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**Restorative practice in schools: some recent research findings**

Research on restorative practice in school settings has increased substantially in the last decade and the last three years in particular. Notable examples from 2020 are: a systematic review of the effectiveness of restorative practice in reducing conflicts in school environments[[1]](#footnote-1); ‘*Mind the Gap*’ a broader systematic review of research on restorative practices in schools[[2]](#footnote-2); an overview from the U.S. National Education Policy Centre, *The Starts and Stumbles of Restorative Justice in Education: Where Do We Go from Here*?[[3]](#footnote-3); and a paper looking at how restorative practices in schools can help mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experiences.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Strong common themes emerge.

* We can say with reasonable confidence that restorative practice helps reduce school exclusions, perhaps especially among groups most likely to be excluded. Restorative practice is seemingly well-received by both staff and students. There is promising evidence that restorative practice improves student-staff relationships and student-student interactions, with many indications that restorative practice contribute to positive childhood experiences and protective factors, for example by promoting empathy, emotional stability and healthy relationships with others. In areas such as effects on young people’s school attainment and feelings of connectedness to school research is inconclusive.
* Weaknesses in research design and implementation support limit the conclusions we can draw. E.g., restorative practice can mean many things but the specific practices being used and studied are often not clearly defined and described in the research. Often there is little support for staff implementation of restorative practices and little attention is paid to how faithfully approaches are implemented. Where results are poor it is therefore not possible to say how far this was due to the approach itself and how far to poor implementation. Implementation takes time, but studies tend to be short term. Some studies examine restorative practice alongside other initiatives, so effects are hard to disentangle. Long-term evaluations involving well-designed experimental trials are much needed but in short supply.
* Implementation matters! In their study of ‘*The Starts and Stumbles of Restorative Justice in Education*,’ Anne Gregory and Katherine Evans suggest ‘five mis-implementation models’ that can cause restorative initiatives to falter or under-deliver. These involve: mandating models top down, without collaborative decision making; narrowly defined approaches which focus only on changing student behaviour; models that are ‘colour blind and power blind’, failing to address systemic injustices; ‘train and hope’ models with little or no in-person follow up; and under-resourced short-term models that expect results without investing enough time, commitment and resources.

1. Constanze Weber, Leen Vereenooghe, *Reducing conflicts in school environments using restorative practices: A systematic review,* International Journal of Educational Research Open 1 (2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Brittany Zakszeski and Laura Rutherford, *Mind the Gap: A Systematic Review of Research on Restorative Practices in Schools*, School Psychology Review 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Anne Gregory, A and Katherine R. Evans, *The Starts and Stumbles of Restorative Justice in Education: Where Do We Go from Here?* Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center (2020). Retrieved 15 Feb 2021 from http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/restorative-justice [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Meghan Breedlove , Jihyeon Choi & Brett Zyromski (2020): *Mitigating the Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences: How Restorative Practices in Schools Support Positive Childhood Experiences and Protective Factors*, The New Educator, DOI: 10.1080/1547688X.2020.1807078 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)