill 212 (Progressive Discipline and School Safety) includes regulations that administrators must use to promote positive student behaviour, provide ongoing and early intervention to prevent inappropriate behaviour, and address inappropriate behaviour with measured appropriate consequences (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, 2009). Thus Bill 212 introduced a progressive discipline approach intended to guide how administrators reduce their own use of harsh consequences for certain types of inappropriate behaviour. Thus, the law at the time of this research allows administrators to handle student behaviours through gentler responses, such as counselling or detention, before inflicting more serious consequences like suspensions. Administrators at the time of this research were empowered to also consider a range of alternatives to suspension, such as restorative practices, when addressing minor and serious incidents. Another change as a result of Bill 212 is that administrators can consider mitigating factors and other factors when determining how to address individual students’ misbehaviours. This means that administrators can refrain from giving a suspension, for instance if they believe that a student’s behaviour is influenced by factors outside of the student’s control, such as a learning disability. Administrators do not have the authority to expel students, as they had prior to 2007; they can recommend expulsion but only the school board can issue an expulsion.

School boards are required to honour all students’ rights to publicly funded education by providing programs for suspended and expelled students. Students suspended for 6 or more school days and students who have been expelled are offered a board’s program in a central facility where they can continue to receive schooling and access to supports such as guidance counsellors or social workers. These supports are intended to help young people eventually transition back to their own school (or another school) after suspensions. As part of Bill 212, each Ontario school has a safe-school team, which includes principals, students, parents, teachers, and support workers. Bill 212 seems to have made it possible for school officials to consider non-punitive efforts to respond to conflicts and violence, such as counselling and restorative practices. The three research school contexts would have been shaped by these policy changes.
School Policies Shaping Conflict Management at Each School

The purpose of this section is to review conflict management policies at each of the research schools to provide the context in which peacemaking circles and related anti-violence initiatives were implemented. Previous research revealed how control and punishment policies may or may not impede the implementation of proactive anti-violence approaches (Bickmore, 2011b; Karp & Breslin, 2001; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Some evidence seemed to indicate that the Cedar School District’s system policies promoted peacemaking and peacebuilding practices for Pine School. At the time of this research, the Cedar School District’s strategic plan indicated one goal, noting that the school district “will provide safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environments for all staff and students.” This plan also mentioned that strategies would include “reducing suspensions for all and continuing with system-wide implementation of restorative justice practices.” This policy focus on reduction of suspensions likely impacted school administrators to consider using dialogue processes, such as restorative peacemaking practices, to reduce punitive exclusions. These policies appeared to encourage the possibility of restorative practices, including promising to support staff and students through training, staffing and other resource support.

So because we have had a new [school board] director there have been some changes, and it’s [restorative practices] now in our annual operating plan … so the question will be how does it connect to their school improvement plan and obviously most strongly connected to community, culture and caring (Mary, CSS).

Thus Cedar School District’s official goals promote student inclusion and community building in classrooms and schools as Pine School administrators were encouraged by senior school-district managers to make student voice, character education, and positive school climate a priority in their schools (Mary, CSS; Bob, PSVP). Pine School’s school improvement goals at the time of data collection did emphasize the inclusion of diverse and underrepresented students, similar to what was recommended by Bickmore and MacDonald (2010).

It aligns with goal of providing a welcoming inclusive environment for students where they can feel safe and respected; a lot of our students are disenfranchised so they typically don’t have a voice, and we are trying to ensure that they are feeling heard. And that’s usually something that students report back that they like that opportunity to be heard and not simply judged. (Bob, PSVP)
Here, the Pine School vice principal (Bob, PSVP) affirmed that Pine School staff intended to build a sustainable, safe school climate through respect and relationship-building. Student voice opportunities such as these are helpful to promote peacebuilding empowerment and strengthening community for students.

In contrast to these peacebuilding intentions, other evidence indicated that Pine School’s conflict management policies emphasized peacekeeping and control measures to address violence. For example, the principal sent parents a letter that contained information about midterm report cards and the Ontario Code of Conduct. The code outlined student behaviours that would lead to suspension or expulsion at this school, including infractions such as uttering a threat to inflict serious bodily harm on another person, bullying, swearing at a teacher or another person in a position of authority, and the violation of any prohibitions identified in a 2010 school-district policy. Examples of student behaviours that could lead to expulsion given in this Code of Conduct letter included possessing a weapon, using a weapon to cause or threaten bodily harm to another person, and causing bodily harm requiring treatment by a medical practitioner (Pine School, 2010). This letter and Code of Conduct did include progressive (less punitive) actions that could be exercised by school staff when dealing with such incidents:

- Informal talk
- Time out, loss of privilege, detention, assigned duties around the school
- Temporary therapeutic withdrawal from class/school
- Formal conference [restorative]
- Seek support from outside agencies, such as social workers or police

Thus the policy document describes an emphasis on peacekeeping control and punishment as approaches to conflict management. The policy document also allows some space for peacemaking and peacebuilding such as counselling and restorative practices. This school-policy document does reveal evidence that “formal” restorative conferences were allowed as an option to respond to conflict incidents. As noted earlier, school staff at Pine School did not facilitate formal peacemaking circles, and instead the central support staff intended to lead these formal peacemaking circles; instead, Pine School staff members did implement some proactive less formal restorative practices. One teacher explained:

We do [suspend] for fist fights if they’ve been in one. … They come back and sit down for a meeting with administration. I don’t normally get involved with those. The admin will bring both in and discuss what happened: here’s why you will be suspended and this
is how we can prevent this in the future, and what can we do to make things right. (John, PST)

Based on the description above, it seems there was little space for student voice, since counselling was based on explaining why students were suspended. Julie, a Pine School guidance counsellor (PSG), corroborated that contradictory peacekeeping and peacebuilding approaches are applied to incidents.

Now kids will be suspended for whatever if it’s serious nature. However, now they leave with more of an awareness of how they made the person feel. Before, they would get their consequence or whatever, but you [were] not correcting the problem.

The Cedar School District conflict management emphasis on punitive consequences is consistent with prior research showing that most schools punish students for less nonviolent as well as violent offences (Bickmore, 2011b; Ohio Department of Education, 2010). Evidence that these conflict management policies influenced the use of punitive consequences as well as peacemaking and peacebuilding was affirmed by Bob, the Pine School vice principal.

There are still people who feel that I am supposed to be the hammer. It will take time to change school culture. Ultimately we have cut back on our suspensions from last year and the goal next year would be to do that again. A lot of suspensions have been around opposition to authority or around issues of getting to class.

Thus Pine school conflict management policies did leave room for some post-incident peacemaking in the form of formal restorative peacemaking circles (usually called conferences there). School-based policies also encouraged promoting a welcoming environment, with opportunities for student voice and input in school decisions, as recommended by Jones (2004), Peterson and Skiba (2001), and others. The continuing use of punitive policies seemed to restrict students to be autonomous problem solvers in some ways because of punitive consequences and control measures (Bickmore, 2011b).

Some evidence of peacebuilding opportunities were embedded in River School (and Pacific School District) policy documents. The Spencer Agency program book identified two ways that Spencer Agency expertise was available in schools, as part of the school-based program. This program included peer mediation and a community referral and support program. None of the interview evidence substantiated that student peer mediators led any mediations or peacemaking interventions. Instead, outside adult facilitators from the Spencer Agency led restorative peacemaking circles and mediations that occurred at River School as intensive
interventions after serious incidents (Alan, RSVP; Lesley, RSP). The community referral and support program was designed to raise awareness of restorative justice options and to provide information sessions to encourage students to volunteer to become mediators. At the time of this thesis data collection, no information from interviews or documents showed that River School students or staffs actually implemented this program of restorative justice awareness activities. The program book mentions that Spencer Agency programs were designed to augment policies in place in the Pacific School District, and to support student attachment to schools and academic achievement. Such rhetorical goals are used to augment policies with proactive peacebuilding discipline, a practice consistent with the recommendation by Morrison et al (2005). However, the Spencer Agency program in the Pacific School District also conflicts with restorative practices because they become part of a control system focused on rules rather than emphasizing healthy relationships (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Restorative peacebuilding philosophies emphasize promotion of a strong school community where there are positive relationships between school members, as part of responsive regulation, instead of punitive discipline (Blood, 2004; Morrison, 2007).

The River School growth plan argued that character education awareness and co-curricular involvement of students would strengthen relationships between and among staff and students, which would in turn reduce the number of suspensions. Character education awareness among staff and students should result in a reduced number of suspensions and office contracts from 2008–09. We hope to reduce these by 2% Specific strategies were mentorship programs including involvement with the Spencer Agency and a trip for student leaders to become peer mediators. This reference in the school plan confirms that school policies encouraged the use of restorative practices through referrals to the Spencer Agency (also Alan, RSVP). The peer mediators’ trip mentioned here was an overnight camp for high status students who were members of the student council (Alan, RSVP). At the time, at least this leadership opportunity did not include many diverse students, but did constitute one limited example of co-curricular peacemaking education for a few students. Student mediators did not mediate. River School, like the other case study schools, emphasized peacekeeping. The River School student handbook included a copy of the Code of Conduct and outlined behavioural expectations for students in an introductory passage.
Every student is expected to comply promptly and courteously with requests made by all staff. Every student is expected to be courteous and considerate of the emotional well being of others. Respect for others, respect for self and respect for the building are essential at all times.

This emphasis on respect for others and everyone in a school building may be consistent with restorative approaches advocated in Morrison’s (2007) pyramid. Respect for others is an immunization strategy used to prevent violence. Morrison advocated school-wide immunization strategies to encourage mutual respect, thereby preventing violence from escalating by developing a strong climate of respect, a strong sense of belonging to the school environment, and strong social and emotional skills. However, it was not evident from interviews what activities River School actually implemented such a respectful school climate.

Other expectations in the River School Code of Conduct, put forth in 2008, resembled the top-down control-and-order policies described in the research literature (Gladden, 2002). For example, students were expected to “be punctual and attend regularly” and “know and obey all school rules.” Teachers were expected to “enforce rules consistently and fairly” and parents were expected to “cooperate with the school in developing positive attitudes to learning and school behaviour.”

The 2008 Code of Conduct promised suspensions for students found on school property or at school activities “who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.” Possession of illegal drugs “would be punished by suspension and referral to the police.” This document announced that physical harm and bullying behaviours were not tolerated.

Every student is expected to be courteous and to refrain from inflicting physical and bodily harm on others. Boisterous physical contact, fighting or any form of inappropriate physical contact is forbidden, as are any forms of verbal bullying, including threats. Concerned students are encouraged to report incidents to staff as soon as possible.

That bullying incidents be reported to the main office suggests a punitive peacekeeping response to these types of conflicts.

A comment from the principal of River School (Lesley, RSP) affirmed that school policies emphasized a punitive peacekeeping response to serious incidents followed by some opportunities for dialogue. “All students who are suspended are expected to have a reentry meeting with a school administrator” (Lesley, RSP). She explained that the purpose of this meeting was to provide an opportunity for students who were engaged in a conflict to repair the
harm. Thus administrators at River School apparently used some post-incident peacemaking dialogue following punitive exclusions.

Alan (RSVP) reported the introduction of Bill 212 was helpful in enabling administrators like himself to implement restorative practices, in contrast to before Bill 212 when regulations had been more punitive and restrictive: “I think [Bill 212] was all about the balance between a consequence and an intervention. It encouraged a win-win—it wasn’t just about punishment and prescribing exactly what the punitive response should be to student behaviour.” Alan “encourages students to reach out to other students and adults at the start of conflicts so they could be addressed before violence.” Thus he apparently believed that government and school policies such as Bill 212 and the River School handbook helped introduce the possibility of peacemaking. This limited evidence shows how school conflict management policies encouraged the use of punitive consequences but also enabled some restorative dialogue practices to respond to conflict or violence between students at this school.

School goals identified in the River School handbook and by River School staff in interviews focused on reducing suspensions, albeit by only 2%, and responding to conflicts in less punitive ways through restorative and character education approaches. The Spencer Agency’s external restorative peacemaking facilitators were available to respond to serious incidents. Apparently, peer mediation training had been introduced to a small group of student leaders before the data collection period, although I found no evidence that conflicts were referred to student mediators at River School. Overall, I identified some indication that conflict management policies offered potential peacemaking and peacebuilding opportunities, although punitive practices such as suspensions were prominent in policy regulations, as understood and implemented at River school.

I found some evidence suggesting that some Ocean School conflict management policies in the Pacific School District attempted to promote some peacebuilding. An excerpt in the handbook under bullying prevention defined positive school climate:

Positive school climate is the sum total of all the personal relationships within a school. When these relationships are founded on mutual acceptance and inclusion, and modeled by all, a culture of respect becomes the norm. A positive climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable, and accepted.

The statement above is consistent with literature that shows the importance of strong relationships for reducing violence in school climates (Blum, 2005). However, as in the other
case study schools, Ocean School policies supported the use of punitive consequence, which is unlikely to make all students feel safe, comfortable, and supported. The Ocean School student handbook (2008) mentioned that “all students who engage in fights on or around school property may face suspension from school. Any such actions, which disrupt the tone or operation of the school or endanger others, will be treated with more severe consequences.” Also, in a Safe Schools section of the handbook it is mentioned that “students who are asked by teachers to leave a classroom for being uncooperative were required to report to the main office and complete a conduct report.” Such conduct reports and threats of punishment are a form of peacekeeping, in contrast to a teacher talking to the student and resolving the situation so that it would not have to be referred to the office. Such emphasis on social control and exclusion does not promote peacebuilding or opportunities for students to engage in problem-solving or learning to resolve conflicts (Gladden, 2002; Jones 2004; Peterson & Skiba, 2001).

However, another statement in the Ocean School handbook advocated peacemaking intervention to prevent violence: students were encouraged to “let friends, guidance personnel or administration help!” This type of intervention before conflict escalated into violence could resemble (or not) the middle level of Morrison’s (2007) whole-school violence-prevention pyramid in which conflicts are to be handled in a respectful way.

The Ocean School student handbook also includes a section entitled “Bullying Prevention and Intervention: Your Responsibility” that advocated proactive peacebuilding goals at the base of Morrison’s (2007) pyramid. This document noted the importance of bullying-prevention strategies to foster a learning environment that supports academic achievement for all: “bullying adversely affects: a school’s ability to educate its students, students’ ability to learn, healthy relationships and the school climate.” This statement recognizes the importance of promoting healthy relationships as part of a positive school climate (Blum, 2005; Morrison, 2007), although, as was the case at River School, I found little evidence at Ocean School regarding how this occurred there (see Chapter 5). The handbook recommended progressive discipline as an intervention strategy to address bullying behaviours and referred to restorative practices as a strategy to respond to bullying. Thus on paper, like the other two case study schools, Ocean School conflict management policies allowed for restorative practices to be applied in response to aggressive behaviours such as bullying.
The continuum of progressive discipline responses outlined in the Ocean School handbook included some non-punitive measures with a focus on improving behaviour, such as meetings, restorative practices, and school-community programs.

- Meeting with a parent(s)/guardian, pupil, and principal
- Detentions
- Withdrawal of privileges
- Restorative practices
- School, district, and community programs
- Mediation services through the Spencer Agency

But at the same time, the handbook lists punitive suspensions and progressive discipline as punitive approaches to addressing bullying. Bullying is a complex behaviour to address, and little evidence suggests that punitive practices solve bullying issues (Craig et al., 2007). Previous research indicated that responses to bullying are applied unevenly in and across schools, and argued that punitive policies may undercut healthy relationships and disproportionately punish marginalized students (Bickmore, 2011b).

Some elements of Ocean School’s conflict management policies could hinder an administrator or teacher’s ability to implement proactive peacemaking and peacebuilding approaches. In my professional experience, most teachers and administrators have a tendency to follow punitive policies first, before selecting more proactive approaches. Most of the evidence I found suggests that the use peacekeeping and control measures was still prominent at Ocean School, disproportionately harming targeted students. These policies may reinforce systemic violence and may limit collective problem solving and conflict-learning opportunities for diverse students.

Ocean School’s policies did reveal some evidence that peacebuilding practices were being introduced and that healthy relationship-building was being promoted, at least in policy. Restorative practices were listed as an option that administrators could consider when dealing with serious incidents where harm occurred. However, as at the other two case study schools, punitive regulations identified as progressive discipline seemed to limit opportunities to implement post-incident restorative interventions, or at least insist that some students may be punished before gaining access to restorative dialogue opportunities.
7 Discussion and Conclusion: School Contexts

This chapter presented the conflict management contexts of three case study high schools. The findings described in this chapter are consistent with previous research showing that conflict management policies continue to emphasize social control by school officials (Bickmore, 2011b; Gladden, 2002). All three case study schools in both school districts faced similar policy constraints, in that school administrators and teachers were required to adhere to the Ontario Safe Schools policies and the Code of Conduct (Ontario Ministry of Education 2009). These policies emphasized punitive peacekeeping consequences in response to conflicts as well as violence threats. However, with the recent introduction of Bill 212, each school had more latitude (and policy pressure) to consider alternatives to punitive consequences, through educative prevention measures like character education and early intervention (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). The possibilities for restorative responses to conflict incidents in all three schools were shaped by then recent government policies that gave administrators more leeway to address conflict situations with a continuum of gentler approaches other than strictly punitive zero-tolerance policies. For example, all three schools included restorative peacemaking approaches in their Codes of Conduct as potential responses to violent and nonviolent conflicts. At Pine School, in particular, the policy environment enabled the emergence of a range of proactive preventive measures as well as post-incident restorative and dialogue approaches. At River and Ocean Schools, outside-agency personnel supported conflict management by facilitating restorative peacemaking circles in response to some violent incidents.

However, a punitive approach to address a threat of violence was still embedded in policies at all three schools and the province of Ontario at the time of this research. The consequence of such control and punishment policies is that they restrict student opportunities for autonomous problem solving in conflict situations and exclude particular students from their schools (Bickmore, 2011b; Gladden, 2002; Noguera, 1995). The Safe Schools Act prescribed consequences for offending behaviours, such as suspensions for fighting or possible expulsion for drug possession. The findings in this chapter highlighted the tension between punitive school policies and the proactive peacebuilding goals of restorative justice theory (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). At the same time, Bill 212 did create an opening in these Ontario schools that had not been present in the recent past.

All three schools served a diverse pool of economically challenged students. Students at Pine School, more than the other two schools, had learning needs that could not be met in regular
schools. This level and type of need may have opened the door for more staff and administrators to consider alternative peacemaking and peacebuilding approaches (McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane et al., 2008). Pine School also differed from the other two schools in that it had a smaller student enrolment and small staff. I have experienced relationship ties being stronger between staff in smaller schools because there is more frequent contact between staff members; this, too, may have encouraged proactive peacemaking and peacebuilding measures to be implemented more fully or quickly than in larger schools (as in McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, et al., 2008; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011).

All three schools benefitted from the support of the same outside agency to varying degrees. The Cedar School District received help from the Spencer Agency, as this district was funded by a grant from the provincial government that provided training by an expert trainer to a small group of staff members in each of the school district’s elementary and secondary schools. A small group of Pine School teachers and the vice principal had participated in this training. The Spencer Agency, based on its long history of supporting youth in the justice system, was helpful in bringing together police officers and social workers to implement social-emotional, conflict-learning, and restorative justice components as part of this training offered to teachers and administrators. River School and Ocean School teachers did not receive training in restorative practices. However, administrators in both of these schools invited Spencer Agency personnel who were restorative peacemaking experts onto the school sites to facilitate two kinds of restorative peacemaking dialogue processes: mediations and formal peacemaking circles (Sharon, OST; Alan, RSVP; Lesley, RSP). These two schools implemented a small range of proactive and post-incident restorative practices including restorative inquiry, questions, check-in circles, mediations, and a caring-adult program. Thus, the results of policy analysis in these case studies contrasts with prevailing peacemaking and restorative practice theory, which advocates building the capacity of internal school-based staff to support the sustainable implementation of restorative practices and infusion of restorative-peacebuilding approaches across all human interactions in the school (e.g., Bickmore, 2001; Stinchcomb et al., 2006).
Chapter 5: Implementation of Restorative Peacemaking Circles and Related Peacebuilding Practices

This chapter explains how restorative peacemaking circles and related peacebuilding practices were implemented or impeded in each of the three case study high school contexts. As indicated in Chapter 2, some existing published research literature shows how proactive anti-violence approaches including restorative practices may be interpreted and implemented in individual schools (Morrison and Vaandering, 2012; Vaandering, 2009). Findings from a few comprehensive studies of restorative practice implementations in elementary and secondary schools in Scotland and the United States, however, identified key factors that facilitate implementation of peacemaking circles and other peacebuilding approaches. These factors include leadership and committed staff, high-quality training, and comprehensive implementation of restorative practices (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Restorative practices sometimes have not been implemented well in schools, and this thesis study contributes to previous research that reports how proactive and post-incident processes may actually be implemented to reduce violence in schools (Gonzalez, 2012; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Office of the Surgeon General, 2001; Reimer, 2011). This chapter will contribute to improved understanding of what type of restorative practices were actually initiated in each school, as well as how these practices were implemented, given the policy environment outlined in the previous chapter which shows that administrators in these schools continued to rely heavily on punitive practices. This chapter also examines how implementation of restorative practices at each school seemed to transform some of the ways harmful behaviours and conflicts were handled at each school. The case studies of three schools in this chapter are based on interviews with students, teachers, and administrators, analysis of school-training documents, and limited observation of restorative practice training and practices provided to staff in one school: Pine School.

My analysis of how the implementation of peacemaking circles and related practices did or did not transform the ways conflicts were handled at each school is framed by factors found in prior research to contribute to successful implementation of restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding approaches. In particular, I sought evidence in interviews of whether and how students had opportunities to develop social capital through the promotion of inclusion and relationship-building in their schools, as well as whether administrators may or may not have replaced exclusion and punitive practices used to respond to student conflict or incidents.
This chapter is organized into two parts, each examining all three schools: (a) leadership and initiation, training related to peacemaking and peacebuilding practices, and leadership and training constraints; and (b) interpretation and implementation of those peacemaking and peacebuilding practices, including potential changes to school patterns of conflict management, based on perspectives of interviewees. Various factors in the research literature have been found to increase the likelihood of successful implementation of restorative practices, including committed staff and leadership, and quality training. These factors are informed by theory and empirical findings particularly reflected in Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al. (2007), Morrison et al. (2005), Reimer (2009), and Stinchcomb et al. (2006).

Reimer (2009) explored the implementation of restorative justice practices in a single Ontario school, finding that successful implementation required committed staff and leaders who must receive quality training in restorative justice theory and practices. This scholar pointed out that school administrators, teachers, and policy makers are important gatekeepers of change who help initiate restorative practices, partly by helping encourage commitment among staff and allocating resources to such training practices. My previous chapter showed that such policy and leadership environments recently had shifted in their openness to implementing restorative practices and to replacing some punitive approaches.

Reimer (2009) and others argued that enthusiastic leaders committed to participating and promoting restorative practices are helpful to initiation and implementation. Leaders need to communicate clear restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding objectives to the school community, and promote a realistic timetable to move towards restorative peacebuilding culture change (Morrison et al., 2005). Key aspects of leadership that have helped with the implementation of restorative practices have included modeling a restorative philosophy and explicitly committing to restorative practices by school and school-district leaders to secure resources, time for training, and effective use of efforts (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007; Stinchcomb et al., 2006).

Quality training in restorative practice philosophy, facilitation skills, and related peacemaking and peacebuilding learning for school staff members, school board staff, and senior school-district leaders is important for successful initiation and implementation of restorative peacemaking circles and peacebuilding practices (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007). An open culture, promoting staff relationships with each other and the willingness of a significant number of staff to participate in staff development/trainings, are also key features of a school’s
readiness to successfully implement restorative practices (Morrison et al., 2005; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Continued multiple opportunities for whole-school trainings can encourage commitment from key staff (Kane, 2007; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Unsurprisingly, some staffs are more ready to adopt restorative practices if they believe that said practices have a capacity to make things better (Kane et al., 2007). Implementation of restorative peacebuilding can be implemented more quickly when these options are incorporated into existing policies that are compatible with restorative practices (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Comprehensive implementation of peacemaking and peacebuilding includes a range of responses at universal, targeted, and intensive levels (Morrison, 2007). These include proactive and responsive post-incident strategies to address conflicts that emphasize relationships first and explore factors related to the relational breakdown second (Vaandering, 2009).

Each school case study will be explored in detail below. The data analyzed for each section of this chapter are the perspectives of participants expressed in interviews, document analysis, and participant observations. In particular, I will examine interviewees’ reports of punitive and restorative practices they had experienced or witnessed in the year preceding data collection. I will also describe factors such as time or facilitation expertise that may have facilitated or impeded each school’s implementation of restorative peacemaking circles and related peacebuilding practices. I will apply Morrison’s (2007) restorative practice model to each case study to examine and describe restorative implementations and changes to conflict management based on perspectives of interviewees.

1. **Pine School, Cedar School District**

1.1 **Leadership and Initiation**

Teacher and administrator leadership were important for initiating various restorative practices in the Cedar School District, including Pine School, during the 2008–2009 school year. Of 30 staff members, Pine School had two teachers and a vice principal who were most involved in providing some leadership by modelling and training others to embrace the restorative philosophy in their everyday interactions with students (Julie, PSG; Bob, PSVP; John, PST). Mary (CSS) also provided leadership as a central resource person assigned to support implementing restorative practices in many Cedar District schools, and by the superintendent, who was instrumental in providing resources and training for three to five teachers in each of the district’s schools. I interviewed three Pine School staff members for this study who had received
restorative justice training. There were about five or six other teachers at Pine School who had been trained but were not as involved as the aforementioned staff members (Bob, PSVP). Mary (CSS) was an expert resource who teachers could contact if they had questions regarding the implementation of restorative practices. Expert support is beneficial to restorative practice implementation for motivating and supporting teachers to try practices (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007). I learned Mary (CSS) had been facilitating a restorative check-in circle that involved all staff members at Pine School. Her participation at this meeting modeled restorative dialogue in a talking circle format. I noticed, shortly after this circle experience, that some teachers shared their experiences with recent restorative practice conversations with Mary in the staff room (Pine School Observation, May 3, 2010).

It can be quite challenging for administrators and teachers to make peacemaking and peacebuilding education a priority, because of the pressures related to standardized tests and other pressures that make student literacy and numeracy achievement a priority (Bickmore, 2011b; Jones 2004). One Cedar School District superintendent seemed to be supportive of implementing restorative practice at all schools. The same superintendent was also involved in developing partnerships among members of the Cedar School District, another school district, the Spencer Agency, and local police to seek further funding to initiate restorative practices in the Cedar School District (Mary, CSS).

We are fortunate that we have a superintendent that clearly articulated that restorative justice would become a part of embedded practice at all schools. I think that helps, because what it does is it’s important that staff receive the same key messages but I also think it’s important when you talk about something like [restorative justice] that is not a mandated obligation by schools, that it has to be a clear mandate from up top to say: this is how we are going to behave in our schools (Mary, CSS).

This superintendent helped promote the use of restorative peacemaking circles and peacebuilding approaches among Cedar School District teachers and staff members. The importance of such leadership in establishing a common vision to improve participation and strengthen relationships in school communities has been found to be important for successful implementation of restorative practices (Kane et al., 2007; Morrison et al., 2005).

Research on restorative justice implementation advocates opportunities for teachers, students, parents, union members, and other stakeholders to have input into the implementation of the restorative justice process and to review how current practices influence students
Most secondary schools have teacher leadership teams that provide school-wide leadership for curriculum instruction, as well as co-curricular activities such as student-leadership opportunities. Such input from various members may facilitate change in conflict management philosophies by facilitating staff members’ sharing responsibility, discussing and learning different approaches to conflict and school-climate relationships, and their consequences. One example of such staff leadership was Pine School’s leadership team of seven to eight members who met once in the months preceding thesis data collection with the principal and vice principal to discuss curriculum and staff issues and staff. One agenda item at this meeting was developing a vision for the implementation of restorative practices (Bob, PSVP; Julie, PSG). Regular meetings of this type apparently helped develop positive relationships between Pine School teachers and administrators, which would have facilitated collaborative work on conflict management approaches and other school-wide peacebuilding measures.

One of Pine School’s administrators indicated that the school had developed leadership goals to nurture healthy relationships among students. Bob’s (PSVP) comments provided some evidence of a leadership vision to initiate relational peacebuilding at Pine School. Such leadership was likely helpful for encouraging staff members to work towards common goals; such inclusive relationship-building and voice are elements of comprehensive peacebuilding, a finding which dovetails with the work of Kane et al. (2007) who found that the inclusion of students’ voices helps reduce the marginalization of students.

Another co-leadership setting that exhibited commitment to a restorative peacebuilding vision was the Pine School’s community, culture, and caring student-success team. Such teams work to promote and engage students and staff in conflict-learning opportunities, including for diverse student participation in activities such as assemblies or school leadership. A monthly newsletter sent to parents mentioned that this team offered support to students through “our anti-bullying, drug danger awareness and positive choice assemblies we have run with motivational speakers, theatre groups and agencies focusing on supporting the healthy development of children and youth” (Pine School letter to parents, April 2010). Such peacebuilding opportunities are helpful for promoting a culture that affirms the value of nonviolent relationships, which is necessary for the adoption of restorative practices by school staff (McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane et al., 2008; Morrison, 2007; Morrison & Ahmed, 2006). Student success teams like that at Pine School may provide opportunities for staff to discuss ideas for conflict learning and strengthening relationships. Such a group of school-community members can reinforce a vision
for the promotion of peacebuilding practices that are not always given the attention they deserve inside or outside classrooms.

1.2 Training

Implementation of restorative practices can be hindered if all staff members do not receive professional development that at least introduces them to restorative justice practices and philosophy. Stinchcomb et al. (2006) found that schools that had only trained some staff in restorative practice training implemented only limited post-incident restorative conflict resolution alternatives instead of implementing broader comprehensive proactive peacebuilding approaches, as suggested by Morrison (2007) and others. Of about 30 teachers at Pine School, only eight to ten people had received a 2-day restorative practice training during the school year of the data collection and the preceding year (Julie, PSG; Bob, PSVP).

Pine School was able to partly implement what Stinchcomb et al. (2006) recommended because staff members who had received expert training did provide an overview of the restorative philosophy to the entire staff. Pine School, like other Cedar School District schools, followed a train-the-trainer model. Thus, as mentioned above, staff members from Pine School received a two-day training in restorative justice philosophy and practices, such as how to lead check-in circles and peacemaking circles (Julie, PSG; John, PST). These trained staff members were expected to introduce the restorative philosophy and practices to all staff members on a professional-development day, and increase awareness by running staff meetings in a check-in-circle format (Julie, PSG). Julie (PSG) mentioned that Pine School’s teacher-leadership team had organized a session to pass on what they had learned at the system training to other Pine School teachers.

Quality restorative practice training delivered by experts (who may be external to the school district) has been found to be helpful for school districts in implementing restorative practices (Reimer, 2009; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). A known expert from outside the school district led the first day of training for a few Pine School staff along with other Cedar School District staff. The second day was led by district staff from the Spencer Agency, as well as by police staff (Julie, PSG). Training had been first provided to some Cedar School District staff members during the school year preceding data collection, 2009–2010 (Mary, CSS).

[Restorative practice] sort of connects to the adult’s level of understanding and one other thing that we’re really trying to emphasize in all the trainings is the entire staff participates when they bring it back to their schools so the, custodial, secretaries,
[educational assistants] of course, but also bringing in school councils and getting the parents to have a better understanding, and I would like to look at bringing in some of the student leaders. (Mary CSS)

This training for Cedar School District teachers was held at a central location, and teachers and administrators were released from their buildings for 2 days so that they could focus on participating in the training without interruption. Such release of teachers can be costly, as they often need to be replaced by supply teachers. This is one reason why some school districts opt for the train-the-trainer model. However, the disadvantage of the train-the-trainer model for introducing restorative practices in schools is that key staff from each school who are to be trained to become trainers may not be skilled enough to train others proficiently in implementing various practices at their schools. The advantage for this approach is that many staff members can be trained in restorative practices with minimal or no other costs for training because school district staff provided this training, as noted in (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007). Having a few staff members teach others on staff about restorative practices can show that restorative practices are a priority and provide clear direction. Bringing whole staff together also could help promote a common understanding of the conflict resolution approaches for responding to violence, as well as promoting a philosophy of relationship-building and inclusion over exclusion and punitive practices in a school.

The original training provided to eight to 10 teachers from Pine School (and others from all other Cedar School District schools) lasted 3 school days in the first 2 years of restorative practice implementation. This changed to 2 days in the 3rd year, the year of my data collection. The Cedar School District presented the following agenda:

**Agenda for Restorative Practice Training:**

1) an overview and philosophy of restorative justices; 2) Language Skills and Approaches; 3) Informal peacemaking circle role play; 4) Exemplar of restorative practices at the Lighthouse Program; 5) Relationships and Classroom Community Expectations; 6) Personal and Academic Goals, Critical Thinking; 7) Transitioning Restorative Practices into the School.

Three Pine School staff members corroborated that restorative practice training had introduced the restorative philosophy, as well as given them an opportunity to explore ways to build community in the classroom through role playing (John, PST; Julie, PSG). Pine School staff members also explained they had received training in how to facilitate various restorative
peacemaking and peacebuilding practices. One proactive peacebuilding technique they had learned was check-in circles: here, each circle participant was invited to respond to a question posed by the facilitator, usually a classroom teacher. Often during such circles student participants shared how they were feeling at the time (John, PST; Bob, PSVP). The first day of the training focused on restorative language skills and demonstrated a more formal restorative-post-incident-peacemaking circle through role play. The last day included another role-play exemplar of a restorative peacemaking circle process used in a Cedar School District program for students who had been expelled or suspended long-term from their schools. This role-play demonstration was led by experienced resource people who frequently facilitated such circles. The 2010 training session concluded with sample techniques for implementing critical-thinking dialogue strategies into the classroom as part of proactive restorative peacebuilding, and how to create a transition plan to introduce restorative practices into a school (Mary, CSS; Bob, PSVP; John, PST. All three staff-member interviewees who had participated reported they found the training to be interesting and believed the concepts and strategies taught there would be useful in helping resolve conflicts at their school (Mary, CSS; Bob, PSVP; John, PST).

The topics covered in the 2-day restorative practice training are similar to what Jones (2004) recommended based on a meta-analysis of research on conflict resolution in schools: the implementation of high-quality training, conflict resolution education, training, and programming should enhance students’ social-emotional development and build a constructive learning community. The content of the Cedar School District training also covered critical thinking through learning activities, and this training appeared to emphasize developing relationships, as recommended by Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey, et al, (2007). A Cedar School District resource person in an alternative program and restorative practice trainer who was part of follow-up interviews (Tina, CSS) provided more details about this training: the expected outcome of the training was for teachers to understand the philosophy of restorative justice and to learn to use five restorative questions in informal conversations and for peacemaking among youth. The five restorative questions, listed below, were consistent with those found in documents from the Cedar School District, and in research literature on restorative peacemaking (Lockhart & Zammit, 2005):

- What happened?
- What were you thinking about at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
• Who has been affected by what happened?
• What needs to be done to make things right? (Tina, CSS)

These restorative inquiry and dialogue questions emphasize how other individuals have been impacted by participants’ behaviour, including aggression, and provide an opportunity to repair relationships. These questions offered teachers and administrators a reference to potentially resolve a conflict by encouraging dialogue to repair harm to relationships.

I observed the first day of a Cedar School District 2-day restorative practices training (April 13, 2011) that involved a few members of the Pine School staff. I noticed that this training session offered opportunities for school staff members to interact among themselves and with other teachers in the school district. Teachers seemed to be actively engaged and quite interested in learning, and many volunteered readily to participate in role plays. The training I observed was provided by expert teachers, resource people, and administrators; a practice that seemed to make school staff participants feel comfortable because the trainers provided examples that were familiar and relevant to teachers. At the time of this research data collection, the school district no longer used an external expert trainer and instead had a small number of school-district restorative practice resource people, such as Mary (CSS), who were fully trained and empowered to lead trainings for Cedar District staff. This accomplishment—having internal school-district staff capable to lead training—likely indicated commitment and capacity for and systemic implementation of restorative practices in the Cedar School District.

Having an appropriate number of people on staff trained and skilled enough to carry out restorative practices is important for initiating and sustaining such peacemaking and peacebuilding innovations (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Julie (PSG) explained:

The first wave of training was administration and myself, and the student success teacher who has since left. There are now an additional three people [formally trained]. However, we have gained people like our new [vice principal] who was trained [in restorative practices] at another school. So, on our staff, we probably have close to 10 who are formally trained. (Julie, PSG)

Bob (PSVP) also pointed out that Pine School staff had been trained the previous spring and fall preceding thesis data collection: “We had five people trained this spring and five people last fall. A couple of those people have moved onto other schools. But there are about eight of us who have formal training now.” Thus eight to 10 people at Pine School (almost a third of staff) had received district training.
In the in-school training, some Pine School staff members who had received restorative practice training in 2009 introduced the restorative practice philosophy and explained an overarching view of formal and informal peacemaking circles and classroom check-in circles to other staff at Pine School. Julie (PSG) said this occurred during the first professional activity in September 2010. Julie (PSG) also explained that check-in circles were proactive restorative-peacebuilding approaches that teachers could use to discuss classroom or personal issues and to receive support from teachers or students to resolve their concerns. Julie (PSG) argued that it was preferable to have teachers implement proactive check-in circles than post-incident formal or informal peacemaking circles, and emphasized the value of such classroom community peacebuilding rather than resolving conflicts after they escalated. I believe this is because teachers did not feel as threatened to build classroom community as they did to oppose addressing student conflict situations. Check-in circles are designed to develop social-emotional skills, and to reaffirm relationships, and they may be tied to the academic curriculum (Hopkins, 2004; Morrison et al., 2006).

Bob (PSVP) and Julie (PSG) reported they and a few other members of the Pine School leadership team had trained the entire staff in how to use check-in circles in the classroom and also had introduced them to how peacemaking circles worked as peacemaking responses to student conflicts.

What happened is on our first [professional-development] day this year before Labour Day weekend, we bought [restorative practices] to the attention of all staff and said “this is what we are going to do. So I went to the dollar store and bought those rocks. We role modelled … and gave them a little bit of restorative practice training on how to conduct check-in circles and we also introduced peacemaking circles. (Julie; PSG)

On the professional-development day described above, Julie (PSG) and the trainers would have spent between 3 and 6 hours to go over the restorative justice philosophy with teachers in the Pine School staff room. That day, teachers also had an opportunity to role play using the five main restorative questions (listed above) that guide post-incident informal and formal peacemaking circles. The recently trained novice staff members leading this professional-development day followed an agenda of activities recommended by experts in restorative practices for school-district staff (Mary, CSS). Each Pine School teacher was given their own rocks as “talking pieces,” meaning symbolic tokens that were passed around to control conversation in a circle so that only one person spoke at a time. The vice principal (Bob, PSVP)
corroborated the details of this training provided to Pine School teachers: “There was a little bit of an introduction to the staff in general, back at our professional-development days. We actually started our first staff meeting in September with a circle and introduced the concept then to staff members.” I was able to observe a staff meeting in which another teacher from the leadership team (not interviewed) led a check-in circle. It seemed that this opportunity for inclusive dialogue for staff was helpful for keeping the momentum going in this early stage of implementation of restorative practices. During this observation of the whole staff check-in circle, I witnessed all members of the Pine School staff (including administrators and approximately 10 educational assistants) sitting in a circle and responding to the question posed by the teacher facilitator: “How are you going to maintain a positive tone in your classroom between now and the end of the year?” This type of in-school leadership and modelling is helpful in developing a shared vision for understanding the benefits of restorative practices for staff members (Morrison et al., 2006). Having a teacher, rather than an administrator, lead the circle and introduce the circle-dialogue process at the beginning the staff meeting was an example of shared leadership that reduced the hierarchy normally associated with punitive practices in schools (Morrison, 2007).

1.3 Leadership and Training Constraints

Some interviewees at Pine School raised some concerns about the process of restorative practices implementation. Pine School was selected as the first wave of schools to receive restorative justice training, partly because this school experienced a more frequent occurrence of conflicts between students compared to other high schools (Mary, CSS). Similarly, researchers found that schools that had experienced frequent conflicts were more likely to give restorative practices a try as a reflection of staff concern about the high volume of student conflicts that could escalate into violence (McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, et al., 2008). According to Julie (PSG), staff members who had not received the system-expert-led training experienced some resistance to the adoption of restorative practices, compared to those who had received that training (Julie, PSG). As noted earlier, in the train-the-trainer model, newly trained novices may be unable (or unready) to lead the quality of training that is necessary for the school staff to become fully knowledgeable about restorative practices (Kane et al., 2007). Because restorative practices operate quite differently from traditional punitive practices and are based on different philosophical assumptions, it is likely that some school staff would resist the paradigm shift required for adapting to this approach.
At Pine School, the train-the-trainer model, used to deliver restorative practice knowledge and skills to Pine School staff members, exhibited some weaknesses. In restorative programs described in prior research literature, staff had up to 6 months training to help ensure the successful implementation of restorative practices (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). In contrast, some Pine School staff had 2 to 3 days of training, and others had less than 1 day of training, led by novice trainers. John (PST) noted that those teachers who had been fully trained by expert trainers were more likely to commit to the process, and that most of them had no problem sitting down with students and an administrator to address the situation. “Other staff [who are] not trained are not necessarily on board, and then this restorative process doesn’t happen because the restorative language isn’t there” (John, PST). Teachers who had not received the formal training from the Cedar School Board expert staff apparently had not developed a deep understanding of how restorative practices work, which could have impeded their ability or willingness to implement these practices. “There are a number of aspects that we can’t cover [in-school professional development] unless we take an intensive period of time and you [only] give here’s the kind of history, here’s how it works” (John, PST). Julie’s (PSG) concerns about training were similar to John’s. She thought that if more people on staff could have been trained more fully and by experts, more staff members would have committed to implementing restorative practices.

When I went to that first training, I said to our principal “it should not be us here,” and I was naming other people. Because you could have come back and you could have sold it to me. I have always been this way. I would say to my students, “Hey you guys you screwed up yesterday: today is a new day.” I truly believe that the training was intense. I think it was 2–3 days training and I would have liked to see the people that wouldn’t buy in go to that and be told that they have to present it to us.

Thus Julie (PSG) believed that if more sceptical staff had attended the expert training, the staff would have been more highly committed to helping implement restorative peacemaking circles and peacebuilding practices. The comments from these two staff members do not necessarily mean that the train-the-trainer model was ineffective at Pine School. However, they point to the challenges in changing the philosophy of teachers who are used to being guided by a punitive approach when responding to conflicts and discipline, and the potential role of sufficient high-quality training time in meeting such challenges.

In summary, eight to 10 teachers and one administrator at Pine had received comprehensive restorative practice training over 2 days, delivered by either an outside expert or
fully trained and experienced Cedar School District staff, over the course of 2 school years. Pine School staff members who had participated in these full restorative trainings then provided a shorter overview of restorative practices to Pine School staff, primarily through one professional-development day near the start of the 2010–2011 school year. In this partial training for Pine School staff led by recently trained novices, staff members were introduced to restorative philosophy and post-incident peacemaking circles, and taught how to facilitate proactive check-in circles (Bob, PSVP; John, PST; Julie, PSG). The expert training received by some Pine School staff seemed helpful for creating novice trainers who then taught the restorative philosophy to Pine School staff. Many Pine School leadership team members received expert training and it was helpful to have these school leaders help initiate restorative practices; the professional development day learning appeared to give many staff members an introduction to the restorative philosophy.

**1.4 Conflict Management Changes and Punitive Consequences: Pine School**

At the time of the research, responses from adult and student interview participants indicated that some Pine School staff were experimenting with and developing informal restorative dialogue responses to inappropriate behaviours in classroom settings (Bob, PSVP; John PST; Julie, PSG). This may indicate that some staff assumed that restorative practices should only be used for discipline instead of conflict resolution education. According to Julie (PSG), some teachers generally did not send students to the office as a first response to poor behaviour and instead used peacemaking dialogue to address situations. She explained that these teachers tended to get the conflicting individuals involved in dialogue together rather than talking to them separately. Julie (PSG) explained further:

> The other thing is we have provided all the teachers with the [talking piece] rocks. The idea is that teachers are using it [passing it to each student] so that only one person talks at a time. I’ve seen a lot of teachers talking to a kid when I am walking by the hallway and they will have a rock in their hand. It’s just a visual because kids say “I have a rock I can talk now.” Yeah I think that teachers try to do their own [restorative peacemaking] circles in the class before sending [the students in conflict] to the office.

What Julie (PSG) described above seems to be a mediation approach because a teacher is mediating a conflict resolution dialogue between two students. Implementation of such peacemaking dialogue (as an alternative to punishment on a regular basis) would also contribute to peacebuilding (systemic institutional change in conflict management and learning; Bickmore,
McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, et al., 2008). Julie (PSG) explained she believed some teachers at Pine School were trying to facilitate problem-solving dialogue with students first, and if teachers could not resolve the issue, or if they did not have time because they were teaching, then they would refer the students to meet with Julie. The teachers usually would follow up with Julie after their class or when they had a break to see whether the issue was resolved between the students. Part of the follow up would involve the teacher who had referred the student(s) and a conversation with Julie (PSG). This process was likely helpful for building participating students’ social capital because the restorative question asking how harm could be repaired provided an opportunity for the teacher to get to know a student better than in a punitive environment.

Teachers seemed to be well aware of the opportunity to bring students to Julie’s office for help resolving conflicts that had not escalated to serious harm, such as anger issues or disagreements with another student. This process reflected a slight change in Pine School’s conflict management approach from the time preceding restorative practice implementation (and the data collection for this research). Because most students were referred to Julie for dialogue, and not to the vice principal for punishment, teachers were clearly adopting some elements of a peacemaking approach in which diverse students were empowered to solve their own conflicts (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007 Morrison, 2007; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Many students who visited Julie (PSG) may not previously have such an opportunity to talk through their conflicts with another person, serving as a social capital resource for them. The existing policies in schools often limit such opportunities for students to express themselves in a non-punitive environment (Bickmore, 2011b). These restorative conversations of informal mediation, facilitated by the guidance counsellor and some classroom teachers at Pine School, fall into the middle level of the whole-school violence-prevention model, where teachers mediate small conflicts between students and employ whole-class immunization strategies such as check-in circles to minimize or prevent future violence (Morrison, 2007).

Kids have asked to bring the other people into my office. And so, before, it would be just like I wouldn’t even hear about it, and the kid would just self-identify and come down or come down almost like they were in trouble, and now they are coming down to problem solve. … They worked through it partly with the teacher, and now they want to work through it more. And the kids will say, ‘I want to bring in so and so and we need to talk
about this,” and they know sitting there and talking about it with the other person there.

(Julie, PSG)

One student interviewee corroborated the way the peacemaking nature of conflict resolution worked based on her experience. Jessica (PSS) indicated that Julie (PSG) had facilitated meetings between herself and another student who had been referred by their teacher. Another time Julie (PSG) also had been available to facilitate a meeting with a small group of students and help them resolve an issue. “Ms. [Julie] will ask you what’s wrong and then she’ll get both sides of the story” (Jessica, PSS). Similarly, one teacher at Pine School, John (PST), who acted as teacher-in-charge when administrators were out of the building for meetings, reported that at the time of the data collection he had come to rely less on traditional punitive approaches when conflicts were referred to him: When John (PST) had students referred to him by teachers for Code of Conduct violations when he was “Teacher in Charge,” he told me he tries to talk things through with students:

We will sit individually with kids and talk it through and find out what happened and then usually ask can we bring the other one in and talk this through and see if we can solve this. Nine times out of ten the kids say “yes okay.” (John, PST)

John’s (PST) approach reflects a restorative approach in that John facilitated a discussion between the two students so they could resolve their disagreement through dialogue, instead of punishing or excluding them. This type of approach offers relationship-building (access to social capital) opportunities to students through dialogue with each other and with John (PST).

In addition to apparent proactive peacemaking facilitation by some teachers at Pine School, the school administration also responded to conflict and violence in somewhat more proactive ways than they did prior to implementation of restorative practices. The support from school administrators for developing positive relationships and modelling relational approaches (peacebuilding) was being accepted by many of Pine School’s teachers (as in Kane et al., 2007; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Typically, a vice principal in secondary school responds to student misconduct through control and punishment (Adams, 2000; Gladden, 2002). It appeared that Bob (PSVP) continued to implement control and punishment in this school. However, some interview evidence showed Bob (PSVP) was applying restorative peacemaking practices in some post-incident situations.

It depends on the situation in terms of what is going on with the students, versus what is going on in the school, because it is very common for me to have 4–5 things going on at a
time, so that lengthy restorative justice is not likely to happen. But what I do is take some of those questions and incorporate them into the dialogue I have with the students. I try to get them to reflect on how they impacted on others? How will they make this right? (Bob, PSVP)

Bob’s implication here, that he typically asked students to reflect on how their behaviour impacted others and how they would make the situation right, indicates he was beginning to infuse restorative elements to address conflicts in post-incident arbitration counselling.

Administrators at Pine School used traditional punitive consequences for fighting, extreme violence, and defiance (Bob, PSVP; John, PST; Julie, PSG). Bob (PSVP) stated,

a lot of suspensions are more for kids who are refusing to go to class and we can’t guarantee their safety, so it’s more like “go home so your mom can make sure that she knows where you are, because we won’t know where you are.”

Since the introduction of restorative practices, when some students would come back after suspensions, they would participate in dialogue with an administrator about the problem that had precipitated the punishment.

Our regular operating procedure is if the student has done something that we don’t have a choice we have to suspend, and we do for fist fights, if they’ve done that and we do that and when they come back they sit down and there is a meeting with admin—I don’t normally get involved with those. … Quite often they will sit with the administrator, and the administrator will bring both in and discuss what happened: “Here’s why you were gone; How can we prevent this in the future, and what can we do to make things right?” (John, PST)

As outlined in Chapter 4, the policy at Pine School did give administrators some discretion as to whether to suspend students, but Pine School administrators usually still chose to suspend students. Provincial and school-district policies grounded in retributive justice make for an awkward relationship with restorative practice implementation in schools (Karp & Breslin, 2001). It is awkward because restorative justice is supposed to allow for school members impacted by an incident to arrive at a decision together to learn and to mend relationships, instead of having punitive consequences imposed on individuals. Pine School staff quite often implemented restorative practices after punitive consequences, which contradicts restorative practice theory (Kane et al., 2007). The vice principal explained the basis for his conflict management choices:
Bob (PSVP) did consider mitigating factors, such as individual education plans for students, and explained he was required by policy to take some factors into consideration if he decided to suspend a student from school. Students with special needs may not have control over actions in making punishment decisions. Bob (PSVP) corroborated John’s (PST) perception that he arranged for students to have a conversation with him and another student with whom they had been in conflict, when they returned from suspension.

1.5 Restorative peacemaking Circles

Student and teacher interviewees (Julie, PSG; John, PST; Bob, PSVP; Jessica, PSS) described dialogue processes at Pine School that constitute informal restorative conferences or informal peacemaking circles, as in prior research such as Stinchcomb et al. (2006) and Jones (2004). An important element here is Pine School’s allocation of staffing resources to facilitate such restorative peacemaking dialogue. Julie (PSG), in her role as guidance counsellor, was allocated time to help students strengthen relationships by mediating peacemaking dialogue: “I’m flexible because I am in guidance. … So sometimes I might just spend all day working on a problem meeting with each kid” (Julie, PSG). One student confirmed that Julie (PSG) was accessible to assist the student in conflict management. “You can say, ‘Ms. [Julie], I need to talk to you,’ and come in when you feel up to it. If she is in the office, she will call people down for a meeting” (Jessica, PSS).

Most post-incident dialogue processes reported by Pine School staff and students who I interviewed were informal peacemaking circles that included a facilitator who was a Pine School staff member and the two or three students most directly impacted by an incident. Bob (PSVP) described facilitating a process using questions to encourage students to see the perspective of another person. Unlike some restorative peacemaking processes (Pranis, 2005), Bob did not circulate a talking piece in these mediations.

I set the ground rules. … I will be asking questions from one person, the other person I want to listen attentively, be able to repeat back what that first person has said so when
we are finished they can articulate what the first person said. No interruptions no but’s, no that’s a lie, just listen because people see things differently. Because sometimes once you put yourselves in their headspace then you may understand. Same thing back and then we start to talk through the questions there. I have [questions] up on the wall and try and come to my last question: How are we going to make this right?

John (PST) also reported he did not use a talking piece, but did use restorative language, when he facilitated conflict dialogue between students.

I leave it up to the students: “how are we going to make it better?” And generally it’s an apology: it’s “sorry, Sir, I know I shouldn’t have done that. … I would like to come back to the classroom, if you will accept my apology. Can I come back?”

On one hand, John (PST) still holds authority over the student, but this post-incident dialogue does provide opportunity for relational accountability, which occurs in restorative justice. Julie (PSG) described a short conflict-dialogue process she facilitated one to three times a week between students:

I do a minimum once a week. In the high peaks I may do two to three a week. I do them during lunch, during class time, all the time. I don’t take that long; I tend to take about 30 minutes. … I bring them in here with the chairs and we form a formal circle. I have those three rocks right there; we always have to have a rock for a talking piece. I go over the rules of [restorative justice] and each of the kids tell their side of the story of what they want out of it, and by the end they come to some conclusions. … I have kids come in and say “where’s that rock; I want that rock.” They all want it and want to talk about it, whereas I never would have had that before. The kids would be yelling at each other and I couldn’t hear them. Now we sit in a circle and we talk about it.

Thus Julie’s (PSG) restorative process did circulate a talking piece so students would each have an opportunity to talk, one at a time.

Three Pine School staff members reported facilitating restorative dialogue with two to three students at a time. None of these adult-led restorative processes involved parents. These facilitators told me they had communicated with teachers if necessary, but that teachers did not participate directly in these dialogue processes. Because these processes did not include everyone impacted by an incident, based on restorative practice theory, not all harm would be repaired (Pranis, 2005); however, this process did demonstrate that adults at Pine School were
responding to some conflicts in non-punitive ways, and potentially, relationships could be strengthened.

In each of these dialogue practices, students had an opportunity to explain their side of the story, to repair the harm from the incident, and to share how the incident had impacted them personally; thus, they constituted restorative practice (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007; Morrison, 2007). Bob (PSVP) and Julie (PSG) mentioned they used the five restorative questions (described above under training) as a guide for these dialogue processes. Julie (PSG) was the only staff member who reported using a talking piece, and ensuring that students sat across from each other and from herself: “Kids find it easier because they are telling me the story … by the end, they start communicating to each other” (Julie, PSG). Julie (PSG) also facilitated larger formal peacemaking circles for more serious incidents such as bullying involving more than two or three students. For this process she held precircle meetings with each person directly involved in the incident a few hours before the formal circle dialogue, usually during the same school day. She followed the same process and restorative dialogue questions as she used with informal peacemaking circles, and a rock as a talking piece was circulated to each student. No teachers or parents participated in the peacemaking circles Julie conducted. In contrast, restorative justice theory argues for the participation of many people impacted by an incident, to facilitate the development of empathy and transformation of relationships (Pranis, 2005). Although not all members participate in informal and formal peacemaking circles, the data seemed to indicate that Pine School staff members had responded to some student conflicts and minor incidents in restorative ways instead of meting out punishment.

1.6 Proactive Peacebuilding Practices

While some post-incident restorative dialogue was implemented at Pine School, restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding practices were implemented only sparsely. Such proactive peacebuilding approaches provide opportunities for relationships (social capital) to be strengthened between students and other members of the school community, thereby reducing the likelihood of escalated violence, instead of merely repairing harm afterwards. Pine School’s limited introduction of check-in circles in classrooms was one example of a community-building and dialoguing opportunity that did become available to some students. Mentoring programs and assemblies were other examples of peacebuilding practices at Pine School at the time of the research, according to the community-care teams final report. Check-in circles normally were facilitated by a classroom teacher with the students. These meetings enabled participants to share
opinions on a topic, or tell others how they are feeling. Mary (CSS), the Cedar School district resource person, explained:

Well there is a really strong focus on building relationships between everybody in the class, so that they know each other better and are less likely to cause harm to each other. But also, it sets things up for better group work. It sets things up for individuals being able to communicate, because often times in class you are going to have students trying to get attention and the confident kids that are eager to participate, and sometimes they drown each other out. So [check-in circles set] up a climate for some of those quieter students to have more of a voice. (Mary, CSS)

John (PST) said he regularly facilitates check-in circles known as brags and drags: he encouraged students to “brag” about things they have recently experienced about which they are proud, and to share “drags”—negative experiences:

In my regular practice, we do it on Mondays—not as conflict resolution but as a community building. If I forget, the kids are now at a point where they say “Hey we haven’t done brags and drags after the weekend” so I have to stop what I am doing and we have to see how things are going, and if it’s been a rough day for someone we’re going to give them a little more space and be more tolerant because we understood it was a rough weekend.

Such dialogue processes open up the opportunity for students to develop strong relationships through open communication (Gladden, 2002). This approach is consistent with Morrison’s (2007) primary or universal level of school peacebuilding in which such conversations “immunize” community members so that conflicts do not escalate into harmful situations. The vice principal (Bob, PSVP) claimed that many Pine School teachers held check-in circles on a regular basis. “Some classes eat it up and miss it when they don’t have it.”

In terms of the actual classroom circle, most teachers use it as a way to set classroom tone and a warm welcoming environment one where students feel respected and their voice is heard. A lot of teachers will use it on the Monday after a weekend. A lot of teachers will use it 2–3 minutes a day, and some people will do it on the Friday just to see what the plans are for the weekend. (Bob, PSVP)

Earlier, I mentioned I had observed a check-in circle among approximately 30 Pine School staff at a staff meeting, for 20 minutes, led by one teacher-leader. This check-in circle among staff was an example of peacebuilding in that it gave everyone a voice and provided an
opportunity for relationships and sense of community to be strengthened by listening to different perspectives of peers about stressful experiences to which all apparently could relate.

Another peacebuilding opportunity was an adult–student mentoring program:

We have the caring adult program, which connects an adult to a student in every grade. There is a breakfast once a month, and that is part of getting to know if there is a problem with a kid. … At student success meeting we will say who is caring adult—teachers will go out and speak to the kid on their own time. … They have done scavenger hunts, last semester we had a big pizza lunch … teachers do it on their lunch or their prep. (John, PST)

This caring-adult mentoring program is an example of broadening the relational bonds between students and teachers again as an immunization strategy against violence by developing a regular positive relationship with an adult. Students develop social capital in that they can seek help from that adult in conflict situations. Although proactive, whole-school level peacebuilding practices identified by interviewees and documents were limited, Pine School is a small school so the introduction of these few practices may have had some opportunity to impact many people there.

The introduction of check-in circles and the caring-adult program at Pine School seemed to reveal that the school had introduced a few strategies that may have contributed to proactive peacebuilding in a small way. Both approaches seemed to provide opportunities for relationship strengthening between and among students and between students and teachers, because they opened opportunities for communication, empathy, and the development of social capital.

1.7 Implementation Constraints

Some interviewees noted a few constraints impeding the implementation of restorative practices. Julie (PSG) revealed how students’ rigid full schedules reduced opportunities to facilitate post-incident restorative peacemaking dialogue.

Time is a factor. Circle and the whole restorative justice piece takes a lot of time if you do it properly from the beginning to the end. … When it becomes break or lunch, depending on the situation, we will continue after break. … Sometimes it takes a long time, and the kids really can’t sit for that long, because if you are really going to respect each other, it’s rude when someone has to get up because it’s their break or something or someone will say “I have to have my smoke.” So sometimes that sort of thing this
disruptive and I mean I can’t control it, because it is their break and lunch, and you’re going to create another conflict if you make them stay.

Julie’s (PSG) role, like that of most guidance counsellors, was to meet with students to support their individual career, academic, or social needs. Even though her own schedule was flexible, it was still challenging for her to conduct dialogue processes, because access to students was constrained by their school timetables. Bob (PSVP) mentioned that his own limited time could be a hindrance for the implementation of restorative circles or mediations: “The one hurdle I run into is that this place can be so busy: the ability to sit and do it can be challenging. … Lengthy restorative justice is not likely to happen.”

Bob’s comment, and the indication that some staff remained punishment orientated, is consistent with past research reviewing the implementation of restorative practices in three school districts (Morrison et al., 2005). The Morrison et al. study found that it could take 1 to 3 years for a school’s attitude towards punishment to change. Restorative implementation at Pine School had gone on for 2 years at the time of the research. “The Safe Schools Act and changes that have been made are … meant to be more in line with restorative practices and is less punitive. [But] There are still some people are in punitive land” (Bob, PSVP). Bob’s (PSVP) comments highlight continuing pressures on teachers and administrators to respond to student behaviours with punishment rather than extending restorative dialogue involving all individuals impacted by the incident.

1.8 Summary: Pine School

In the Pine School case, some staff members who were trained did indeed implement circles and other peacemaking and peacebuilding practices. The Cedar School District had set clear objectives and allocated resources to train four to five key staff people at each Cedar School District schools in restorative justice practices and to reduce the number of suspensions through the implementation of restorative practices in schools. At Pine School, some staff members implemented proactive peacemaking and peacebuilding practices such as check-in circles, restorative inquiry, restorative language, and informal and formal post-incident peacemaking circles. All interviewees consistently reported that post-incident dialogue nearly always involved one adult staff member and two students (and did not include other stakeholders). The case also highlights some challenges for broader implementation of restorative practices. In particular, not every staff member had received high-quality training for more than a few hours, led by experienced experts. I found little evidence of those untrained or
less trained staff members using restorative methods other than some classroom teachers used check-in circles.

Two staff members implemented restorative peacemaking circles (Julie, PSG; John, PST) that did replace any punitive consequences. In comparison, the vice principal (Bob, PSVP) reported using restorative enquiry in situations to resolve conflicts, often after or in concert with assigning punitive consequences such as suspension. The vice principal also used punitive consequences, such as suspension, as part of students’ reentry to the school. The vice principal said he did not have enough time to implement mediations or more formal extended and inclusive peacemaking circles due to other responsibilities. The other barrier to implementation of restorative practices at Pine School appeared to be the competing paradigms of retribution (punitive policies) and restitution (repairing harm to the victim and community). Restorative practices were impeded because certain punishments had traditionally been the expected response to violent and serious student behaviours.

Pine School’s conflict management seemed to change in that teachers were using proactive check-in circles that contributed to peacebuilding. Limited introduction of restorative peacemaking circles by two teachers indicated use of restorative practices instead of punitive consequences may have been helpful in strengthening relationships for students and other school members. The use of punitive consequences and restorative practices by the vice principal (Bob, PSVP) seems to reveal that Pine School did not fully replace punitive practices with restorative approaches at the time of research (as recommended by Morrison, 2007). This finding is consistent with previous findings reported by Stinchcomb et al. (2006).

2 River School, Pacific School District

2.1 Leadership and Initiation

The Pacific School District, the region’s police force, and the Spencer Agency collaborated to introduce restorative peacemaking circles, at River School and other high schools in an effort to respond to harming behaviour. According to the two administrators interviewed at River School, restorative practices had not been directly introduced to River School administrators. “The process of implementation in the Pacific School Board has been largely through word of mouth … and some [other] schools in the district were introduced to this approach about 3 years ago,” said Lesley (RSP). Alan (RSVP) had some experiences with restorative practices at his last school, which he used to help initiate and promote this process at River School. Alan (RSVP) explained further.
I would say about 4 years ago, the project [name withheld] started in partnership with the Spencer Agency. Again the whole idea of it was to come up with a better conflict resolution intervention that would ensure that the schools were safer and that kids would realize the impact of their decisions and try to solve problems in the future. So, especially, it worked well with gangs: I think that may have been the impetus to get gangs together to talk.

Individual gang members can develop social capital through facilitated dialogue. A gang is an example of an opportunity for social capital, but to help promote positive behaviours, other school and community members can expose gang members to different perspectives to address power imbalances (Bickmore, 2011b; Morrison, 2007; Putnam, 1995).

Most of the leadership to initiate restorative practices came from a few administrators (e.g., principals and superintendents) in the Pacific School District, and Spencer Agency staff members who were passionate about getting restorative practices into Pacific School District schools (Alan, RSVP; Lesley, RSP). The committee of people who formed this partnership opened the door for River School to access the services of Spencer Agency facilitators to help address serious student conflicts (Alan, RSVP). Alan (RSVP) was interested in trying an approach other than punitive consequences to address conflicts between individuals or groups. He suggested that traditional punitive approaches were not effectively dealing with these conflicts. Alan (RSVP) was responsible for making referrals to the Spencer Agency to initiate restorative peacemaking circles. When he or the principal deemed it necessary, Alan arranged for students in conflict to meet with an outside facilitator from the Spencer Agency.

Lesley (RSP) believed in using restorative practices as a conflict management approach. She believed in the importance of students repairing the harm caused by escalated or violent conflicts. Alan (RSVP) told me that administrators, youth counsellors, and the student-success teacher at River School were actively involved in the initiation and implementation of restorative peacemaking circles. These comments suggest that River School had a small group of committed leaders, as is necessary for the implementation of restorative practices (Kane et al., 2007; Morrison & Ahmed, 2006).

### 2.2 Initiation of Peacemaking Circles

River School introduced some post-incident informal and formal restorative peacemaking circles. Outside facilitators from the Spencer Agency introduced these non-punitive responses to conflict at the school with support from the River School administrators who made referrals for
these conflicts to be handled by external facilitators. Restorative meetings took place at the school near the guidance area. Referrals to the Spencer Agency mostly addressed minor incidents between students. School administrators were supportive of restorative practices because they made referrals to the Spencer Agency, yet complying with existing punitive guidelines. Conflict management at River School seemed to have changed only slightly when I collected data for this research because practices were limited to post-incident peacemaking circles. Limited adoption of post-incident restorative practices was possible even though teachers at this school had not received training.

2.3 Training

Alan (RSVP) had been a Pacific School District social sciences teacher a few years before becoming a vice principal at another school where he had participated in peacemaking circles. Even though River School staff members were not trained in restorative practices, some implementation of restorative practices occurred because of the involvement of the Spencer Agency.

Alan (RSVP) mentioned that Spencer Agency personnel had planned to train some student leaders to lead peer mediation. However, I found no evidence that students actually had led any peer mediations at River School at the time of data collection. All interviewees reported that only one Spencer Agency adult and an assistant led preconference meetings and facilitated actual restorative peacemaking circles at River. Having students mediate conflict would likely have required a great deal of commitment for ongoing restorative practice training, referral processes, supervision, and advising by River School adults.

2.4 Leadership and Training Constraints

In summary, River School staff members had not been trained in restorative practices, although the two school administrators had participated in some restorative peacemaking circle experiences. River school administrators did sometimes implement restorative language when they tried to resolve a conflict between two students (Lesley, RSP; Alan, RSVP). Both administrators referred serious and less serious conflict incidents to the Spencer Agency, for which an experienced skilled facilitator and assistant, not on the school staff, came to conduct pre-circle meetings and then formal restorative dialogue meetings (Lesley, RSP; Alan, RSVP). A benefit to having Spencer Agency lead peacemaking circles was that it minimized the use of River School staff members’ time, a challenge that sometimes deters school personnel from running restorative peacemaking circles. A potential downside was that students and staff did not
have the comfort of knowing the person who led the peacemaking circle, so the development of in-school relational resources may have been diminished as a result. However, given prevailing legalistic paradigms, such arms-length facilitation may have been perceived by some as being less prone to bias than processes led by in-school staff.

2.5 Conflict Management Changes and Punitive Consequences

The analysis of school documents revealed a total of seven (three in fall and four in the winter) peacemaking circles conducted in the 2010–2011 school year by an external facilitator from the Spencer Agency at River School in response to conflicts including physical assault, racial tension, verbal harassment, bullying, and physical altercations. The principal of River School, Lesley (RSP), mentioned she perceived the post-incident restorative practices facilitated by Spencer Agency personnel to be part of her overall program of discipline:

I think [restorative peacemaking] is part of the process of progressive discipline. There is problem solving and it helps to take concerns seriously. At our school, we try to reduce violence and conflict escalation, informally, or formally through this process. It means a lot to parents to be partners in education and sharing of information from incidents (Lesley, RSP).

Lesley’s (RSP) comments dovetail with Bill 212 and other policies recommending alternatives to suspension. Her reference to parent involvement also indicates a philosophy of strengthening relationships for students and school community members as a component of making schools safer. However, no parents were involved in the restorative practices dialogue experiences reported by the two River School administrators. Lesley (RSP) did indicate that she and the vice principal did try to involve parents, explaining what was involved in the restorative practice process in which their son or daughter participated. Clearly, this approach would restrict the implementation of a peacemaking circle based on theory (as in Pranis, 2005). However, River School administrators’ attempt to communicate with parents prior to or after peacemaking circles, showing some small changes in conflict management to become more inclusive.

Alan (RSVP) explained that the skilled Spencer Agency facilitators visited the school to handle serious conflict incidents between students, such as bullying and physical altercations. “The Spencer Agency has set everything up. They are great. I normally e-mail them, give them the situation, and they let us know when they can come down. Usually we have a designated quiet room” (Alan, RSVP). Such external support for restorative practices was found in a previous study to facilitate implementation only if it was mixed with internal school-staff
leadership (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007). Alan (RSVP) believed it was much better to have a person not on staff interview participants and carry out other organizational duties necessary for running restorative circles. Prior to the actual peacemaking meeting, Spencer Agency facilitators normally conducted interviews separately with each direct party to the conflict. One of the agency people would then conduct the restorative dialogue, usually on the same day. One student, Lisa (RSS), had participated in one such restorative conference meeting: “My [vice principal] made me aware of it [restorative justice] and I thought it was a good idea” (Lesley, RSVP). This substantiates that the vice principal sometimes facilitated students’ involvement in conflict resolution instead of imposing punitive consequences in such instances. Alan (RSVP) told me he made referrals for minor disputes between students and also more serious incidents where greater harm was done through words or physical harm.

Lesley (RSP) indicated that the partnership with the Spencer Agency was necessary for restorative practices to run at their school, because it would be difficult for her or the vice principal to run such a lengthy process during school. Alan (RSVP) concurred that he did not have time. Other studies reported that resources to allocate a restorative coordinator were helpful to ease the load on administrators to organize peacemaking meetings (Stinchcomb et al., 2006), but this did not occur at River. Having an outside agency facilitate restorative practices offers the opportunity for a “neutral” party to lead a circle, in line with what is proposed by Pranis (2005). But in contrast, having an outside agency facilitate restorative practices minimizes opportunities to develop restorative capacity in school staff for the development of relational resources.

Three student interviewees (Jennifer, RSS, Brenda, RSS, and Lisa, RSS) described restorative practices in which they had participated, led by one facilitator from the Spencer Agency, one assistant from the Spencer Agency, and involving two to three student disputants. A talking piece was not used during the restorative conference experiences. All three student interviewees also indicated that a Spencer Agency facilitator had met with them prior to the actual restorative meeting and asked participants the same questions that would be asked in the restorative meeting. This revealed that the process had the structure and the actual sequence expected in restorative peacemaking circles (Morrison, 2007).

The two River School administrators interviewed reported that punitive consequences were still being used in conjunction with restorative practices at the time of this research. Lesley (RSP) revealed that she or the vice principal (Alan, RSVP) always tried to have a reentry meeting after students returned from a suspension. At this meeting, they used restorative inquiry
language such as “what happened?” and “who has been impacted by this incident?” This indicates some implementation of a very limited restorative approach, because two students in conflict were brought together and invited to answer restorative questions.

2.6 Restorative Peacemaking Circles

At the time I was gathering data for this research project, the restorative practices implemented at River School included two administrators’ use of restorative language and implementation of a few mediations and restorative peacemaking circles by outside facilitators. In contrast, interviewees also reported use of punitive practices.

Alan (RSP) described his understanding of what occurred in restorative conference meetings led by Spencer Agency facilitators, based on his experiences as a participant.

The facilitators first of all they try to draw out everyone’s side. Everyone gets a chance to understand what they did, why they did it, and what their thinking was behind it. The next part is about impact and feelings. It is very informative you get everything out there. … Then the last part when everything gets out, then it comes to the agreement. Sometimes there is hugs and make up and it’s wow, and they move on, and other times they are going to agree to disagree, but these are the terms.

The process resembled peacemaking circles because various people impacted by the incident seemed to be involved and the issues addressed were complex.

There can’t be an imbalance there. … You have to be careful: the bigger you make it the more you get the camp mentality. So, the best [restorative dialogues] have been one on one with a counselor. I’ve participated in bigger ones but you have to balance it out; you can’t just have the victim and four perpetrators; it’s very intimidating.

Similarly, Lesley (RSP) reported that Spencer Agency facilitated peacemaking circles to prevent future violence from occurring. Individuals involved in a conflict had a chance to share their concerns and ways to repair the harm. Lesley (RSP) also explained that restorative peacemaking circles were helpful for engaging parents in the problem-solving process related to their child’s conflicts. Parents are often impacted by their child’s behaviours, but are not always involved in the resolution process. Although parents were not directly involved in the peacemaking circle process, Lesley (RSP) and the Alan (RSVP) would reach out to parents over the phone and provide opportunities for them to give input or be kept informed about the conflict management process.
Alan (RSVP) reported that Spencer Agency adults would facilitate restorative peacemaking circles for incidents where serious harm had not occurred, but when conflict was escalating to become physical between two or more individuals. A peacemaking circle also can be used to address complex conflictual issues such as misunderstandings or hearsay; this conflict dialogue process is represented at the secondary or targeted level of responsive regulation noted by Morrison (2007).

As much as possible we try to make it a learning experience. They would get together and everyone who was involved would get together and the Spencer Agency would interview all these individuals and hammer out a contract that we could agree on how to cohabit in the future. … And sometimes it was just misunderstandings: they didn’t actually hear them say it was friends they said it and a lot of hearsay and paranoia set it and it just kind of festered so this is a way to stop it and get everyone together. So we’ve used it proactively before as well as before suspension. (Alan, RSVP)

Alan’s (RSVP) comment about using post-incident peacemaking circles does indicate that River School administrators were using dialogue processes to teach a few students problem-solving and communication skills so they would not have to use physical violence to resolve conflicts. Such educative practice constitutes part of peacebuilding (Bickmore, 2011a). Alan (RSVP) said “for the most part we [Spencer Agency staff] have just been dealing with student to student conflicts,” referring to the restorative meetings he had participated in, facilitated by the Spencer Agency.

The more people you try to get involved the harder it is to get everyone together. That’s why, especially the parents, it’s hard to get them in. I couldn’t do it unless it is after school and then you don’t have the kids. For the most part it’s not difficult getting the kids as they are here at school (Alan, RSVP).

Jennifer (RSS), a River School student, described a restorative dialogue experience that involved the two people most directly in conflict. “We talked to each other and listened to what each other had to say.” Brenda (RSS), another student, said “someone from the Spencer Agency spoke to both of us individually here and asked the same questions again in the circle. … The questions were: How did you feel? What was going through our mind at the time?” A third River School student interviewee, Lisa (RSS), described the process similarly: “first they sit you down and the lady lets you explain your side of the story and the other person will come in and they explain their side of the story and we all talk together about it.” All three students indicated that
their restorative meeting did not last any longer than 30 minutes and occurred during the school day (Lisa, RSS; Brenda, RSS; Jennifer, RSS).

The two school administrators apparently implemented informal restorative peacemaking circles at River School. Alan (RSVP) revealed issues that students brought to him before physical violence occurred, in his office or during conversations in the hallways. Alan (RSVP) believed students brought these issues to him because they knew he would not punish them. This approach resembled Morrison’s (2007) responsive regulation at the secondary level.

Yeah, proactively is everything. Like if we can stop conflict before it happens, because that’s the key, kids have to realize that, yes, solve your problems on your own with words, but at the point when you can’t solve a problem, don’t resort to violence, don’t resort to spreading it around your kids. That’s when you have to reach out to adult. (Alan, RSVP)

It appears that some students believed that reaching out to an adult like Alan (RSVP) could help them to resolve an issue before it escalated to violence. Lesley (RSP) also believed that students were starting to seek out peacemaking by speaking to administrators before incidents escalated to violence. This suggests that word could have spread to some students about the benefits of having conflicts mediated by an adult.

2.7 Peacebuilding Practices

Very few peacebuilding activities were identified at River School during the time of data collection. Document analysis and interview data suggested that the school was in the process of developing a peer mediation program. Having student leaders was one of the goals the Spencer Agency listed in their handbook for school-based programs. This type of training could have enabled leaders to facilitate restorative-mediation dialogues among peers but none of the interviewees reported that quality peer facilitation or implementation had occurred.

Other indicators of peacebuilding were co-curricular activities listed in the 2008 River School student handbook, including sport teams, student council, music, and drama. Such experiences provide opportunities for students to build relationships, communicate with one another, and develop skills that are ingredients of proactive peacebuilding (Gladden, 2002). However, as noted in a previous study (Bickmore & MacDonald, 2010), care must be taken to support diverse students to participate in activities so all can have opportunities to build peer conflict management capacity and increase their sense of belonging to a school. At the time of data collection for this study, I found little evidence to suggest diverse students were involved in
these opportunities. Other peacebuilding activities reported by interviewees were that some violence-prevention and character education messages were communicated to students through assemblies (Lesley, RSP). Such curriculum may be slightly helpful in contributing to a positive school climate.

River School spirit wear was being introduced to students and staff to help build a sense of community pride in school (River School, 2008). The handbook mentioned a Metis Community Partnership that was to be implemented to expose students respecting certain cultural traditions, such as respect for others’ cultures, environment, and property. Teaching acceptance of other cultures and perspectives constitutes an aspect of peacebuilding relationships across differences strengthened as part of these activities (Jones, 2004).

2.8 Implementation Constraints

Lesley (RSP) argued for including in restorative dialogue a skilled facilitator and an authority figure.

The circle could do more harm if the mediator doesn’t facilitate effectively. I believe that administration should be present for big issues, because a secondary issue may arise during the circle. We must ensure safety and trust. The process might need an authority figure, and without this in place, this could fly in the face of the process. Kids may blow up and get emotional.

Lesley’s (RSP) comment indicated some reluctance to implement restorative meetings because things may get emotional. This is surprising because most restorative meetings do get emotional (Lockhart & Zammit, 2005). With expert facilitation, these concerns should be handled appropriately.

Lesley (RSP) described one incident in which a student who had been targeted by others did not feel she had been treated fairly in a restorative meeting. Lesley (RSP) thought the facilitator had not understood the nuances of interactions with this student population because she had not worked at the school. In this situation, the student lost her temper because she apparently thought her side of the story was not being presented adequately in the circle.

Alan (RSVP) reported that serious complex conflicts could not be addressed with restorative practices unless time and resources were devoted to supporting victims, offenders, and educators. Both administrators told me that external facilitators from the Spencer Agency did have the time and resources to support these individuals. The River School Principal (Lesley, RSP) described one racist incident to which they had responded with punitive consequences. In
fact, the student was excluded permanently from their school: a female student had said some harmful things to another girl and refused to show remorse or interest in participating in a restorative circle.

2.9 Summary: River School

The data collected from River School revealed that some restorative peacemaking circles were initiated by two school administrators and by involving facilitators from an outside agency (Spencer Agency) that was very experienced in facilitating restorative justice practices. This internal coordination by administrators constitutes evidence of early implementation of restorative practices when handling some minor incidents and disagreements between students. The River School administrators perceived restorative practices as being part of progressive discipline, aligned with Bill 212. In some instances, they invited students to engage in restorative inquiry dialogues upon returning to school after suspension. Nevertheless, punitive consequences were still being issued to students at River School. This case study highlights the concern mentioned by many restorative justice theorists including Karp and Breslin (2001) that restorative practices coexisting with or supplementing punitive consequences may have contradictory results. There was little evidence of the implementation of proactive peacebuilding activities beyond a few isolated activities at River School. This should not be surprising, as none of River School’s staff members or students were trained in restorative practices.

3 Ocean School, Cedar School Board

3.1 Leadership and initiation

Ocean School is in the same school district as River School and has access to the same school-based programs. The principal of Ocean School (who I did not interview) told me in a side conversation that she participated on a committee charged to develop the existing partnership between the Spencer Agency, the Pacific School District, a nearby school district, and the local police department. One of the two teachers interviewed, Sharon (OST), mentioned that “the principal is an enormous advocate of alternative education and anything that works. I think if there is any resource in the schools that is available in the school, it is tried; any method is tried.” The other teacher interviewed, Bryce (OST), said, “I am aware that, if a kid is suspended, that a kid has to go through counselling. None many of my students have been required to go through this process.” Bryce’s comment seems to indicate that a conflict-dialogue approach was applied after punitive suspension had been issued to students at Ocean School.
3.2 Leadership and Training Constraints

None of the Ocean School staff had received training in restorative practices. Presumably this lack of training limited Ocean School’s implementation of restorative practices. Not many teachers at Ocean School seemed to be aware of restorative practices. Sharon (OST) mentioned, “I’ve heard of [restorative justice] through word of mouth. … It wasn’t a complete surprise when it came to my attention.”

3.3 Conflict Management Changes and Punitive Consequences: Ocean School

Interviews with two teachers and three students reported two formal restorative conference experiences, also known as peacemaking circles, and analysis of school documents revealed a total of 31 (15 in the fall and 16 in the winter) peacemaking circles conducted in the school year 2010–2011 by an external facilitator from the Spencer Agency in response to conflicts including verbal assault, verbal threats, bullying, and physical altercations. Sharon (OST), referring to Spencer Agency facilitators, commented, “we have far more outside help this year than we have had last year.” Sharon (OST) was referring to the external help for facilitation of restorative practices from the Spencer Agency.

I would say workers are in the building and they certainly do deal with individual student referrals … The Spencer Agency is in here a couple of times per week if not more. The process has been amazingly helpful to the school this year. (Sharon, OST)

This likely represents a change in conflict management for the few student issues reported to be handled by the external facilitators compared to the punitive regime in previous years.

A student, Chris (OSS), and a teacher, Bryce (OST), mentioned an occasion when Bryce had broken up a fight between Chris and his brother. The vice principal had walked both boys to the main office of the school and briefly interviewed each of the boys separately in the office. After these interviews, the vice principal did not suspend either of them. Instead, the vice principal asked Chris if wanted to participate in a restorative peacemaking circle to try and repair the harm done from the incident. This is an example that demonstrates how Ocean School administrators used some discretion in how they responded to conflict and violence.

The two teachers interviewed confirmed that punitive consequences continued to be assigned to students at this school at the time of this research. Bryce (OST) noted that “The way it has been is the teacher tries to deal with it and then concern is sent to the office.” Sharon (OST) said students were suspended but that alternative measures such as restorative conferences
(peacemaking circles) were attempted in almost all cases before someone was suspended. Sharon’s (OST) comment about alternative measures seemed to indicate that school administrators were trying to minimize the use of punitive discipline.

3.4 Restorative Peacemaking Circles

At the time I collected data, Ocean School implemented informal and formal peacemaking circles, as well as non-restorative traditional punitive approaches (Bryce, OST; Sharon, OST). Bryce (OST) was asked to participate in the dialogue because he stopped a fight between two brothers in the school hallway. I would characterize this process as an informal restorative peacemaking circle because some people directly involved in the incident were involved in facilitated-dialogue processes (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007). A formal peacemaking circle is supposed to include more people directly and indirectly impacted by the incident involved (Pranis, 2005). Bryce (OST) met with a Spencer Agency facilitator as well as attending a pre-meeting between the facilitator and a participant. Chris (OSS) described the pre-meeting in which he participated regarding the same conflict. The facilitator asked him the same restorative questions that would be used again in the restorative dialogue meeting with his brother:

On Thursday I got called in by myself, asked me questions, my brother got called in by himself, they asked him questions, and then they called us both in and they asked us the same questions, and we just talked about stuff that we could do to prevent it the next time. (Chris, OSS)

The teacher described a similar process of individual meetings of no more than 10 minutes followed by the formal circle meeting:

When I met with [the facilitators] they told me the purpose of me being there, and how it might help situation, and we asked the boys to come in there and the five [including a Spencer Agency assistant] of us discussed as a teacher how I felt about the situation. (Bryce, OST)

In this incident, everyone had an opportunity to share how they felt the event had impacted them and to acknowledge the people who had been harmed as a result of the incident. According to Bryce (OST), the facilitator asked each person the following questions: How did you come to be involved in the event that took place? What were you thinking, feeling at the time the event took place? What has been your experience since the event took place leading up to today? Who have you seen affected by this event? These questions are consistent with the
standard sequence of restorative questions used by facilitators in many restorative practices (Lockhart & Zammit, 2005). The Spencer Agency restorative-program book explained that in a preconference preparation meeting, a

Program Assistant will make each party aware of the other’s view prior to the conference.

… So victims can decide if they would like to proceed even if an offender has a different perspective or is minimizing their role or responsibility.

This description seemed to indicate Ocean School’s conflict management was inclusive because a teacher impacted by an event was given an opportunity to share how the incident impacted him and the two boys involved in the physical altercation had an opportunity to experience this impact and also repair any harm that may have been done to this teacher.

The other teacher interviewed reported her experience in a peacemaking circle experience facilitated by a Spencer Agency person along with support from an assistant. This dialogue process included many people impacted by the inappropriate behaviour of a small group of Grade 9 girls during and outside of classroom lessons over a period of 2 months. As in the instance above, Sharon (OST) met with one of the two Spencer Agency staff persons prior to the peacemaking circle for a pre-meeting where they asked the same series of restorative inquiry questions that the facilitator later asked of the whole group in the restorative conference.

I didn’t anticipate a 2-hour meeting in which what they said at the beginning was exactly what they said at the end. I mean there was some good discussion in the middle but it was endless, and by the end we were pretty tired.

During the actual circle meeting, Sharon (OST) remembered that the facilitators told each person where they were to sit, and “The questions were re-asked: if the answers were forgotten or not the same, the mediator reminded from her notes, and that was helpful” (Sharon, OST).

One student I interviewed, Katie (OSS), was one of the Grade 9 girls who participated in the peacemaking circle. Katie (OSS) explained that she and other Grade 9 girls at the school had not been wearing their uniforms, were regularly late for classes, and had conflicts with teachers. For the restorative peacemaking process, Katie was pulled out of class by a guidance person to speak with a person from the Spencer Agency a few days before the circle. She participated in a pre-circle meeting with a Spencer Agency mediator, a Spencer Agency assistant, and three other students. The meeting lasted 10 minutes, and she was asked the same set of restorative inquiry questions listed above. In the full peacemaking circle there were three teachers, a vice principal, the principal, Katie, and two other students. Katie told me that during the peacemaking circle,
everyone had a chance to be informed about what each person’s concerns were. This was facilitated by the sequence of questions and the fact that only one person was allowed to talk at a time. Another student interviewed, Shauna (OSS), was also part of this peacemaking circle. As occurred with Katie, a guidance counsellor called Shauna out of class to meet with a counsellor, and that counsellor invited her to consider participating in a restorative circle. Shauna (OSS) participated in the group pre-circle meeting and was asked the same questions reported by Sharon (OST) and Katie (OSS) and the previous instance involving Bryce and Chris. The peacemaking circle description given by Sharon (OST), Katie (OST), and Shauna (OST) seemed to indicate Ocean School’s conflict management approach was inclusive because many people impacted by an incident had an opportunity to have a voice.

3.5 Peacebuilding Practices

I found very little evidence of proactive peacebuilding activities at Ocean School, despite that the rationale for “Bullying prevention at Ocean School” was included in the 2008 Ocean School student handbook as a mechanism to emphasize the importance of a positive school climate: “A positive school climate is a crucial component of prevention. Bullying adversely affects: a school’s ability to educate its students, students’ ability to learn, healthy relationships and the school climate.

None of the interviewees in this case mentioned that Ocean School had implemented bullying-prevention strategies at the time of the research.

The Ocean School 2008 student handbook also lists over 60 co-curricular clubs and teams. Such experiences may enable participating students to build relationships with one another outside of the classroom (Blum, 2005). Jones (2004) added that such activities could facilitate learning, provide students with opportunities to solve problems, and develop skills such as active listening. I did not find evidence that Ocean School intentionally provided opportunities for diverse individuals to engage in the democratic-citizenship practices recommended by Bickmore (2011b). These opportunities may have existed but were not reported by the small pool of interviewees or found in the documents I analyzed.

3.6 Implementation Constraints

I found no evidence that anyone on the Ocean School staff facilitated restorative peacemaking circles. It is challenging for most high schools to make a staff person available to facilitate formal restorative peacemaking processes because of the time involved in setting up meetings and interviewing participants in pre-circle meetings, then facilitating the actual
peacemaking circle. Teachers have classroom responsibilities and duties supervising students in a regular week. Other school staff members, such as guidance counsellors, although their schedules may be more flexible, are responsible for providing career counselling and timetable changes for students. This means that, given current typical workload configurations, regular in-school staff often do not have the free time needed to facilitate restorative processes.

3.7 **Summary: Ocean School**

Ocean School introduced some post-incident peacemaking circles. Outside facilitators from the Spencer Agency introduced these non-punitive responses to conflict at the school. Ocean School administrators referred students to the Spencer Agency for restorative work when there were serious incidents such as group conflicts and physical altercations. The leadership shown by Ocean School administrators in selecting these non-punitive approaches in light of existing punitive guidelines should not be underestimated, given that no one their staff had received any restorative practice training. Thus, conflict management at Ocean School seemed to have changed only slightly when I collected data for this research. External facilitators seemed to make possible this limited early implementation of restorative practices. However, as the data on Ocean School makes clear, adoption of restorative practices without offering training to teachers or administrators vastly limited the opportunities for implementation of either proactive or post-incident restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding.

4 **Discussion and Conclusion**

This chapter investigated how peacemaking circles and other peacebuilding practices were initiated, supported, impeded, and carried forward in each of the schools examined. This included analyzing how peacemaking circles transformed the ways conflicts were handled at each school. I explored the various mechanisms affecting the initiation of restorative practices presented in this chapter in the context of leadership, training, implementation of restorative practices, and whether these approaches did or did not transform the ways the three schools handled conflicts.

As noted earlier in the conceptual framework, the first level of Morrison’s (2007) framework includes proactive peacebuilding activities directed at the entire school population to prevent destructive conflict escalation. The secondary or targeted-practices level addresses conflicts and disruptions through facilitated dialogue, and the third level uses intensive dialogues for the most difficult situations. I will employ this framework in the discussion of whether the
implemented restorative approaches found at each case study school transformed the ways the schools handled conflicts based on data collected from interviews, documents, and observations.

Each case study school introduced restorative practices in different ways. School staff members were not trained in restorative practices at the two schools in the Pacific School District (River School and Ocean School). A small number of teachers and administrators (three to five per year) from Pine School in the Cedar District School received training over a 2-day period, with training lasting about 7 hours each day. An expert trainer who did not work at the Cedar School District provided training to these staff members. This initial training covered restorative justice philosophy and how to facilitate proactive peacebuilding practices (check-in circles) and post-incident practices (peacemaking circles). Thus, these invited Pine School staff members who participated in the training provided by the school board received Level 1 and Level 2 training from Morrison’s (2007) pyramid. I found evidence that a small group of Cedar School District staff, mostly resource people like Mary (CSS), also were trained to handle Level 3 conflict incidents (Mary, CSS; Bob, PSVP). In all Cedar District schools, including Pine School, novice trainers then taught staff members at their own school during a 2- to 3-hour school-based professional-development day. Novice trainers also modelled usage during staff meetings by practicing check-in circles with talking pieces during the time I collected data for this research.

The type of training provided to facilitators across the three schools varied. Restorative-practice training followed a train-the-trainer model in the Cedar School District; in contrast, staff at the two Pacific School District schools did not receive restorative practice training, and instead external facilitators likely received training through the Spencer Agency from a restorative practice expert. A total of eight to 10 staff members at Pine School were given a full 2-day training. Each trainer then provided a half-day introduction to colleagues during professional-development sessions at Pine School.

None of the staff at River School or Ocean School in the Pacific School District had received expert training. Instead, Spencer Agency staff experts facilitated restorative practices themselves in these schools. In contrast, the Cedar School District did allocate resources so that people such as Mary (CSS) could mentor novice trainers during the early stages of restorative practice implementation at Pine School. The allocation of resources included opportunities for staff members to contact Mary by phone or e-mail with questions related to facilitation. Resource people from the Spencer Agency also attended staff meetings in which restorative practices were being modelled (Pine School Observation, May 20, 2010). My analysis showed that Pine
School’s access to expert training at the district level, in which novice trainers who were trained, was of value. This resource stemmed from administrative support from the Cedar School District superintendent, which was not forthcoming at the other school district. The two other schools (River School and Ocean School) in the Pacific School District, had administrators who helped coordinate outside community/resources support to assist in implementing a few restorative circles.

Facilitation by internal school staff, enabled by school staff training, seemed to equip Pine School to implement a broader range and quantity of restorative practices compared to River and Ocean Schools. A consequence of having novice trainers had been that internal school staff only handled Level 1 conflicts restoratively because they were not skilled enough as restorative practice facilitators or did not have enough time in the day to facilitate other, more complex restorative practices. In comparison, I found evidence of more restorative peacemaking circle implementation in response to Level 2 incidents at River and Ocean Schools.

The facilitation of restorative practices varied between the two school districts. External facilitators at River and Ocean Schools (Pacific School District) implemented most restorative practices, whereas facilitation done at Pine School (Cedar School District) was internally led by a small group of staff members. External facilitators implemented post-incident peacemaking circles at River and Ocean Schools. Post-incident restorative inquiry was employed by Alan (RSVP) and Lesley (RSP) at River School. I found evidence that school administrators at River and Ocean Schools encouraged the use of post-incident practices by making referrals to the Spencer Agency. The most widely facilitated restorative practice was proactive classroom check-in circles at Pine School (Cedar School District): over a third of the staff of approximately 30 had implemented this practice once a week during class time. None of the schools implemented intensive restorative peacemaking circles for very serious violent incidents (Level 3). School administrators addressed these incidents using punitive approaches.

External expert facilitators who handled conflicts at River School and Ocean School enabled conflicts to be addressed in a way that required little participation from school staff, including administrators, through delivery of precircle or full-circle meetings. In contrast, Pine School’s vice principal indicated it was difficult to find time to implement peacemaking circles, and a guidance counsellor there (Julie, PSG) facilitated many informal peacemaking circles, likely because they were less time consuming.
Pine School sought and found more resources to support the introduction of restorative practices when compared to the other two schools (River and Ocean). Pine School had time dedicated to restorative dialogue, and teacher leaders modelled restorative practices, which led to broader implementation of peacemaking and peacebuilding. Policies emphasizing peacemaking and peacebuilding also supported implementation in Pine School. For example, Pine School’s school-improvement plan made reference to implementing strategies to promote inclusion and strengthen relationships for students and staff, but these policies were better implemented because the staff members at Pine School were trained in restorative practices.

The types of restorative practices implemented varied across the three case study schools. All three schools implemented restorative practices (reflecting Morrison’s secondary level) for serious or somewhat serious violent incidents. Pine School implemented post-incident restorative peacemaking circles and post-incident restorative inquiry (as well as some proactive restorative practices). River School implemented restorative peacemaking circles and a small amount of post-incident restorative inquiry. Ocean School only implemented post-incident restorative peacemaking circles. Pine School implemented some proactive check-in circles, and there was evidence of a small amount of commonly used proactive peacebuilding practices in all three schools, such as anti-violence assemblies and relationship-building co-curricular sports and clubs.

Wider staff implementation of restorative practices was evident at Pine School, which had smaller student enrolment and a smaller staff, compared to the other two schools. As previously noted, one third of the staff at Pine School was trained in restorative practices, and this helped promote the incremental spread of these innovations (in pro-active as well as post-incident forms) at this school. Because it was a smaller school with a smaller staff, it may have been easier to introduce restorative practices when compared to the other schools, which had larger staffs.

Conflict management patterns changed slightly at River School and Ocean School, even though most evidence seemed to indicate that only some Level 2 (post-incident restorative peacemaking) practices were implemented. There was evidence that the administration at Ocean School was beginning to replace punishment with restorative peacemaking, such as in the incident of the two brothers who were involved in a fight on school property and were not suspended. At River School, administrators had implemented post-incident dialogue when students returned from suspension, and administrators used restorative language to respond to
some minor incidents. Pine School had the broadest change in patterns of conflict management, based on reports of check-in circle usage by teachers demonstrating Level 1 practices, and by facilitation by the vice principal and other staff implementation of Level 2 post-incident informal restorative practices.
Chapter 6

The literature review examined theory and research on the consequences to individuals and climates when various conflict management approaches are employed in schools. Restorative peacemaking circles and other peacebuilding practices have been found to provide opportunities for individuals to develop social capital by strengthening relationships between and among students and teachers, which seems to have a positive impact on school climate (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007; Morrison, 2007; Morrison & Ahmed, 2006). Peacemaking circles and peacebuilding practices are part of whole-school violence prevention, which itself is a comprehensive approach to make schools safe, develop quality relationships between staff and students, be responsive to student culture, and provide strong emphasis on academic achievement (Morrison, 2007). Morrison’s theoretical model advises administrators, teachers, and others who work in schools to respond to conflicts and potential conflicts in three ways, to promote comprehensive whole-school peacebuilding. In the broadest, most fundamental Level 1, schools promote proactive peacebuilding practices, such as conflict learning and the development of social-emotional capacity and a sense of inclusive community, inside and outside of classrooms, to strengthen relationships and to prevent the escalation of conflict. The second level of practice, as part of comprehensive peacebuilding, is peacemaking, meaning facilitated and supported dialogue used to respond to conflicts and the underlying needs of students after particular conflict problems emerge. The third level, intensive facilitated dialogues and follow-up work, in a fully implemented environment would be the tip of the pyramid, used only rarely to respond to serious incidents (Morrison, 2007).

The purpose of this chapter is to compare and contrast the ways administrators and others handled particular incidents of conflict and violence in each case study school, and the ways direct participants perceived the consequences of these administrators’ choices to respond to conflicts in restorative or punitive ways. I asked two main questions regarding those choices: What was the perceived impact of conflict management choices on relationships? What was the perceived impact on future violence? This analysis focussed on describing and comparing the perceived characteristics and consequences of each type of response to conflict. Thus, I compared, contrasted, and explained differences and similarities in perceived impacts in and across types of stakeholders such as students or administrators, in and across schools, as well as
across conflicts. I investigated places and situations where positive consequences were more or less agreed upon by most participants in these practices.

This chapter presents various kinds of conflict management approaches implemented in response to particular incidents, based on descriptions from students, teachers, and administrators found in interview data. I contextualize these patterns in relation to the limited amount of data emerging from document analysis and participant observations. I was able to collect and analyze information regarding the perceived consequences of each approach for relationship-building and violence prevention, according to the perspectives of various interview participants (students, administrators, and others). Conflict management responses are organized by school and type of approach (e.g., peacemaking circle). I also provide a description of each incident, including who was enabled to participate in dialogue and who facilitated or led the conflict management approach. I conclude by summarizing evidence and its contributions to peacebuilding theory and knowledge base. This discussion aligns the similarities/differences among actors’ perceptions, students, administrators, and other adults.

The findings describe 19 total conflict incidents reported by interview participants in all three schools. Table 3 provides a summary of these restorative peacemaking interventions and other conflict management approaches described by interview participants.
Table 4
Conflict Management Approaches Reported by Participants at all Three Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People involved in the incident</th>
<th>Conflict management approach</th>
<th>People involved in conflict management</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Perceived consequences</th>
<th>Facilitator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 students</td>
<td>Informal peacemaking circle with a talking piece</td>
<td>Julie facilitator, Bill, and another student</td>
<td>Pine School</td>
<td>Bill, PSS Bill broke up a fight and prevented violence. He said that all students had a chance to speak in the circle</td>
<td>Guidance counsellor — Julie (PSG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 students</td>
<td>Informal peacemaking circle with a talking piece</td>
<td>Julie facilitator, Sean, and another student</td>
<td>Pine School</td>
<td>Sean, PSS Sean said he was treated fairly. He said they were friends again after the circle.</td>
<td>Guidance counsellor — Julie (PSG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 students</td>
<td>Informal peacemaking circle with a talking piece</td>
<td>Julie facilitator, Jessica, and Jessica’s friend. The boyfriend did not participate</td>
<td>Pine School</td>
<td>Jessica, PSS Jessica said she and the other student had a chance to speak and both sides of the story were heard. Although the relationship was repaired between her and her friend, it was not between her and her friend’s boyfriend.</td>
<td>Guidance counsellor — Julie (PSG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 students</td>
<td>Informal peacemaking circle with a talking piece</td>
<td>Julie facilitator and 5 students</td>
<td>Pine School</td>
<td>Julie, PSS Julie said she followed up with the boys in a circle and the offending boys. They were calling another boy names. Bullying toward another student stopped.</td>
<td>Guidance counsellor — Julie (PSG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 students</td>
<td>Informal peacemaking circle with a talking piece</td>
<td>Julie facilitator and five students</td>
<td>Pine School</td>
<td>Julie, PSS Julie said she facilitated the circle for boys who taking advantage of another student, making him buy coffee and the boys stopped name-calling after the circle.</td>
<td>Guidance counsellor — Julie (PSG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 students</td>
<td>Informal peacemaking circle without a talking piece</td>
<td>John facilitator and 2 students</td>
<td>Pine School</td>
<td>John, PST John counselled students to repair harm.</td>
<td>John (PST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 students</td>
<td>Peacemaking circle without a talking piece</td>
<td>Spencer Agency staff facilitator &amp; assistant, Lisa, and another student</td>
<td>River School</td>
<td>Lisa, RSS Lisa mentioned that the rumours and texting didn’t stop and she was still getting unpleasant looks after the circle from students uninvolved in the circle</td>
<td>Spencer Agency staff facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 students</td>
<td>Peacemaking circle without a talking piece</td>
<td>Spencer Agency staff facilitator &amp; assistant</td>
<td>River School</td>
<td>Jennifer, RSS Jennifer had an argument with Brenda (RSS); violence was prevented and relationship repaired</td>
<td>Spencer Agency staff facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People involved in the incident</td>
<td>Conflict management approach</td>
<td>People involved in conflict management</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Perceived consequences</td>
<td>Facilitator</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 students</td>
<td>Peacemaking circle without a talking piece</td>
<td>Spencer Agency facilitator &amp; assistant</td>
<td>River School</td>
<td>Brenda, RSS</td>
<td>Spencer Agency staff facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jennifer had an argument with Lisa (RSS); violence was prevented and relationship repaired</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 students</td>
<td>Peacemaking circle without talking piece</td>
<td>Spencer Agency facilitator &amp; assistant, 3 students, 2 administrators</td>
<td>River School</td>
<td>Alan, RSVP</td>
<td>Spencer Agency staff facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Alan said the participants had emotions and remorse during the circle.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 students</td>
<td>Peacemaking circle—unknown if a talking piece was used</td>
<td>Spencer Agency facilitator &amp; assistant, administrator Lesley, victim, offender, parents of victim &amp; offender.</td>
<td>River School</td>
<td>Lesley RSP</td>
<td>Spencer Agency staff facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lesley said parents thanked her for arranging the circle that stopped bullying.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 students</td>
<td>Peacemaking circle—no talking piece</td>
<td>Spencer Agency facilitator &amp; assistant, Chris, Bryce, and Chris’s brother</td>
<td>Ocean School</td>
<td>Chris, OSS</td>
<td>Spencer Agency staff facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chris mentioned that participants were able to share their opinions separately. He felt the circle didn’t necessarily repair their relationship. Violence was reduced.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 students</td>
<td>Peacemaking circle—no talking piece</td>
<td>Spencer Agency facilitator, Spencer Agency assistant and Chris, Bryce, and Chris’s brother</td>
<td>Ocean School</td>
<td>Bryce, OST</td>
<td>Spencer Agency staff facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>He believed there was relationship repair. He saw the boys the next day and they made a point of saying hi.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students and teachers</td>
<td>Peacemaking circle—no talking piece</td>
<td>Spencer Agency facilitator &amp; assistant Sharon, Katie, Shauna, 3 other students, 2 other teachers, principal, vice principal</td>
<td>Ocean School</td>
<td>Katie, OSS</td>
<td>Spencer Agency staff person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Without the circle they probably would have gotten suspended and the situation would deteriorate. She was more compliant in wearing her uniform but did not repair the relationship with the vice principal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People involved in the incident</td>
<td>Conflict management approach</td>
<td>People involved in conflict management</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Perceived consequences</td>
<td>Facilitator</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students and teachers</td>
<td>Peacemaking circle—no talking piece</td>
<td>Spencer Agency facilitator &amp; assistant, Sharon, Katie, Shauna, 3 other students, 2 other teachers, principal, vice principal</td>
<td>Ocean School</td>
<td>Natasha, OSS</td>
<td>Spencer Agency staff person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 students</td>
<td>Peacemaking circle—no talking piece</td>
<td>Spencer Agency facilitator &amp; assistant, Sharon, Katie, Shauna, 3 other students, 2 other teachers, principal, vice principal</td>
<td>Ocean School</td>
<td>Sharon, OST</td>
<td>Spencer Agency Staff facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or 2 students</td>
<td>Restorative conversations</td>
<td>Vice principal and 1 or 2 students</td>
<td>Pine School</td>
<td>Bob, PSVP</td>
<td>Vice principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or 2 students</td>
<td>Restorative conversations</td>
<td>Vice principal and 1 or 2 students</td>
<td>River School</td>
<td>Alan, RSVP</td>
<td>Vice principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or 2 students</td>
<td>Restorative conversations</td>
<td>Vice principal and 1 or 2 students</td>
<td>River School</td>
<td>Lesley, RSP</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or 2 students</td>
<td>Check-in circles</td>
<td>All staff at Pine School</td>
<td>Pine School</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>John, PST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or 2 students</td>
<td>Check in circles</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pine School</td>
<td>Relationship-building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 students</td>
<td>Non-restorative punitive consequences</td>
<td>Vice principal, principal</td>
<td>River School</td>
<td>Lesley, RSP</td>
<td>Lesley (RSP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate behaviour</td>
<td>Non-restorative punitive consequences</td>
<td>Student and Vice principal</td>
<td>Other school in Pacific School District</td>
<td>Katie, OSS</td>
<td>Vice principal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Katie, at Ocean School, noted that she had been suspended for being under the influence of alcohol at her previous school. She did not have a chance to speak with anyone.
1 Informal Restorative Peacemaking Circles Experiences, Pine School

Informal restorative peacemaking circles were one of the most commonly implemented restorative practices at Pine School. This approach did not include a pre-dialogue meeting as is required in a full peacemaking circle process. One example of informal peacemaking circles is an incident that involved a student Bill (PSS) who broke up a fight between two friends of his in the school hallway. Julie (PSG) invited Bill (PSS) to be part of a mediation process with Julie and the two other students who were involved in the physical altercation. Bill perceived that relationships were strengthened and future violence was prevented. Because a dialogue approach was used to respond to this conflict incident, a greater opportunity emerged for relationships to be strengthened between the boys and an adult resource, Julie (PSG). Bill (PSS) said that Julie (PSG, a guidance counsellor at Pine School trained in restorative practice) was the facilitator of the process, and that she asked restorative inquiry questions. He mentioned that the peacemaking process had allowed one person to apologize to one another, which suggests that he and the other students had a chance to strengthen their peer relationships. This is an important point, because not all students have an opportunity to apologize or otherwise repair harm with another student when conflict occurs in schools: a genuine apology is a way to repair a relationship. Although Bill had not been involved in fighting in this instance, it helped that he knew Julie from prior counselling interactions. There was less fear that his friends would face punishment, as Bill knew they were going to participate in an informal peacemaking circle session; meeting with Julie was probably less threatening than meeting with a vice principal. The restorative questions Julie (PSG) posed to Bill (PSS) in this situation shifted the focus from blame for the actual fight to how the relationship was harmed, and who was impacted by this incident. Bill said he felt a bit nervous before the circle, but then felt fine after the experience. Future violence apparently was prevented as a result of the peacemaking circle experience, and Julie’s (PSG) actions in
facilitating this peacemaking dialogue prevented the escalation of conflict and prevented the boys from facing punishment from an administrator. Bill said, “I saved them both [boys] from getting suspended.” Bill also indicated that the boys involved in this conflict had resolved their issues and did not fight again.

Another Pine student, Sean (PSS), described a conflict that involved a student pulling the chair out from under him in a class initiating a fight.

I was coming back in class. I was about to sit at my assigned computer, but then all of a sudden when I was about to sit down this kid in my class pulled the chair away from me. I tried to grab it from him, but then he started to put me in a headlock. Here’s one thing I left out. He didn’t know it was my assigned computer. I didn’t hear what he was saying. Because at first I thought he did it, you know, how he pulled the chair from me: At first I thought he did it for no reason.

A classroom teacher referred the boys to Julie (PSG) for a peacemaking circle instead of sending them to see the vice principal. Julie approached both students who got into the fight, and Sean and the other students agreed to participate in a circle. The perceived impact of this restorative intervention was that relationships were strengthened and future violence was prevented, based on the perspective of one student about his experience. Being sent to the guidance office instead of the main office was likely helpful to draw on the relational connections that the guidance counsellor had with both students. Sean (PSS) said he felt comfortable going into the circle because he already knew Julie (PSG). This comfort level demonstrates that social capital may be developed through his association with her in that he could use her as a resource to help work through future conflict situations. Sean (PSS) reported that each boy who participated in the mediation was asked restorative inquiry questions such as “How this could have been prevented … who has been impacted … and then, what we would like to do to get it resolved?” Julie (PSG) spoke with both boys individually that afternoon, and after the individual meetings, the boys spoke to each other together with her. An indicator that the relationship was strengthened was Sean’s (PSS) report that things were cleared up between him and the other boy and that they agreed the conflict had been based on a misunderstanding. Sean (PSS) said that he was really upset when the incident happened, but felt better after participating in the mediation. This may indicate that the restorative peacemaking intervention reduced the escalation of violence in this situation.
Another Pine School student, Jessica (PSS), reported tension in a friendship because her friend’s boyfriend believed his girlfriend was seeing Jessica too much and seeing him too little. The response to this conflict by school officials was to refer the girls to a peacemaking circle led by Julie (PSG) and not punishment. The impact of this restorative response perceived by Jessica was that relationships were strengthened and future violence was prevented.

I was trying to solve it here and arguing in the classroom. Well [my friend’s boyfriend] wouldn’t come to school because I was in my friend’s first period class. He finally came to school and I asked if I could talk to him in the hall privately. I was going to talk to him about how I felt and he refused to so I said if you don’t want talk about it I’ll deal with it in here. So I freaked out and I came in [Julie’s office]. (Jessica, PSS)

Jessica decided to go to the guidance office instead of the main office, which indicates that she was seeking to resolve the issue through peacemaking, and not through the coercive authority of the vice principal. It also seems to indicate a positive relationship or trust Jessica (PSS) had that Julie (PSG) would help her work through resolving conflict situations in a non-punitive way. Julie (PSG) invited all three students who were part of this conflict to participate in a circle; however, only the two girls participated. Jessica (PSS) mentioned that Julie (PSG) did speak with her individually: “yes, she talked to me by myself because I was the first one in here.” Jessica (PSS) reported that Julie (PSG) asked questions to “see what’s wrong and then she gets both sides of the story.” Jessica also noted that “you can really speak your piece and nobody can judge each other.” This post-incident response focused on resolving the relational problem rather than prescribing a punishment for any student behaviour. Because the guidance counsellor (Julie, PSG) had already built social capital by developing a relationship with the two girls, this likely helped with Jessica (PSS) and the other girl’s willingness to participate, because Julie was the facilitator. Of course, without participation by the boy, the opportunity for developing social capital could not occur.

Jessica (PSS) said she would have gotten angrier if she had talked to her friend’s boyfriend without peacemaking assistance, so participating in the circle reduced the escalation toward future violence. Jessica (PSS) also reported she had been emotional about the conflict before she joined the circle: “I was mad … really, really mad.” She mentioned that her visit to Julie’s (PSG) office had been helpful for not getting into an altercation with her friend’s boyfriend. Jessica (PSS) indicated that after the peacemaking circle, the issue was resolved between her and her friend, reducing any concerns of future violence between her and the other
girl. However, Jessica (PSS) reported that her relationship with her friend’s boyfriend did not improve, partly because he did not choose to participate in the restorative dialogue meeting. Because Jessica’s (PSS) friend’s boyfriend did not participate, he could not be part of the discussion. The lack of participation by the boyfriend seemed to negatively impact the possibility to entirely repair harm among the three individuals. This example underscores the importance of having people closely impacted by conflict incidents volunteer to participate in restorative processes (Lockhart & Zammit, 2005).

Julie (PSG), the guidance counsellor at Pine School, reported a name-calling incident between boys; she had followed up with a peacemaking circle process instead of punishment. The impact of the restorative response was relationships were strengthened and future violence was prevented, based on Julie’s (PSG) own perspective, reported in the interview. The conflict involved four boys’ aggression against another boy who had an overbite. The four boys were calling him “Bucky the beaver” and he was getting tired of being called that name. This escalated to the victim calling another boy fat, and calling another student “Spic.” Julie (PSG) described the circle:

So we talked about what all of those words meant and why it wasn’t acceptable and how they could all be suspended for talking that way. The most ironic thing is these boys were all best friends but now things have gone poorly.

As part of the peacemaking circle, Julie posed the five restorative questions to each of the boys for them to answer individually as the rock made its way around the boys sitting in a circle. Because the incident was of a serious nature (group bullying), having all five students participate in the facilitated restorative dialogue process was helpful to allow strengthening of relationships among them. Julie (PSG) said her intervention had helped the possibility of limiting further violence because no escalation of the conflict occurred after the dialogue meeting.

Racial and other intolerance conflicts such as in the example above are common in high schools. The peacemaking circle session gave these boys an opportunity to discuss this issue, and to repair the harm to each other and the victim. With the support of the counsellor (Julie, PSG), apparently they were able to stop further bullying among these individuals. Craig et al. (2007) pointed out that bullies have power, and thus it helps to have adults intervene to stop harm, because victims often feel helpless. Julie (PSG) revealed that the four boys did not bother the other students, or use derogatory terms (at school). Julie (PSG) provided evidence of stronger relationships: “In talking to them, it’s positive that they aren’t saying those words anymore
because after the circle we talked about [it].” Julie checked in with each of the boys a few days after the circle and the conflict was not present.

Julie (PSG) also described a bullying incident involving four boys to which she also responded with a restorative peacemaking-dialogue process and not punishment. That peacemaking response also strengthened relationships and prevented future violence, according to this facilitator’s interview. A small group of boys had been taking advantage of another boy at Pine school.

There was a group of cool tough boys taking advantage of a lower functioning kid. He doesn’t mind buying coffee or bus tickets because they are his friends. I had conversation with them and asked if they really were his friends. I started with the two students that he knew and they brought in other kids. (Julie, PSG)

Julie (PSG) indicated she met with all the boys to conduct a dialogue process to alleviate a pattern of bullying (extortion) against one peer. Julie (PSG) believed the offenders had an opportunity to understand in this circle how their actions impacted the victim, and by the end of the session, the victim’s and offenders’ relationships had been strengthened. This comment from Julie (PSG) affirmed the finding from prior research that students may learn conflict resolution and problem-solving skills from guided participation in post-incident facilitated dialogue (Harris, 2005). Further aggression was reduced in that Julie (PSG) indicated that none of the boys continued to take advantage of the lower functioning student.

Julie (PSG) facilitated all peacemaking circle responses to conflict at Pine School, the school’s guidance counsellor. The types of incidents were similar because they were relational issues. Having a staff member facilitating these restorative dialogues encouraged the peacemaking involvement of students, because of the relationships the counsellor had already established with them. Four of the five interviewees reported incidents at Pine involving conflicts between boys. Two of the five incidents involved larger groups (four to five students). Violence was reduced and relationships repaired in almost all of the reported incidents. All three student interviewees revealed they believed violence had been reduced or prevented without the use of punishment in the reported experiences. In two of three student-reported conflicts, interviewees perceived relationships to be repaired. Only one student, Jessica (PSS), indicated that her relationship was not repaired with her girlfriend’s friend. One adult (Julie, PSG) reported facilitating two separate peacemaking experiences in which she felt relationships had been
repaired between students involved, and this counsellor also indicated violence was reduced in the two incidents she reported.

2 **Restorative Peacemaking Circle Experiences, River School**

Most of the reported restorative practices implemented at River School were formal peacemaking circles. One River School student, Brenda (RSS), mentioned she had an argument with another girl in the school hallway: “It was more verbal than physical.” Brenda explained that she and another girl had been texting and making harmful comments to each other. The vice principal responded initially to these two female students, and made a referral to the Spencer Agency: the students were invited by the Spencer facilitator to participate in a restorative peacemaking circle. The two students perceived the impact of the peacemaking circle to be that relationships were strengthened and future violence was prevented. Brenda said the facilitator spoke with her and another girl individually in a room near the guidance office a few hours before the formal restorative dialogue. She mentioned that the same restorative inquiry questions asked in the pre-meeting were also asked in the peacemaking circle. “The questions were: How did you feel? What was going through your mind at the time?”

Brenda (RSS) believed this peacemaking circle experience strengthened her relationship with the other girl and subsequently she felt able to understand the other girl’s perspective. Brenda (RSS) indicated she had developed a better understanding of why there was a conflict between her and the other girl.

After the circle, I felt better than I could go around and not feel intimidated around the other person. I would say strengthened because we’re friends now we talk and hang out and so it’s not a barrier between us now. … She understands what I was feeling and I understand what she was feeling.

Brenda’s comments indicate that the dialogue process helped strengthen her relationship and she had begun to talk and spend time with the student with whom she had been in conflict:

I think it helps because when we walk around the halls we don’t look at each other or talk to each other. We gave dirty looks or something but when we got to the circle we got to talk to each other and we usually don’t talk so when we talk to each other it helps a lot. (Brenda, RSS)

I found evidence that this process helped prevent further violence because Brenda (RSS) said no further issues emerged between her and the other girl named Jennifer (RSS). Also, a 2010 document from the Spencer Agency included a circle agreement form showing that both
girls agreed to not Facebook, text, or e-mail each other, and not to get anyone else involved in the incident.

Jennifer (RSS) affirmed that both girls were “giving dirty looks and saying harmful words to each other in the hallways” before they were referred to a circle by the vice principal. Jennifer corroborated that a Spencer Agency facilitator asked her restorative inquiry questions individually prior to the actual circle with Brenda, and that she had an opportunity to answer the same questions later during the circle.

Yes because when I told each other about our feelings she would agree with me and when [she] told hers I would agree with hers. It’s both how we felt about the fight and it made both of us kind of like closer to each other when we both could agree with each other. I think it helps because when we walk around the halls we don’t look at each other or talk to each other. (Jennifer, RSS)

Evidence of de-escalation of the conflict between the students was in the form of the two girls being able to talk to each other in the hallways. Jennifer (RSS) highlighted that she and her peers were able to express their feelings to each other during this process, which demonstrates that social-emotional learning can be practiced and reinforced as part of post-incident peacebuilding (Bickmore, 2011a). As noted above, Jennifer (RSS) also said the conflict ended after participation in the facilitated dialogue.

Lisa (RSS), the third River School student I interviewed, described an argument that had occurred between another student and herself: “Another girl [thought she] heard something I said and I didn’t actually say it. … Texting and e-mails and some unkind things were said to me.” School officials responded to this incident with a referral to a peacemaking circle. Lisa (RSS) mentioned that no other individuals affected by the incident, other than the other girl, participated in this dialogue process. Lisa’s perceived impact of the peacemaking circle response was that relationships were not fully strengthened and therefore future violence may not have been prevented. Lisa’s (RSS) vice principal (Alan, RSVP) responded to this situation by encouraging Lisa to participate in a peacemaking circle process facilitated by a Spencer Agency person. The facilitator met with Lisa individually and gave her an opportunity to explain her side of the story. After that meeting, Lisa (RSS) participated in the actual peacemaking circle where she met with the other girl and responded to the questions again.

I felt terrified about the whole situation and what was going to be said, and thought I was ready to hear what the other person would say. I felt better after the circle because you
got everything out and got to hear everyone’s points on the situation. I think it was a good thing. I don’t the situation was I didn’t say anything so I liked being able to hear what the other person said and then add my opinion.

According to Lisa, the violence ended between her and the other girl because the conflict did not continue. However, she continued to experience rumours and comments directed at her by other students in the hallways after the circle process. In this instance, like the one mentioned by another student from Pine School (Jessica, PSS), the lack of participation in the restorative dialogue of some individuals directly involved in the conflict seemed to negatively impact the opportunity to repair those relationships. Not all participants who were impacted by the event had an opportunity to share how the incident affected them.

The River School vice principal, Alan (RSVP), recalled a swarming incident involving four to five girls that had occurred at the school. This incident was referred for a formal peacemaking circle. Alan (RSVP) did not report whether the student offenders from this conflict also received punitive consequences. Alan (RSVP) mentioned that a Spencer Agency facilitator led the peacemaking circle, and that the meeting took place at the school. Alan perceived the impact of the peacemaking circle response was that relationships were strengthened and future violence was prevented. He believed the offending girls in this incident came to realize how much they had negatively impacted the peer they had victimized.

I think we had one girl who was swarmed and done bullying didn’t realize the life the victim had lived outside of school. The victim told them that she has been tormented by other students for the past 5–6 years (Alan, RSVP).

Alan (RSVP) revealed that the time afforded to bring these girls together “was very helpful for helping their relationships become respectful and some harm repaired.” Alan (RSVP) made a point of expressing how much of an impact he believed the peacemaking circle had by making all of the participants aware of who had been impacted in this incident. This seems to indicate that the process allowed for the possibility of relationship repair. Alan said that no further conflict aggression had transpired between the victim and the other students.

Lesley (RSP) also reported a longstanding bullying incident had continued since elementary school, addressed through a formal circle facilitated by a Spencer Agency staff member. Lesley (RSP) participated in the circle along with the offender, victim, and a parent for each student. According to Lesley (RSP), the perceived impact of the peacemaking circle response was that relationships were strengthened and future violence was prevented. Lesley
(RSP) reported this circle experience was emotional and took some promotion on her part to bring the students and parents together: “Both parents were not too interested initially that we were going forward with a circle but each of them thanked me 2 weeks later.” Lesley also did not believe suspensions helped students in the long run, and that restorative approaches were helpful in providing support and addressing complex student problems. “The restorative process can deal with chronic problems. Bullying in particular—not just about putting down the harmer they are complex issues and these students require support. Suspensions don’t help kids in the long run” (Lesley, RSP).

Lesley (RSP) reported that no further escalation of conflict occurred stemming from this bullying incident.

An external facilitator from the Spencer Agency led all restorative peacemaking circle experiences reported by student and staff interviewees at River School. Referrals to this agency were made by the vice principal and principal. Violence or conflict escalation was perceived to be reduced in almost all of the reported incidents. The reported incidents were similar in that most were relational conflicts between two or more individuals. They were different in that one incident was a more serious aggression episode involving a group of girls who swarmed another girl. Another unusual type of incident reported was a longstanding bullying conflict that was ultimately referred to the principal. The involvement of outside facilitators did not seem to impede the willingness of these students to agree to participate in peacemaking dialogue about their conflict. The vice principal’s willingness to build relationships with students likely helped transition students to meet with Spencer Agency representatives. The reported incidents at River School were similar in that almost all the participants and subsequent peacemaking circles involved girls. Two of the three students interviewed revealed violence was reduced without the use of punishment, following their participation in a peacemaking circle. In one incident, a girl believed students who did not participate in the peacemaking continued to bother her by spreading rumours and making comments to her in the hallway. This emphasizes the importance for people impacted by an incident to participate in restorative peacemaking.

3 Restorative Peacemaking Circle Experiences, Ocean School

Most restorative practices implemented at Ocean School, like River School, were restorative peacemaking circles by a Spencer Agency staff member. One Ocean School student (Chris, OSS) described a physical-fighting incident involving his brother and himself who both attended this school, referred for a peacemaking circle process. The impact of the peacemaking
circle perceived by this student was that relationships stayed about the same and future violence was prevented. The fight occurred in a school hallway and was broken up by a teacher.

Well I was locking my locker in between two classes. We were arguing so he took his backpack off and then he hit me. We just kind of went to the ground like wrestling there were punches thrown. Two teachers broke up the fight. I went to guidance and one of the people from Spencer Agency pulled me in here and was talking to me about what was going to on the next day with the circle. (Chris, OSS)

Chris (OSS) and his brother were directed to go to the guidance office and were asked if they wanted to participate in a peacemaking circle. The opportunity to meet with a guidance counsellor may have encouraged peacemaking since each boy was able to draw on the relationship they had with a staff member instead of being intimidated by the authority of a vice principal. The facilitator met with each boy individually prior to the circle and posed restorative inquiry questions to each student. The facilitator probed to uncover the relationship strain that had led to the physical altercation.

The actual incident was kind of a sweater type thing; it was going on for a month but we just got to the bottom of it on Wednesday. My mom bought a sweater for my girlfriend and she forgot it at my house one day and he took it and brought it to one of his friends and she took it. So, I asked for it back because she gave it away. (Chris, OSS)

The preparation for the individual meetings, and the actual peacemaking circle spanned the entire day. Chris (OSS) said that his brother and he “had a lot of work and stuff, so said we could stay in the office.” Chris (OSS) also felt that the process did not weaken or strengthen his relationship with his brother. “I don’t think it was really weakened or strengthened. I don’t know. We are still brothers, we still love each other. It was never horrible or anything. We both like each other.” This comment may provide some evidence of his feeling included in the process:

They gave me all the time I needed to speak they let me talk when I wanted to. They just listened to everything I had to say. I was definitely treated fairly because they didn’t disrespect me they just listened and had a response to everything.

Bringing the two boys together to experience facilitated dialogue was a constructive way to address their dispute. Had they remained at home, it is unlikely that they would have talked about this incident. “Once we fight it normally is over. It’s pretty much done with … but I guess it’s nice to talk to someone else and get their opinion” (Chris, OSS). It appears that Chris is
describing a counselling experience instead of a restorative experience, but it is also possible that this restorative dialogue may have prevented future conflict between the brothers.

Bryce (OST) was of the teachers at Ocean School who broke up the fight in the hallway between the two boys. He was invited by the principal to participate in the informal peacemaking circle for about 5 to 10 minutes with both boys and the Spencer Agency facilitators.

My principal asked me if I could meet with [Spencer Agency facilitators] and sit in a session with them and the boys. When I met with them they told me the purpose of me being there, and how it might help situation, and we asked the boys to come in there and the five of us discussed as a teacher how I felt about the situation (Bryce, OST).

Bryce (OST) reported that the peacemaking circle involved some relationship repair between the two brothers, as well as between the brothers and him. He mentioned that the boys were able to apologize to him when he participated in the circle, and also mentioned that both boys made eye contact with him in the hallway the day following the circle and said hello to him. Certainly, the eye contact could be an indicator that the relationship between the teacher and students was on good terms, and the fact that the boys were seen together the next day was also a good sign of relationship repair. The involvement of a teacher in addition to the outside facilitators in this situation could also be helpful to prevent violence in the future because the teacher would have an understanding of the individuals and issues related to the conflict. This could allow the teacher to act proactively, using dialogue to prevent the escalation of future conflicts between the individuals.

One weakness of this peacemaking process was that Chris’s girlfriend and his brother’s friend did not participate in this dialogue (I do not know why they were not asked to participate). There would have been more opportunity for relationships to be repaired because Chris’s brother’s friend had somewhat contributed to the escalation of the incident by accepting the sweater. All parties could have benefitted from hearing peers’ perspectives of the impact this incident had on everyone. Thus, after this restorative circle, there may have still been some tension, such as between Chris’s girlfriend and his brother.

A peacemaking circle was used to respond to ongoing disruption and conflict with teaching staff by a group of five Grade 9 girls who attended Ocean School. Relationships were strengthened and future violence was prevented according to perspectives of one teacher and two students involved in the conflict and the peacemaking circle. Sharon (OST) described the conflict between students and teachers.
It’s been an ongoing problem since the onset of the year. With the kind of an ever-changing Grade 9 group, but there is a central core. They … how you describe it … they are quite attitudinal. Individually, they are far less threatening than they are as a group. But because our classes are restricted, they were often in a group in classes, in the hallways, and 89 million strategies have been tried. We’ve thrown everything at it, at them and had very limited success, so the circle was proposed.

A facilitator from the Spencer Agency led the peacemaking circle, after meeting with each of the individuals prior to the actual circle dialogue meeting. Sharon (OST) reported that a large number of people participated in this circle process: “Oh it was big. … There were four to five girls, principal, vice-principal, two teachers, both student-success teachers, and then the three mediators, so it was large.” An expert facilitator was helpful in skilfully addressing such a complex issue with so many participants. Sharon (OST) also said the process included everyone who was directly affected by the students’ behaviour, and she believed power balance was equalized because an individual not on school staff (Spencer Agency) facilitated the circle, which led to a positive outcome. Sharon (OST) did mention that the process was longer than she expected (over 2 hours). The large number of participants inevitably would have extended the length of the dialogue process.

According to Sharon (OST), most relationships were strengthened after the peacemaking circle and there seemed to be some improvement in student behaviour by these girls after the circle experience.

But it appeared that things were strengthening and then they went back. It didn’t hurt anything, though it didn’t have a negative. I think they made an honest effort for a brief period of time to show some respect to the concept. … I don’t think it had a whole bunch of impact right away. When they stop being Grade 9 girls often girls they may look back in Grade 11 at their Grade 9 selves.

Some tension continued between another girl who was interviewed for this research (Katie, OSS) and the vice-principal, but other student–teacher relations seemed to be slightly improved following the circle, because no further conflicts were reported (Katie, OSS; Sharon, OST). Katie (OSS) said she appreciated that someone not on school staff had facilitated the circle. Katie (OSS) noted, “yes it helps to repair relationships between people, but not really with [the vice principal] though. If [the vice principal] was leading the circle I probably would have got up and left.” Overall, Sharon’s (OST) comments indicated some improvement in relations
between students and teachers, and that their behaviour improved. Therefore, an escalation of conflict seemed to be prevented.

Katie (OSS) explained a guidance counsellor had recommended that she and other girls participate in a peacemaking circle, because nothing was improving. The introduction of this process by a teacher, and not an administrator, likely made it easier to involve Katie (OSS) in this peacemaking process, because she was not dealing directly with a vice principal with whom she had a strained relationship. Katie’s (OSS) comment indicated she viewed the restorative process as a positive alternative to punishment and exclusion: “It was probably better than any other way. If we didn’t have the circle we would probably still get suspended, and the situation would have festered” (Katie, OSS). She also liked that one person could speak at a time, and as a result she could hear everyone’s perspectives and the story could get clarified. This inclusiveness may have helped promote relationship strengthening between the students and school staff. Katie (OSS) admitted she was still often late for class, but felt that she was behaving better in class and that she was wearing her uniform on a more regular basis. This evidence suggests that her relationships with her teachers were improving based on improved compliance with class expectations. The implication that most students had somewhat improved their behaviour in class was a small indicator that relationships may have been strengthened or school climate improved.

The other student interviewee who participated in this same peacemaking circle with students and teachers was Natasha (OSS). Natasha (OSS) said a Spencer Agency person suggested she participate in the circle, and she said yes. Natasha’s (OSS) comments indicated this dialogue process provided an opportunity for voluntary facilitated conversation with the other students and teachers: “I like the fact that I am able to share my side of the story and listen to others so that when a teacher talks they don’t say that this person said this and he really didn’t.” Natasha (OSS) also appreciated the sense of equality in that everyone was asked the same questions. “I think I was treated fairly because everyone had the same amount of time to say what they had to say.” There was evidence that violence was reduced following this peacemaking circle experience in which Natasha (OSS), Sharon (OST) and Katie (OSS) participated. These interviewees told me their conflict did not escalate and relations between students and teachers were improving, aside from the tension that still existed between the vice principal and Katie (OSS). Certainly, the dialogue opportunities they reported facilitated the ability of participants to hear different perspectives from various individuals, and this may have helped resolve differences.
All peacemaking circle experiences reported by student and staff interviewees at Ocean School were led by one external facilitator and an assistant from the Spencer Agency. The principal and guidance counsellor made referrals to this agency to respond to conflicts they felt could be addressed by a peacemaking circle (Sharon, OST). Violence or conflict was perceived to be reduced in almost all of the reported incidents. The reported incidents were similar because they were all relational conflicts, but different in that one incident was a small fight between two siblings, and another incident was a large group conflict involving multiple students and teachers. The student–teacher conflict was a complex problem that required expert facilitation.

Outside facilitation was particularly useful in this situation as an alternative to administration facilitation because it minimized power imbalances that school administrators had over students. The reported incidents were also similar in that school officials did not employ punishment along with the implementation of the peacemaking circles. All three student interviewees revealed that violence was reduced without the use of punishment, following their participation, and that their conflictual incidents did not escalate. The facilitated dialogue experiences helped individuals speak to each other and address the problem that led to the conflict. The large number of participants in the student–teacher conflict may have placed a strain on strengthening relationships because it became less personal; also, the length of time to conduct the circle likely made participants tired and less focussed.

4 Other Practices: Restorative Language

The three administrators who were interviewed provided information on the ways they used post-incident restorative language in conflict situations. All three administrators (Bob, PSVP; Alan, RSVP; Lesley, RSP) typically facilitated these processes with two to three students. The perceived impact of restorative language usage among the administrators was that this approach helped strengthen relationships and prevent future violence. The Pine School vice principal, Bob (PSVP), told me he tended to use restorative language with students when they returned from suspension. “Yep, even when there is a suspension they have to come back and make things right but for the most part I try to avoid [giving suspensions].” Bob’s choice of conflict response took place late in the conflict cycle. Although he used restorative language to strengthen relationships, the implication of his “after the fact” approach may be that students who were punished could feel blamed and excluded because restoration takes place after a significant amount of punitive action has taken place (suspensions). This approach has the potential to harm relationships with the person with whom a student was in conflict, or harm
relationships with the administrator who is excluding the student from school. Nevertheless, it does appear that using restorative language, even after punitive consequences were distributed could help students who were in conflict uncover or reflect on the root cause of their problem or even to mend relationships before another conflict could escalate.

Alan (RSVP) described using restorative language in the earlier stages of conflict.

Yeah, proactively is everything. Like if we can stop conflict before it happens because that’s the key, kids have to realize that yes, solve your problems on your own with words, but at the point when you can’t solve a problem, don’t resort to violence, don’t resort to spreading it around your kids. That’s when you have to reach out to adults.

Alan’s (RSVP) comments indicated he believed violence was reduced when he facilitated discussion using restorative language approaches in the early stages of conflicts, and that doing so enabled students to learn to solve their own problems.

Lesley (RSP) also revealed she often used restorative language when meeting with students before violence became serious, and that this practice reduced her need to use punitive consequences. She noted that “it helps students solve problems together and address conflicts. At our school, we try to reduce violence and conflict escalation informally or formally through this process.” Lesley’s (RSP) comment suggests that using restorative language helps to prevent violence because it allows students to solve their own conflicts. By acting as a facilitator, Lesley (RSP) was able to give students the opportunities they needed to dialogue and engage in relationship strengthening.

The students and staff I interviewed at Ocean School reported that administrators led all restorative language conflict-debriefing activities. Administrators from all three schools expressed that this process helped strengthen relationships between students in conflict (Bob, PSVP; Alan, RSVP; Lesley, RSP). Two River School administrators told me they used a restorative language approach in the early stages of conflict, a practice that gave students opportunities to solve problems and reduce potential escalations of conflict or punishment. The Pine School administrator, Bob (PSVP), mentioned he implemented restorative language after punitive suspensions, although the Pine School guidance counsellor, Julie (PSG) used restorative language proactively. It appears that this approach gave an opportunity for individuals in conflict to strengthen their relationship and reflect on causes of what led to their conflict, even after harm was done.
5 Peacebuilding Practices

I found limited evidence of peacebuilding practices in Pine School in the form of check-in circles led by a third of teachers, once a week. Pine School also introduced a staff–student mentoring program. I found very limited evidence of peacebuilding in Ocean and River Schools, and these were common peacebuilding practices such as assemblies and co-curricular opportunities. The perceived impact of check-in circles at Pine School was that this process helped strengthen community and relationships, and also educate students on how to address conflict when it arises. These findings were based on the perspectives of three adult staff members who were all from Pine School (Bob, PSVP; John, PST; Julie, PSG). Other peacebuilding practices, such as proactive education or value statements promoting peacebuilding (as noted Skiba & Noam, 2001) that were described in documents could have encouraged relationship strengthening. However, the implementation of these practices was not verified in the interviews.

The student handbooks of all three schools identified some potential peacebuilding practices, such as opportunities for students to participate in school clubs or sports teams. The student handbooks of all three schools also described positive ways students should treat each other in the school, and that community members should respect one another. The student handbook for Pine School emphasized creating an inclusive and caring environment for students. The code of conduct at River School mentioned that students should be courteous and considerate to each other. The student handbook for Ocean School stated that mutual respect and inclusion for everyone in the school community was an important goal to achieve. Even though these peacebuilding practices were presented on paper in all three schools, only the adult interviewees described limited examples of these proactive values actually being infused into classrooms or other avenues, such as assemblies. This could be because the interviewees did not view what was on paper as being restorative peacebuilding, as framed in my interview questions or because these practices outlined in the handbooks and Codes of Conduct were not broadly implemented. The lack of evidence reported by interviewees may suggest that more educational awareness and engagement of students by administrators and teachers in all three schools is needed before these peacebuilding value statements would resonate with students.

Students described very limited or no proactive education efforts. There was evidence in all three schools of value statements in school Code of Conduct, recommending students should be respectful towards each other and staff members. There was some limited evidence of
education efforts outside of the classroom from all three school administrators, but Ocean School staff members did not describe any proactive education efforts that were implemented at their school.

6 Check-In Circles and Mentoring Programs at Pine School

John (PST) reported possible consequences of check-in circles. He told me that this process helped encourage the development of relational bonds between students, a process that could help prevent violence because greater respect is developed between students and teachers.

I think circles are most useful the way I do it in the classroom. If a kid has a sense of belonging, then there is some ownership by that student for what’s going on for the facility for the room, for the tools, for the equipment. For example in my classroom and there is a building of respect that there are different people with different points of view.

John’s (PST) comment suggests students may benefit from exposure to different perspectives and build a sense of community in the classroom as they get to know one another, a finding that aligns with the work of Jones (2004), Bickmore (2011b), and Morrison (2007). Julie (PSG) corroborated John’s comments when noting that proactive check-in circles had been broadly implemented at the time of data collection. She also reported that a mentoring program and other initiatives had been introduced.

Check-in circles are big. We have the caring-adult [mentoring program] where an adult is attached to a student in every grade. At student-success meeting we will say who is caring adult—teachers will go out and speak to kids on their own time. We can’t demand that the meet with students but we have over 90% of teachers buying in to this process.

Bob (PSVP) also shared the promising implementation of check-in circles: “I would say 80 per cent of teachers hold class circle once a week—some classes eat it up and miss it when they don’t have it.” The consequences of check-in circles are that they provided opportunities for students to have a voice in the classroom, and allow students to get to know each other better, a boon that could help strengthen classroom community.

The caring-adult program was another peacebuilding approach reported by all three Pine School staff members. Julie (PSG) told me that this program enabled 10 to 15 teachers to each meet with a student once a month in the morning for breakfast at the school. The students selected for this program were those students who would benefit from having positive relations with teachers. Some of these students stood out as having more behavioural concerns than other students (Julie, PST; Bob, PSVP). Therefore, the dialogue between students and teachers was
likely helpful for strengthening bonds between teachers and students. This is evidence of peacebuilding aligned with Gladden’s (2002) recommendation that positive relationships between students and teachers are useful because students have someone to ask for advice when they are in conflict.

The three Pine School staff members (Julie, PSG; Bill, PSVP; John, PST) reported the implementation of check-in circle and teacher–student mentoring approaches. Teachers facilitated the reported check-in circle processes. Responses were similar because they indicated that this process helped strengthen relationships between students. The reports also seemed to indicate that this proactive peacebuilding approach gave students opportunities to listen to perspectives and opinions from fellow classmates. None of the descriptions reported any constraints that may have impeded this dialogue process. This may be because teachers who led check-in circles had already established classroom management capacities, and this approach was another teaching strategy, not as unfamiliar as leading a restorative peacemaking circle.

The scarcity of peacebuilding practices found in River and Ocean schools seems to indicate that there were very few Level 1 restorative practices in these schools (aligned with Morrison, 2007). However, there were promising signs of peacebuilding found in Pine School. It appears that check-in circles introduced at Pine School by teachers, and professional-development training to staff by novice teachers, contributed to peacebuilding by build relational connections between and among students and teachers.

7 Punitive Consequence Approaches Experienced by Students and Adults

The purpose of this section is to present evidence from interviewees on how punitive consequences had perceived negative outcomes. Punitive discipline and security measures in schools can have discriminatory impacts on racialized students or promote a climate of fear (McNeely et al., 2002; Noguera, 1995; Skiba, 2008). Two teachers and one administrator at Pine School (Julie, PSG; John, PST; Bob, PSVP), along with two administrators interviewed at River School (Alan, RSVP; Lesley, RSP), shared their perspectives about the outcomes they associated with the punitive consequences students experienced. The two teachers interviewed at Ocean School (Sharon, OST; Bryce, OST) did not report any experiences with punitive consequences. Most students who were interviewed from the three case study schools shared their perspectives about the consequences of punitive and restorative practices.
John (PST) was often leader-in-charge at Pine School when administrators were out of the building for meetings. John (PST) believed that punitive consequences, such as suspension, took into account the reasons students may have behaved a certain way.

If a student strikes another student and you realize that mom just got beat up by stepdad who came home drunk and you are all upset and someone said something that set you off … well hold on, did you really intend to go after that particular student? No, you are lashing out because you are hurting.

The impacts of punitive consequences John (PST) described are quite similar to the ineffectiveness of punitive consequences reported in research studies by various scholars (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012; Sacco & Nakhaie, 2007). Similarly, comments about punitive consequences came from Lesley (RSP) that “suspensions don’t help kids in the long run.”

Reports of punitive consequence by three Pine School staff members revealed that some positive consequences did occur when punitive measures were combined with post-incident restorative practices. Bob (PSVP), explained he suspended students who were refusing to go to class. John (PST) corroborated that Pine School did use punitive consequences to address fighting incidents: “We do suspend for fighting. Students will come back and sit in a meeting with admin and discuss how can this be prevented in the future.” Julie (PSG) reported that punitive and restorative approaches are being used together at Pine School: “They now leave [post-suspension meetings] with more awareness of how they made a person feel and understand the impact they had on them.” The consequences of this approach for students seem to be that there was still some conflict learning that is gained from this experience.

Two of the three Pine School student interviewees shared stories of past punitive consequence experiences from conflicts they had experienced or other people they knew had experienced. None of the three students reported experiences that occurred at Pine School, but the students did report experiences from previous schools. Jessica (PSS) said she “didn’t get a chance to speak to the person [she] got into a fight with.”

I got into a fight last year and I just got sent home for a week and a half and nothing was solved. No, they just pulled me into the office and said “sorry, you blew your luck. You are suspended for a week.” We went in for a meeting with my parents but that was it.

Jessica’s (PST) response seems to imply that she did not believe issues were resolved from being involved in this post-incident punitive consequence process. Moreover, it appears as though the process was not very inclusive, because she was brought into the office and told what
her consequence would be. There also was no indication in Jessica’s interview of any opportunities to rebuild relationships between the two individuals. Brandon (PSS) did not have a past experience with a punitive consequence response to share in his interview. Another student there, Bill (PSS), said that “when a circle was not used, I still wanted to beat the kid up. If I was part of a circle like I did here [Pine School] it would be resolved it and actually became pretty good friends.” Bill (PSS) also explained he had been excluded from attending school for the duration of his suspension. He did not have an opportunity to speak with the other student with whom he had fought, and therefore he did not have any face-to-face dialogue opportunities to repair his relationship.

Three River School students reflected on conflict experiences at previous schools where they had received punitive consequences. Brenda (RSS), a River School student, revealed that her punitive consequence experience at a previous school was not very helpful in repairing the harm with the person with whom she had a conflict.

I don’t know what they did about the other person but they took me individually and talked about the punishment. They didn’t actually say what I should or shouldn’t have done. They didn’t give me any other options of like what they did in this process. They just told me what I was supposed to do and I was pretty upset about that.

Brenda’s (RSS) punitive consequence experience shows she was still upset over the incident, and suggests her feelings stemmed from her lack of opportunity to resolve her conflict with the other student.

Jennifer (RSS) revealed that her friend was in an argument with another girl at her previous school, and that both girls were suspended. In this instance, there were no efforts made by administrators or other school staff to repair the harm. Jennifer (RSS) said “I think it made things worse because no one was there to talk to them.” Lisa (RSS) was a third River School student who said that in past situations her school’s administrators did not take actions to repair relationships between individuals. The concerns raised by all three students suggest a distinct lack of attention for victims and others impacted by an incident in which they were involved.

Two of the three Ocean School students interviewed reported past punitive consequence experiences. Shauna (OSS) was an Ocean School student who did not report having experienced a punitive consequence of her own at Ocean School or other schools. Katie (OSS) recalled being suspended the previous year at her elementary school for misuse of alcohol. She noted how she “got suspended for getting drunk at school.” Katie (OSS) also mentioned how the suspension
approach lacked the opportunity to feel included in the process of resolving the conflict, which would have been possible through the use of restorative practices.

A suspension is good but I would have like a chance to talk. Getting suspended you should be able to talk about what I did wrong so I wouldn’t do it again. I would rather that people talk about what went wrong as opposed to yelling at the student.

Katie (OSS) also said that a punitive approach could provide an opportunity for a student to repair the harm and speak to other individuals. She was likely yelled at by a person in authority, such as a vice principal, which may have weakened her relationship with the administrator in question. It appears this approach did not provide an opportunity for Katie to discuss the problem that led to the incident.

Chris (OSS) did not report a personal experience of punishment but did report an incident involving a friend who had been suspended at Ocean School: “My buddy and brother’s buddy got into a fight. I guess they could have used this situation; … they suspended them right away.” He told me the parties who had been involved in this fight were never brought together for restorative dialogue, as both students were excluded from school.

8 Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored how peacemaking circles and peacebuilding practices had been implemented in three high schools, as part of a whole-school conflict management strategy. This chapter helped explain, in relation to the conflictual episodes interviewees described, transforming prevailing punitive-focused regimes that existed in the three case study schools. I examined how interviewees perceived peacemaking circles and peacebuilding practices as strengthening (or not) relationships. I also examined how participants perceived the impact of these processes on violence prevention or reduction in schools. Morrison’s (2007) restorative theoretical framework averred that restorative measures could be introduced at primary levels to proactively build and strengthen relationships and prevent conflict from escalating; at secondary targeted post-incident levels through facilitated dialogue to help students who are unable to resolve a conflict; and when necessary at tertiary levels where serious violence between individuals requires intensive facilitated dialogue. Most conflicts experienced by interviewees in this chapter were post-incident restorative responses at only the secondary level of Morrison’s model. There were very few reported situations describing proactive primary level, preventative peacebuilding, although in one school (Pine) a third of the staff did introduce proactive check-in circles. Three adults at this school perceived that this proactive community-building circle
practice was helpful in strengthening relationships between and among students and staff. Administrator interviewees from all schools incorporated restorative inquiry as a follow-up strategy with students who returned from punitive suspensions. The use of this practice seemed somewhat helpful for strengthening relationships and teaching conflict learning. None of the interviewees experienced a third level response.

The facilitation of restorative practices varied across the three schools. Peacemaking circles were implemented by three staff members at Pine School (Julie, PSG; John, PST; Bob, PSVP). At River and Ocean Schools, only external expert facilitators led peacemaking circles. The school administration in all three schools played a part in encouraging students to consider participating in post-incident restorative dialogue practices. Teachers were aware of these practices at Pine School only, and made referrals to the guidance counsellor who, in turn, ran informal peacemaking circles. Referrals to a staff member with less authority than an administrator seemed to be less threatening, because this person was known to not use punishment in response to conflict situations. The vice principal worked in concert with the guidance counsellor to try to respond to less serious conflicts in restorative ways to help avoid using punitive consequences. River and Ocean School administrators endorsed these practices and chose restorative practices over punishment in making referrals to the Spencer Agency for some they deemed less violent or serious relationship conflicts (Lesley, RSP; Alan, RSVP; Sharon, OST).

Also many conflicts reported by interviewees involved punitive responses, and these approaches were not recommended in Morrison’s (2007) restorative practice model. All interviewees perceived that relationships were either damaged or unimproved when schools used punitive methods. Such processes excluded individuals, at least temporarily, from their schools and did not address the causal problem. The reported incidents where punitive consequences were used did not seem to lead to an escalation of violence during the periods when the “offender or offenders” were excluded from their respective schools, but my thesis research collected no evidence of what happened after that or outside the school.

There were a few reported conflictual incidents described in which punitive and restorative approaches were used to respond to conflict or violent incidents. The previous chapter affirmed that administrators in all three case study schools employed both punitive and restorative practices. The three administrators interviewed told me they attempted to employ restorative interventions at least equally as often as punitive approaches (Alan, RSVP; Bob,
PSVP; Lesley, RSP). It does appear room exists for both responses, mainly because post-incident dialogue may be helpful for strengthening relationships. None of the students interviewed reported experiencing restorative practices after punishment or exclusion. However, teachers and administrators did indicate they believed restorative dialogue did help repair relationships even after conflicts had escalated. Julie (PSG) and Bob (PSVP) explained that restorative dialogue helped repair harm after suspension. Also, Lesley (RSP) and Alan (RSVP), expressed that using restorative language helped repair harm and future escalation of conflict when students returned from suspension. I found that the reported interviewee experiences of restorative dialogue experiences following punitive practices seemed to indicate that restorative practices still exist in a punitive-policy framework. Prior research revealed that school officials did chose punitive practices over restorative peacemaking practices for more serious offenses where the school district policy superseded the restorative response (Stinchcomb et al, 2006).

Most of the conflict or violent incidents that were responded to with peacemaking practices involved relational issues, and replaced punitive practices. Because interviewees reported that further violence was prevented and relationships were strengthened in almost all their experiences, my findings seem to indicate that restorative practices need not be used in conjunction with punitive approaches by administrators. Stinchcomb et al. (2006) reported success in reducing behavioural referrals and suspensions through the use of restorative practices such as formal circles to address assault, vandalism, physical violence; and minor interpersonal conflicts through informal restorative circles. The conflict incidents reported by the small number of interviewees in this chapter did reveal that post-incident restorative peacemaking circles, without the application of punishment to individuals, reduced violence and deescalated conflict in almost all reported incidents. Neither internal nor external facilitation impeded positive consequences of this process. Based on the findings presented in this chapter, school administrators should consider both types of facilitation as an alternative to punitive consequences. The findings from this chapter suggest that proactive peacebuilding practices such as check-in circles and post-incident restorative peacemaking circles helped strengthen relationships, based on the perspectives of interviewees.
Chapter 7
Overall Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, I investigated how restorative peacemaking and related peacebuilding initiatives, such as community building and conflict resolution education, can help to create peaceful school climates. I explored restorative peacemaking circles and peacebuilding practices as alternatives to harsh discipline practices that have been ineffective in preventing and reducing violence in schools (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012; Skiba et. al, 2001). Punitive approaches have disproportionately punished marginalized youth (Gladden, 2002). Researchers on whole-school violence prevention showed ways schools can provide relationship-building opportunities and social-emotional skill building that will enable students to address conflict in constructive ways (Gladden, 2002; Jones, 2004; Morrison, 2007; Skiba, 2000). The analysis is organized around Morrison’s (2007) theoretical model for restorative practices, which recommends that restorative practices be implemented comprehensively across the school, at three levels. The first level immunizes conflicts from escalating through relationship-building and social emotional learning. The secondary level addresses conflicts and disruptions through facilitated dialogue. The third level commencing when serious violence has occurred between individuals and intensive facilitated dialogue is required. This thesis study is premised on the theory that relationship-building resources (i.e., social capital) can be developed by students through restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding practices, which, in turn, can help prevent or reduce violence in schools.

A small number of conflicts were reported across all case study schools. However, findings from this study suggest that most conflicts reported by interviewees in this study were handled with post-incident restorative responses resembling Level 2 in Morrison’s (2007) model. Overall, essentially no evidence showed Level 1 proactive peacebuilding implementation at two schools (River and Ocean) and some evidence of such activities at one school (Pine). It would be inaccurate to say that Morrison’s responsive regulation pyramid was implemented, even to a small extent, at River or Ocean schools because very few staff members at these schools seemed to be aware of restorative conflict management responses. I found no evidence of intensive restorative implementation by school officials in any of the three case study schools, primarily because interviewees reported no serious violent incidents. One exception to this finding is that the Cedar School District (in which Pine School was located) did implement Level 3 intensive responses indirectly, after students were punished through a lengthy suspension or sent to an
alternative program. The alternative program in this school district had expert trained facilitators and counselling support in place to respond to students’ needs, although after the incidence of destructive conflict. The absence of Level 3 responses in any of the case study schools, only limited evidence of proactive peacebuilding practices, and the comparison of Pine School to River and Ocean Schools, seems to indicate that school staffs require more restorative training (and sufficient staffing resources) to successfully implement Morrison’s comprehensive whole-school restorative practice recommendations.

These limited findings of case study schools’ conflict management approaches can reinforce in a small way the findings of a previous study by Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al. (2007), revealing that institutional change going from less punitive approaches to whole-school restorative practices is slow and patchy in secondary schools. Findings from this study also seem to indicate a reliance on control and compliance by school administrators because they responded to some incidents with restorative practices alongside punitive approaches in Pine School and River School (aligned with Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Bickmore (2004) showed that nonviolent behaviours such as drug use and theft are often punished harshly in schools, and found a range of conflict management approaches—peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding— influenced by policies across Canadian school districts. Conflict management policies seem to have shaped the types of responses reported at the case study schools by school administrators. The findings from the present study contribute some evidence showing that restorative practices (peacemaking in particular) were not fully adopted to replace punitive practices in schools even for nonviolent or less serious incidents.

Ocean School and River School used external facilitators to implement restorative peacemaking circles, and the vice principal and principal at Ocean School implemented some restorative inquiry. Pine School had broader internal facilitation by a small group of teachers with a guidance counsellor and a teacher implementing restorative peacemaking circles. Also, evidence emerged of proactive restorative peacebuilding such as check-in circles, implemented by a third of the Pine School staff. These findings shed light on previous findings, showing that broadened implementation of restorative practices occurred in schools where staff valued the commitment and modeling of restorative practices by key members of staff (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al, 2007). The findings from Pine School resonate with past research findings, showing how facilitation by (trained) internal school staff can help to broaden wider restorative practice implementation in schools.
Conflict management at all three case study schools seemed to emphasize punitive policies and social control (aligned with the findings of Adams, 2000 and other research cited above). Documentary and interview evidence allowed me to describe conflict management policies of schools, indicating that school administrators usually prescribed punishment for certain student behaviours and especially for violent behaviours such as assault. A review of codes of conduct from all three school showed that all three school issued suspensions for behaviours such as fighting and more severe consequences for assault. School administrators also prescribed punishment for nonviolent activities such as drug possession, in compliance with the Ontario Safe Schools Act (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Interviewees also indicated that administrators issued suspensions to students, sometimes for fighting and noncompliance (Bob, PSVP; Chris, OSS; Lesley, RSP). Punitive policies in all three schools restricted student opportunities to develop their own capacities for autonomous problem solving a finding aligned with Bickmore (2011). The administrators of all three schools still implemented punishment for serious conflicts and this may have contributed to hindering student peacemaking opportunities. Perhaps a promising sign for restorative justice advocates was that administrators interviewed at all three schools believed that post-incident dialogue was important to help understand problems and to repair harm done to individuals. However, the exclusionary effects reported by interviewees in this study (and in previous research) highlight the concerns that surface when punitive consequences coexist with restorative practices, as was also noted by Morrison and Vaandering (2012).

I experienced the challenge of trying to implement restorative peacemaking when I was vice principal of a high school and a student had used harmful language towards another student. All parties who were impacted by this incident were invited and did participate in the restorative circle that I facilitated. I believe harm was repaired between the offender and the victim. However, prior to participation in this restorative peacemaking circle process, the principal and I had already suspended the offending student from school. The suspension did not address the issues that led to this incident. I believe it was the peacemaking circle process that helped repair the harm and get at the root causes for why the offender used harmful words towards the victim. Similarly, findings from this study showed that the small pool of interviewees all perceived that punitive consequences, such as suspensions and exclusions from school, tended to harm relationships. Exclusions were effective in stopping the escalation of violence at the time, but none of the reports from interviewees suggested that the problems causing the conflict were
addressed by these approaches. These findings are consistent with Noguera (1995) and Gladden’s (2002) theory that punitive discipline does not address the reasons conflicts occur and does damage relationships.

Very limited interview reports indicated that the introduction of Bill 212 gave school administrators more leeway to implement restorative responses in conflict situations to promote proactive peacebuilding approaches in their schools, but that not all administrators in the case study schools fully understood or took up that leeway. This exemplified how conflict-management policies at the provincial level and school-district level could help or hinder administrator implementation of restorative practices. Administrators had more leeway because they had more discretion over which behaviours had to be punished. Other conflict management policies, such as the inclusion of restorative peacemaking approaches found in schools’ codes of conduct as post-incident options at all three case study schools, may have helped to encourage implementation of these practices by all three schools. The influence of policies in shaping conflict management responses in my study are similar to those reported by Reimer (2009) and Bickmore (2004).

Relational issues were the most common type of incident to which school personnel responded with restorative peacemaking, as reported by interviewees at all three schools. Somewhat similarly, Stinchomb et al. (2006) found circles to have been used to respond to minor interpersonal conflicts. However, at Ocean and River Schools, some restorative peacemaking circles (led by outside expert facilitators) also addressed some complex longstanding aggression problems. Stinchomb et al. (2006) also reported that the implementation of circles and restorative practices in research-study schools had more peaceful school environments, with fewer suspensions and less disruptive behaviours among students. The findings from this study revealed that many students who normally would be excluded from school through punitive practices for their behaviour instead were able to remain in school and to have their conflicts or incidents addressed through restorative peacemaking. Facilitated restorative dialogue processes are designed to give each person impacted by an incident an opportunity to recognize and repair damaged relationships. Almost all interviewees who participated in restorative practices reported their relationships were strengthened and that future violence was prevented following peacemaking circle experiences. Negative relations between students and the school administrators who normally dole out punishment to students were avoided or bypassed in these cases. These findings provide some evidence that school administrators should consider the
impacts of using restorative practices rather than punitive approaches. Reports from this study are consistent with previous studies showing a greater opportunity to resolve conflicts using restorative approaches (Stinchomb et al., 2006).

Pine School had a smaller school enrolment and staff compared to the other two schools. Broader implementation of peacemaking practices were found in Pine School, and this finding was consistent with previous research showing that restorative practices sometimes were implemented more broadly and quickly in schools with smaller staffs because relationships in these environments tends to be more personal (McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, et al., 2008). Pine School interviewees told me their school had a higher frequency of disruptions compared to the other two schools (as noted earlier by Bob, PSVP; Julie, PSG). I found evidence that administrators at Pine School were active in sharing the responsibility of responding to conflict incidents in restorative ways with the guidance counsellor. The broader implementation of these practices at Pine School reinforced findings from previous research (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007) showing that frequent conflictual incidents may be more likely to be addressed with restorative practices because school officials at this school may have recognized that punitive consequences have been ineffective (Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al., 2007).

Committed leaders and facilitation by internal school staff may have contributed to broader implementation of restorative practices at Pine School, compared to River and Ocean Schools. The vice-Principal, guidance counsellor and a teacher-in-charge demonstrated this commitment by sharing the responsibility of responding to conflict incidents with restorative practices. School district leaders demonstrated commitment by providing quality restorative practice training and support to administrators, teachers, and resource teachers. A small number of Pine School teachers received expert training in restorative philosophy and how to facilitate check-in and peacemaking circles. I believe this training contributed to teacher facilitation of relationship-building and dialogue because these individuals understood the purpose and principles behind this conflict management approach and also became committed to leading and sharing this knowledge with other colleagues during a professional-development session. In contrast, this training opportunity was not available to River and Ocean teachers. Also, it seems as though facilitation of check-in circles did not occur in River and Ocean Schools because teachers did not have this opportunity to learn this process for relationships in their classrooms. This finding, emphasizing the importance of committed leaders and quality training, is in alignment with the work of Stinchomb et al. (2006), Reimer (2009), and Kane, Lloyd,
McCluskey et al. (2007), all of whom reported that providing staff with substantial training of restorative justice philosophy, practices, training, and support contributed to broader implementation. Administrators at River and Ocean Schools were willing to make referrals to external facilitators, but because staff members did not receive restorative practice training, broader implementation of comprehensive peacemaking- and peacebuilding-restorative practices was impeded. The train-the-trainer model implemented at Pine School did have some limitations, as there was no evidence from the few interviews conducted in this study about whether other Pine School staff members responded to conflicts using restorative peacemaking or implemented proactive peacebuilding beyond weekly check-in circles. This finding supports the theory that expert training is required to increase full implementation of restorative peacemaking in schools.

It is likely that tensions and emotions are greater between participants when more serious incidents occur in schools. Expert facilitation is important to help increase the likelihood of repairing relationships during restorative peacemaking circles. Evidence of these types of strains was present in the multiple student–teacher conflicts reported at Ocean School. Effective facilitation was required to manage these complex conflicts. Without skilled facilitation, the escalation of behaviours from the Grade 9 girls, for instance, may have continued. Nonetheless, it is important to note that most restorative dialogue experiences reported by interview participants in this study were implemented for less serious and less complex incidents. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain whether individuals who facilitated dialogues required a high level of skill. Findings from River School and Ocean School did point out that external facilitation was useful in reducing power imbalances inside the restorative peacemaking circle process (even when facilitating a restorative peacemaking circle) because administrators have power over students. Because formal peacemaking circles can take a long time, data from these case study schools also showed that external facilitation can remove time constraint concerns for preparation, operation, and follow up of circles for staff in schools. Past research has not delved into a thorough examination of the impacts of internal versus external facilitation. This study was helpful in raising the concern of who should facilitate peacemaking in certain circumstances.

Overall, the findings from this study show that successful implementation of restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding approaches requires committed leaders and teachers who are well trained in restorative practices. The importance of leadership is similar to findings put forward by Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey et al. (2007) that leaders need to encourage all stakeholders, and provide time and resources to support implementation. School administrators need to
understand the benefits of infusing proactive practices in their schools so relationships can be strengthened in schools and conflict resolution education can prepare students to respond constructively to conflicts when they arise. If funding support is available from their school district, school administrators can introduce comprehensive restorative practice training to teachers in their school so that proactive approaches such as check-in circles or social-emotional learning can be attempted to be implemented in the classroom. In addition, comprehensive training can include restorative peacemaking circles or student-led peer mediation, so student conflicts can be constructively addressed, in contrast to the harmful effects of punitive practices (noted by Bickmore, 2008; Noguera, 1995). Some evidence showed that one school (Pine) did infuse a small degree of proactive practices through the use of check-in circles, and internal staff’s facilitation of mediations (or informal peacemaking circles), that may have helped strengthen relationships for a small number of students following conflictual incidents. Staff and school administrators at this school also showed it is possible to address conflicts using restorative responses under existing punishment policy regimes. In contrast, a small amount of data was collected at Ocean and River Schools showing that school administrators made referrals to external facilitators to handle student conflicts restoratively. Although, external peacemaking efforts such as the ones reported in this study are not representative of whole-school restorative implementation (as promoted by Morrison, 2007), I believe it is a viable implementation option for schools to introduce restorative peacemaking in collaboration with school administrators (as shown in River and Ocean Schools). Perhaps schools that choose this implementation approach can include restorative practice training at a later time to a significant portion of the school teaching staff (as was shown in Pine School) so that both proactive peacebuilding and peacemaking responses can be infused into the school.

**Strengths and Limitations of this Research Methodology and Design**

My study investigated the implementation and consequences of peacemaking circles (including conferences) and peacebuilding practices, based on the theory that these proactive and post-incident practices have relationship benefits for diverse participants. This study contributes to the limited research showing how peacemaking circles and peacebuilding practices may be implemented in schools based on a small but well-rounded sample of administrator, teacher, and student perspectives.

It is important to note that the small pool of student, teacher, and administrator interviewees does limit the persuasiveness and reliability of my findings. Along these same lines,
this study did not robustly examine implementation or consequences of restorative practices before, during, or after these practices were infused in schools. However, the comparisons between a small school (Pine) and two larger schools (River and Ocean), facilitation by external experts versus internal school staff members (Pine vs. River and Ocean), as well as the gathering of perspectives from a variety of stakeholders (such as students, teachers, and administrators) allowed for identification and verification of key findings that show the impact that school conflict management policies, leadership, and training can have on the interpretation and violence reduction qualities of restorative practices.

I believe the violence reduction and relationship benefits of restorative peacemaking and proactive peacebuilding experienced by student, teacher, and administrator interviewees are meaningful findings that help reinforce why restorative dialogue processes should be implemented in high schools. Similarly, these findings are helpful to explain how restorative peacemaking and proactive peacebuilding may offer students access to social capital relationship resources.

Even though staff training only occurred in one case study school (Pine School), I was able to examine the character and apparent consequences of quality training in that school, and to analyze the consequences of not having restorative training or internal (school staff) facilitation in the other two schools (River and Ocean Schools). I was also able to compare the consequences of post-incident restorative responses across three schools and show how these approaches could be effective both on their own and when used in conjunction with punitive practices. The finding that restorative peacemaking was implemented alongside punitive practices points to an important and tricky issue that seems not to have received much attention in previous research. My examination of why or how administrators used restorative practices and punitive practices together (for the same or similar conflict situations) was quite limited. However, this finding does raise further questions, including whether (or to what degree) public high schools really are capable of implementing comprehensive, fully non-punitive restorative practices, based on theory recommended by scholars such as Morrison (2007) and Pranis (2005).

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research should further explore the benefits and difficulties of restorative practices in public high schools, through the use of a larger pool of interview subjects. A larger pool of interviewees will offer more robust evidence, by attaining more perspectives on the implementation and perceived impacts of restorative practices in a wider range of contexts. Also,
a larger pool may provide more information about the type of high school students who may particularly benefit from restorative and peacebuilding practices—such as younger or older, academic level, or learning disabled students. Certainly, researchers should include a larger and more diverse pool of students in future research. Because minority children are disproportionately harshly disciplined in schools (Children’s Defense Fund, 2012; Skiba et al, 2001), I recommend a detailed examination of effects of restorative practices in minority student populations. More perspectives from administrators also would be beneficial, to examine the challenges of (and possibilities for) replacing punitive practices with restorative practices, as well as the challenges (and possibilities) of replacing punitive policies with skilled facilitation (by external or internal staff) and other restorative peacemaking and peacebuilding practices. Future research should investigate the impact of proactive approaches, such as check-in circles and other peacebuilding activities, on violence prevention in greater depth. A robust examination of the (impacts before and after) implementation of restorative practice usage for serious violent incidents handled at the school level is in order. Also, researchers should explore further what helps or hinders the implementation of peacemaking and peacebuilding in small schools versus larger enrolled schools. I believe this kind of study may help further the argument for the use of restorative practices over punitive practices in schools.

**Implications**

I learned from this study that school and school-district policies can and often do shape, help, and impede the implementation of peacemaking circles and related peacemaking and peacebuilding practices in schools. Transformational change, from punitive practices towards peacebuilding, requires a rethinking of the perceptions and policies that guide conflict management choices by administrators and others, in efforts to prevent or respond to incidents and their causes. I found in this study, consistent with my recent experiences as a school administrator in Ontario schools, that many school officials believe restorative practices should be used alongside or after punitive practices, at least for serious incidents such as physical fighting or verbal harassment. Although increasing numbers of administrators are aware of restorative practices as a conflict management response, more training is required to support administrators and teachers in how to introduce (internal and/or external) facilitation of restorative peacemaking and proactive peacebuilding, and greater awareness of how these practices can replace punitive practices.
My research study showed the importance of leadership and quality training to support the implementation of these practices; a finding that aligns with work by other scholars (Reimer, 2009; Stinchomb et al., 2006). Specific research implications for school administrators are that they have the discretion to respond to conflict in gentler ways (than punitive responses) to address conflict more constructively. Also, school administrators can choose to initiate restorative practice training and proactive peacebuilding learning as part of professional development for teachers in their schools. Administrators can also seek external facilitation as a resource to implement restorative peacemaking.

Implications of this research for policy makers are that they should be aware that punitive conflict management policies can impede restorative practice implementation because the harm that punitive policies do to relationships restricts autonomous student problem solving. Also, administrators may feel restricted to respond to student conflicts or incidents in punitive ways based on the school district or school-based policies that guide their decision making. However, policies may give administrators discretion whether to respond to behaviours with punitive or alternatives such as restorative practices. Facilitating dialogue between offenders and victims even when responding with punitive consequences will likely still help improve relationships and repair harm between individuals.

Scholarly implications of this study point to evidence that a punitive regulatory framework exists in all three schools (aligned with Morrison & Vaandering, 2012) in this study and likely many schools in North America. The operation of punitive policies in schools contradicts restorative justice theory (Pranis, 2005) and also indicates that further research will be needed to examine how restorative practices can be implemented separately from (replacing) punitive policy regimes. Findings from this study contribute to those of previous research (such as McCluskey et al, 2007), showing that the fairly broad implementation of proactive peacebuilding and restorative peacemaking at one school (Pine) seemed to be associated in particular with quality training (provided to a large proportion of staff) and committed leadership.

Harsh punitive policies disproportionately punish minority populations of students and harm relationships. My analysis and evidence in this thesis study help to affirm the theory that restorative peacemaking and proactive peacebuilding practices can provide access to social capital (relationship resources) for students and thereby reduce the escalation of destructive conflict and violence. The perspectives of students, teachers, and administrator interviewees
from this study suggest that the implementation of these practices in schools can contribute to building stronger and more peaceful relationships among all members of a school.
References


Appendices
### Appendix A

**Data Sources from Three School Sites**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pine Secondary School—Cedar School Board</th>
<th>Interview Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview Participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vice-Principal—Bob</td>
<td>June 16, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance Counsellor/Teacher Leader — Julie</td>
<td>June 16, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Leader—John</td>
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<td>Student—Bill</td>
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<td>Student—Jessica</td>
<td>June 16, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student—Sean</td>
<td>June 16, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cedar School Board Restorative Practices Coordinator—Mary (some data reflects her observations of training that took place on May 26, 2010)</td>
<td>May 27, 2010</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Observation of Pine School staff meeting</td>
<td>May 20, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observation of Cedar School Board introductory restorative justice and circle training</td>
<td>April 13, 2011</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Pine School Code of Conduct</td>
<td>June 16, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Pine School Parent Letter from Principal</td>
<td>June 16, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Pine School Community, Culture, Caring Team Year End Report June, 2010</td>
<td>June 16, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>d) Cedar School Board Restorative Practice Training</td>
<td>May 27, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>e) Cedar School Board Brochure of the restorative process</td>
<td>May 27, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>f) Cedar School Board Annual Operating Plan</td>
<td>May 27, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>g) Cedar School Board restorative training booklet</td>
<td>April 13, 2011/2</td>
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### Ocean Secondary School—Pacific School Board

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<tr>
<td>Teacher—Sharon</td>
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<td>Teacher—Bryce</td>
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<td>Student—Chris</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student—Katie</td>
<td>June 18, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student—Shauna</td>
<td>June 18, 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observations**

No observations but incident with Chris occurred on June 16, 2010 and he participated in a circle on June 17, 2010

**Documents**

- a) Spencer Agency Brochure: What is a Peer Mediation Conference
- b) Spencer Agency Peer Mediation and School Diversion Program
- c) Ocean School Student Handbook

### River Secondary School—Pacific School Board

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Principal—Lesley</td>
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<td>Vice-Principal—Alan</td>
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<td>Student—Jennifer</td>
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<td>Student—Lisa</td>
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<td>Student—Brenda</td>
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**Observations**

No observations

**Documents**

- a) River School Growth Plan
- b) River School Student Handbook
- c) Contracts of circle meetings
Appendix B
Interview Questions for Administrators Who Have Participated in Peacemaking Circles

Implementation:
Describe when and how peacemaking circles came to be implemented at your school?
Have you been trained in peacemaking circles? Who else has been trained? Why?
(If yes, How long was the training? What occurred during the training? What did you learn?)
Which school members are aware of the peacemaking circle process? How did they become informed about this innovation? Do any teachers use this process in the classroom?
What resources have been required to implement this intervention?
How does this innovation fit into the school code of conduct? the school improvement plan or school goals? the board improvement plan?
What resources have you been able to access, to help support any challenges you have with peacemaking circles?

Description:
What happens in a peacemaking circle? Describe the steps in the process.
Who facilitates peacemaking circle sessions at your school?
Who participates in a peacemaking circle?
Describe what happens in a circle?
In your experience, what are the feelings, emotions, and concerns of participants during and upon completion of participating in a peacemaking circle?

Kinds of conflicts for which peacemaking circles are useful:
In what ways has implementation of peacemaking circles complemented or conflicted with pre-existing conflict management, violence prevention/ reduction, or discipline processes in your school? Explain.
Which kinds of conflict scenarios are handled by peacemaking circles in your school?
How is that determined?
Did you think it was appropriate for the conflicts you dealt with? Why? In what types of situations do you think circles are most useful? When do you believe peacemaking circles should not be used? Why?
Strengthening relationships:
Do you feel your relationship with other circle participants weakened or strengthened during the circle process? Explain. Do you think relationships among other individuals were strengthened or weakened? Why?

Cultural inclusion:
How do you ensure there is a full range of people participating in the circle process? Are there obstacles to this inclusion? Explain.
Did you feel various circle participants’ voices, opinions, stories were heard through this process? What about yourself? Explain.
Did you feel that each participant was treated fairly in the circle process? Why or why not?
How do you believe the peacemaking circle process helps (or hurts) to repair/rebuild relationships among diverse members of your school community (e.g., personalities, gender, language, ethnicities)? Explain.

Influence on violence reduction:
Was the circle process helpful for reducing violence/conflict in the dispute you dealt with? Why? In what ways?
Did you feel the peacemaking circle helped to resolve or de-escalate this conflict? How? In what ways? Why?
What aspects of this process did you like/dislike?
Do you feel this issue has been appropriately addressed/resolved now? Explain?
Think about a past experience when you were involved trying to resolve a conflict using a traditional approach. Describe the conflict incident. What steps did you take to try and reduce violence/conflict? What efforts were made to repair/rebuild relationships between the two disputants? Discuss. Did you involve people who were most influenced to constructively deal with the conflict? In what ways did you involve them?
Appendix C

Interview Questions for Students Who Have Participated in Peacemaking Circles

Implementation:
When did you first become aware of peacemaking circles, when and how they came to be implemented at your school?
How do you see this circle process complementing (or working against) existing discipline and violence reduction processes that are used in your school? Explain

Description:
What happens in a peacemaking circle? Describe the steps in the process.
Who facilitates peacemaking circle sessions at your school?
Who participates in a peacemaking circle?
Describe what happens in a circle?
In your experience, what are the feelings, emotions, and concerns of participants during and upon completion of participating in a peacemaking circle?

Kinds of conflicts for which peacemaking circles are useful:
Did you think the circle process was an appropriate way to handle the conflict you dealt with? Why? In what types of situations do you think circles are most useful? When do you believe peacemaking circles should not be used? Why?

Strengthening relationships:
Do you feel your relationship with other circle participants weakened or strengthened during the circle process? Explain. Do you think relationships among other individuals were strengthened or weakened? Why?

Cultural inclusion:
As far as you know, who can participate in a circle? Do you believe there is a full range of people participating in this process? How? Do you see any obstacles to this inclusion?
Did you feel participants’ voices, opinions, stories were heard through this process? What about your own? Explain.
Did you feel like you were treated fairly or unfairly when you participated in the circle? Why or why not?

Do you believe this process helps (or hurts) to repair/rebuild relationships among diverse people (e.g., personalities, gender, language, ethnicities)? How so?

Influence on violence reduction:
Do you feel the circle process was helpful for reducing violence or de-escalating the conflict, in the dispute you were part of? In what ways? What aspects of this process did you like/dislike?

Do you feel the conflict was appropriately addressed? Explain?

Think about a past experience, when you or another person was involved in a conflict at school (when a circle process was NOT used). Describe the conflict incident. Who was involved? What steps did school officials take, to try to reduce violence/conflict? What efforts were made to repair relationships between the two disputants? Explain.

Do you think the use of peacemaking circles has influenced how discipline is conducted at your school? How so?
Appendix D
Interview Questions for Teachers Who Have Participated in Peacemaking Circles

Implementation:
Describe when and how peacemaking circles came to be implemented at your school?
Have you used this process in the classroom? Do other teachers?
How have student-student conflicts been dealt with at your school? Are there different approaches your school uses to address serious conflicts between students?
In what ways do you believe this circle process has complemented, or worked against, existing discipline and violence prevention/reduction practices at your school? Explain
What resources are available if you would like to or are already using this process in your classroom?

Description:
What happens in a peacemaking circle? Describe the steps in the process.
Who facilitates peacemaking circle sessions at your school?
Who participates in a peacemaking circle?
Describe what happens in a circle.
In your experience, what are the feelings, emotions, and concerns of participants during and upon completion of participating in a peacemaking circle?

Kinds of conflicts for which peacemaking circles are useful:
How does your school determine which kinds of conflict scenarios are handled by peacemaking circles?
In what types of situations do you think circles are most useful? Did you think it was appropriate for the conflict you dealt with? Why? When do you believe peacemaking circles should not be used? Why? What are some benefits or drawbacks, about the circle process?

Strengthening relationships:
Do you feel your relationship with other circle participants weakened or strengthened during the circle process? Explain. Do you think relationships among other individuals were strengthened or weakened? Why?

Cultural inclusion:
Who can participate in a circle? Do you believe there is a full range of people participating in this process? How? Are there any obstacles to this inclusion?

Did you feel participants’ voices, opinions, stories were heard through this process? What about your own? Explain.

Did you feel that you were treated fairly or unfairly when you participated in the circle? Why or why not?

Do you believe this process helps (or hurts) to repair/rebuild relationships among diverse people (e.g., personalities, gender, language, ethnicities)? How so?

Influence on violence reduction:

Did you feel the peacemaking circle helped to resolve or de-escalate this conflict? How? In what ways? Why?

What aspects of this process did you like/dislike?

Do you feel this student conflict was appropriately addressed? Explain?

Has the use of peacemaking circles influenced how discipline is conducted at you school?

Think about a past experience, when you were involved in trying to resolve a conflict with students (when a peacemaking circle was NOT used). Describe the conflict incident. Who was involved in dealing with the situation? What steps were taken to try and reduce violence/conflict? What efforts were made to repair/rebuild relationships between the two disputants? Explain.
Appendix E
Interview Questions for Resource People Who Have Participated in Peacemaking Circles

Implementation:

How did you become aware of the circle process? Who contacted you to participate in the process?

Did you have any concerns prior to participating in a peacemaking circle? Explain.

How have student-student conflicts been dealt with at your school? Are there different approaches your school uses to address serious conflicts between students?

In what ways do you believe this circle process has complemented, or worked against, existing discipline and violence prevention/reduction practices at your school? Explain.

Description:

What happens in a peacemaking circle? Describe the steps in the process.

Who facilitates peacemaking circle sessions at your school?

Who participates in a peacemaking circle?

Describe what happens in a circle.

In your experience, what are the feelings, emotions, and concerns of participants during and upon completion of participating in a peacemaking circle?

Kinds of conflicts for which peacemaking circles are useful:

Do you think this process was useful for addressing the conflict your child was involved in? Why? In what types of situations do you think circles are most useful? When do you think peacemaking circles should not be used? Explain.
Strengthening relationships:

Do you feel your relationship with other circle participants weakened or strengthened during the circle process? Explain. Do you think relationships among other individuals were strengthened or weakened? Why?

Cultural Inclusion:

Did the circle process provide a forum for you to communicate more effectively with the individuals (group) involved?

Did you feel that each participant’s voice, opinions, stories were heard through this process? What about your own? Explain.

Did you feel as if you or your son/daughter was treated fairly or unfairly in the circle process? Why or why not?

Do you believe this process helps (or hurts) to repair/rebuild relationships among diverse people (e.g., personalities, gender, language, ethnicities)? How so?

Influence on violence reduction:

Was the circle process helpful for reducing violence/conflict your son daughter was involved in? In what ways? Do you feel this issue has been appropriately addressed/resolved now? Explain.

What parts of the handling of the situation did you like/dislike?

Think about a past experience, when your child was in a conflict with another student. Describe the conflict incident. Who was involved, and how so? What steps were taken to try and
reduce violence/conflict? What efforts were made to repair/rebuild relationships between the two disputants? Explain.
Appendix F
Participant Observation Guide

Pseudonym of School _________________________ Date & time _______________________

Type of observation:

1. safety and well-being team meetings, staff meetings, leadership team meetings, or
introductory and ongoing restorative justice training sessions

Look for #1– descriptions of restorative circle, related restorative practices, or
peacebuilding implementation approaches in the school e.g. a) discussions of how these
approaches will be implemented and how they may impact students, teachers, administrators, or
parents; b) information describing procedures and processes for implementation of peacemaking
circles or related restorative practices; c) descriptions of what these processes look like

Look for- #2

a) Participants’ perspectives on the ways peacemaking circles and related restorative
practices might improve (or not) relationship-building, and/or cultural inclusion during student-
to-student conflicts or the school climate (peacebuilding)

b) or descriptions of how punitive, non-dialogue or exclusionary approaches to dealing
with conflict might improve (or not) relationship-building, and/or cultural inclusion in student to
student conflict scenarios or the school climate (peacebuilding)

Look for #3- participants’ perspectives on the ways peacemaking circles or related
restorative practices, might prevent/reduce or (not) violence in student-to-student conflicts or
promote peacebuilding (or not)

b) or descriptions of how punitive, non-dialogue or exclusionary approaches to dealing
with conflict might prevent/reduce (or not) violence in student to student conflicts or promote
peacebuilding (or not)
Appendix G
Document Analysis Guide

Pseudonym of school ________________________

Date document was created or approved: __________

Type of document: introductory or ongoing training for peacemaking circles/restorative justice training, minutes from safety and well-being team meetings, school effectiveness plans, school board improvement plan, school newsletter, discipline and behaviour code documents (e.g. policies related to discipline and use of peacemaking circles)

Look for #1– descriptions of restorative circle, related restorative practices, or peacebuilding implementation approaches in the school e.g. a) descriptions of how these approaches will be implemented and how they may impact students, teachers, administrators, or parents; b) information describing procedures and processes for implementation of peacemaking circles or related restorative practices; c) descriptions of what these processes look like

Look for- #2

a) descriptions of the ways peacemaking circles and related restorative practices might improve (or not) relationship-building, and/or cultural inclusion during student-to-student conflicts or the school climate (peacebuilding)

b) or descriptions of how punitive, non-dialogue or exclusionary approaches to dealing with conflict might improve (or not) relationship-building, and/or cultural inclusion in student to student conflict scenarios or the school climate (peacebuilding)
Look for #3- descriptions of the ways peacemaking circles or related restorative practices, might prevent/reduce or (not) violence in student-to-student conflicts or promote peacebuilding (or not)

b) or descriptions of how punitive, non-dialogue or exclusionary approaches to dealing with conflict might prevent/reduce (or not) violence in student to student conflicts or promote peacebuilding (or not)
Appendix H
Information and Consent Letter for Administrators

Dear Administrators:

I am a Ph.D. student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at University of Toronto. I am conducting a study on the implementation of peacemaking circles (also known as restorative circles), and the possible capability of this conflict resolution innovation to strengthen relationships among individuals and groups, to facilitate cultural inclusion, and to reduce violence in schools. I intend this study to be helpful to administrators, policy makers and scholars looking to better understand and improve the use of peacemaking circles as part of an overall conflict management strategy. I would like to include you and your school as part of this study.

I will conduct 30-minute interviews with 2–5 students, 1–2 teachers, 1 Principal or Vice-Principal, and 1-2 parents, from each of two schools, during the months of May and June of this year. Administrators who are selected for this study will have attempted to resolve a conflict between two students and will also have participated in, or facilitated, at least one peacemaking circle. Other participants will have also participated in a circle or been influenced in some way by this experience. I will ask you (and each participant) questions related to your/their peacemaking circle experience. Specifically, I will ask participants to describe the conflict and the events leading up to, during, and after the circle experience. The questions are designed to investigate implementation of this conflict management alternative as well as possible consequence of this process for relationship strengthening and violence reduction. The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board’s Evidence-Based Education and Services Team has officially approved this study. When the study is completed, I will make a report on the findings available in the school library for interested school staff, parents and students.

School administrators are also asked to forward consent letters to potential participants (including parental/ guardian consent letters to parents/ guardians of potential student participants who are under 18 years of age). If the student is under the age of 18, their parent will be asked to sign in order for the student to be eligible for this study. As above, I will ensure that each individual participant (including both student participants and their parents/guardians)
receives a copy of their signed consent form and I will keep the original for myself (with the list of pseudonyms kept separate) in a secure locked cabinet to protect confidentiality.

If you (administrator) are interested in participating in this study, and to allow others in your school to participate, please contact me via phone, postal mail (a self-addressed stamped envelope is included) or e-mail to confirm your interest within 5 days of receiving this information. I will accept signed hard copies of information/consent documents, either in advance via postal mail, or in person at the beginning of the first meeting or interview. I will send you copies of your information and consent documents via e-mail or postal mail, and can follow up by phone to answer any questions you may have. If you are selected to participate in the study, I will arrange a time and place to meet and conduct interviews in a private location at your school. I will not use information from school records and participants’ responses will not be identifiable by name in the findings of this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If, on the research day, any individual becomes unwilling or unable to participate, his/her feelings will be respected. If you have any concerns or questions about rights of participants, or would like to receive more information about the study, please contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Kathy Bickmore at the University of Toronto at 416-978-0237 or me (see contact information below). Additionally, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Thank you,
Dean Barnes, Ph.D. Student, Department of Curriculum Studies
O.I.S.E. University of Toronto
Appendix I
Information and Consent Letter for Students

Dear Parents or Guardian of student:

I am a Ph.D. student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at University of Toronto. I am conducting a study on the implementation of peacemaking circles (also known as restorative circles), and the possible capability of this conflict resolution innovation to strengthen relationships among individuals and groups, to facilitate cultural inclusion, and to reduce violence in schools. I intend this study to be helpful to administrators, policy makers and scholars looking to better understand and improve the use of peacemaking circles as part of an overall conflict management strategy. I would like to include you (student) as part of this study. If the student is under 18 years of age a parent/guardian must sign the consent documents.

I will conduct 30-minute interviews with participants during approximately April and May of this year. Students who are selected for this study will have been involved in a conflict with another student, and also will have participated in a peacemaking circle. The interviews will occur in private locations at students’ schools and I will be asking participants questions related to their peacemaking circle experience. The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board’s Evidence-Based Education and Services Team, and subsequently your (child’s) school Principal, has officially approved this study.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me via phone, postal mail or e-mail to confirm your interest (a self-addressed envelope is included) by DATE. I will accept signed hard copies of information/consent documents, either in advance via postal mail, or in person at the beginning of the first meeting or interview. I will send you copies of your information and consent documents via e-mail or postal mail. I can follow up by phone to answer any questions you may have. If you are selected to participate in the study, I will arrange a time and place to meet. Confidentiality will be strictly protected: No participant’s responses will be identifiable by name in the study.
Participation in this study is voluntary. If, on the research day, any individual becomes unwilling or unable to participate, his/her feelings will be respected.

If you have any concerns or questions about rights of participants, or would like to receive more information about the study, please contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Kathy Bickmore at the University of Toronto at 416-978-0237 or me at (905) 845-0012 (work). Additionally, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

I sincerely appreciate your co-operation.

Thank you,

Dean Barnes, Ph.D. Student, Department of Curriculum Studies

O.I.S.E. University of Toronto
Appendix J
Information and Consent Letter for Teachers

Dear Teachers:

I am a Ph.D. student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at University of Toronto. I am conducting a study on the implementation of peacemaking circles (also known as restorative circles), and the possible capability of this conflict resolution innovation to strengthen relationships among individuals and groups, to facilitate cultural inclusion, and to reduce violence in schools. I intend this study to be helpful to administrators, policy makers and scholars looking to better understand and improve the use of peacemaking circles as part of an overall conflict management strategy. I would like to include you as part of this study.

I will conduct 30-minute interviews with 2–5 students, 1–2 teachers, 1 Principal or Vice-Principal, and 1-2 parents, from each of two schools, during approximately March and April of this year. Teachers who are selected for this study will have participated in, or facilitated, at least one peacemaking circle. Other participants will have also participated in a circle or been influenced in some way by this experience. The interviews will occur in a private location at your school. I will ask you (and each participant) questions related to your/their peacemaking circle experience. Specifically, I will ask participants to describe the conflict and the events leading up to, during, and after the circle experience. The questions are designed to investigate implementation of this conflict management alternative, as well possible consequence of the process for relationship strengthening and violence reduction. The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board’s Evidence-Based Education and Services Team has officially approved this study. When the study is completed, I will make a report on the findings available in the school library for interested school staff, parents and students.

School administrators are also asked to forward consent letters to potential participants (including parental/ guardian consent letters to parents/ guardians of potential student participants who are under 18 years of age). If the student is under the age of 18, their parent will be asked to sign in order for the student to be eligible for this study. As above, I will ensure that
each individual participant (including both student participants and their parents/guardians) receives a copy of their signed consent form and I will keep the original for myself (with the list of pseudonyms kept separate) in a secure locked cabinet to protect confidentiality.

If you (teacher) are interested in participating in this study, please contact me via phone, postal mail (a self-addressed stamped envelope is included) or e-mail to confirm your interest within 5 days of receiving this information. I will accept signed hard copies of information/consent documents, either in advance via postal mail, or in person at the beginning of the first meeting or interview. I will send you copies of your information and consent documents via e-mail or postal mail, and can follow up by phone to answer any questions you may have. If you are selected to participate in the study, I will arrange a time and place to meet and conduct interviews in a private location at your school. I will not use information from school records and participants’ responses will not be identifiable by name in the findings of this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If, on the research day, any individual becomes unwilling or unable to participate, his/her feelings will be respected. If you have any concerns or questions about rights of participants, or would like to receive more information about the study, please contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Kathy Bickmore at the University of Toronto at 416-978-0237 or me (see contact information below). Additionally, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

I sincerely appreciate your co-operation.

Thank you,

Dean Barnes, Ph.D. Student, Department of Curriculum Studies

O.I.S.E. University of Toronto
Appendix K
Parent Consent Letter

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am a Ph.D. student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at University of Toronto. I am conducting a study on the implementation of peacemaking circles (also known as restorative circles), and the possible capability of this conflict resolution innovation to strengthen relationships among individuals and groups, to facilitate cultural inclusion, and to reduce violence in schools. I intend this study to be helpful to administrators, policy makers and scholars looking to better understand and improve the use of peacemaking circles as part of an overall conflict management strategy. I would like to include you as part of this study.

I will conduct 30-minute interviews with participants during approximately April and May of this year. Parent/guardians who are selected for this study will have participated in at least one peacemaking circle. The interviews will occur in a private location at your school. The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board’s Evidence-Based Education and Services Team, and subsequently your child’s school Principal, has officially approved this study.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me via phone, postal mail or e-mail to confirm your interest (a self-addressed envelope is included) by DATE. I will accept signed hard copies of information/consent documents, either in advance via postal mail, or in person at the beginning of the first meeting or interview. I will send you copies of your information and consent documents via e-mail or postal mail. I can follow up by phone to answer any questions you may have. If you are selected to participate in the study, I will arrange a time and place to meet. Confidentiality will be strictly protected: No participant’s responses will be identifiable by name in the study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If, on the research day, any individual becomes unwilling or unable to participate, his/her feelings will be respected.

If you have any concerns or questions about rights of participants, or would like to receive more information about the study, please contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Kathy
Bickmore at the University of Toronto at 416-978-0237 or me at (905) 845-0012 (work).
Additionally, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

I sincerely appreciate your co-operation.

Thank you,
Dean Barnes, Ph.D. Student, Department of Curriculum Studies
O.I.S.E. University of Toronto