RP-Observe Manual

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(January, 2014)
Description of Restorative Practices

Restorative Practices (RP) aim to a) promote support and connection, b) uphold structure and accountability, and c) integrate fair process and student voice. RP has its roots in the restorative justice movement. In restorative justice, those affected by an infraction or crime come together to identify how people were affected by the incident. Together, they decide how to repair the harm. Similar to efforts outside of the US (Blood & Thorsborne, 2005; McCluskey et al., 2008), Ted Wachtel and colleagues (2009) have adapted restorative justice to the school setting and emphasized a preventative approach, as opposed to the more traditional reactive approach (e.g., reliance on suspension and security measures). From a prevention standpoint, educators and administrators aim to strengthen relationships, increase students’ investment in the community and the rules (build support and social capital) and hold students accountable to one another (implement fair process and structure). The practices themselves also emphasize adolescents’ developmental need for autonomy and decision-making.

Purpose of RP-Observe

RP-Observe and teacher support: Running effective RP circles and conferences can be challenging. Educators need to be supported as they learn to implement high quality RP circles and conferences. Support can come in the form of detailed feedback based on observations of how educators are actually running circles/conferences. Observation should be systematic, which means what an observer notes while watching a circle or conference should be guided by theory and research. The RP-Observe manual is the first tool that provides a systematic way to detect the varying area of strengths and challenges educators experience when they implement RP circles/conferences in their schools. Educators and observers use RP-Observe to guide discussion about ways to improve the circle/conference process.

RP-Observe and program evaluation: Given the emphasis on empirically-based practices in schools, practitioners and researchers need research-supported tools to measure implementation. Without such tools, there is no way to verify that interventions were well implemented or poorly implemented. RP-Observe helps trainers and evaluators develop the skills to observe and reliably rate the quality of RP circles/conferences. The purpose is to open up the “black box” of RP circles/conferences through observation, and shed light on why the RP program may or may not be working.

Three RP Essential Elements

RP-Observe is designed for observers to record the quality of the following three RP “Essential Elements” (See http://www.iirp.edu/pdf/WSCE-Overview.pdf for other essential elements), as defined by the Institute of International Restorative Practices (IIRP):

- **Proactive Circle**: On a daily or weekly basis, students sit in a circle and discuss a topic that helps build community.

- **Responsive Circle**: After a *moderately* serious incident, students sit in a circle and address who has been harmed and what needs to be done to make things right.

- **Restorative Conferences**: After a *serious* incident, an educator runs a structured and/or “scripted” meeting whereby involved students and their supporters systematically follow an accountability and reparation process: they discuss the incident, identify who has been harmed, and jointly develop a solution to make things right.
In proactive circles, educators use structured group discussion and meaningful exchanges while sitting in a circle (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2010). Facing each other, they have frank and open discussions about academic topics (e.g., their academic goals for the day or the semester), emotional topics (e.g., their experiences being the target of teasing), and classroom-specific topics (e.g., what norms of respect they would like to establish in the classroom). The types of topics and specific content are limitless, yet the goal is similar: provide an opportunity for students and educators to learn about one another (and thus respond more appropriately to one another).

In response to a breach of trust, educators implement “Responsive Circles” in which the classroom as a whole discusses an incident with the hopes of restoring community. Responsive circles engage students in the management of conflict that has affected many students or adults in the classroom. Students discuss feelings, identify who has been affected, and develop a plan to repair the harm and prevent future conflict. All people involved in the wrongdoing are expected to participate. This process aims to hold students accountable for breaching trust in the community.

To address more serious incidents, educators conduct “Restorative Conferences.” They use a structured and scripted meeting protocol (Wachtel, O’Connell, & Wachtel, 2010). Accountability for wrongdoing is central to the conferences. Yet, importantly, there is also a focus on reintegrating the wrong-doer into the community rather than stigmatizing him or her. Students are able to bring a supportive person with them to the conference, which is part of the process of restoring their sense of community. The conferences also focus on the emotions of all involved, including a process to help the wrong-doer resolve shame by making amends.

**Theoretical framework guiding RP-Observe**

The fundamental tenets of RP are based on theory about an authoritative and developmentally sensitive approach to child development (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2014; Wachtel, 2012). In the 1960s, Diana Baumrind presented a typology of parenting styles and found that an authoritative style was associated with a range of positive outcomes (Baumrind, 1968, 1991). Baumrind (1991) conceptualized authoritative parenting as highly demanding and highly responsive. Respect for and cooperation with authority, according to Baumrind (1996), should be nurtured along with autonomous reasoning and independent thinking. This is particularly important for adolescents as they seek greater control in decision-making (Smetana & Gaines, 1999) and expect fair and legitimate adult authority (Turiel, 2005). Adolescents are especially sensitive to issues of fairness and autonomy, so that efforts to manage and control their behavior must be tempered with efforts to demonstrate that they are regarded with respect. Baumrind’s research spawned decades of research on authoritative parenting.

In a school setting, Authoritative Discipline Theory suggests than an authoritative approach to discipline combines both firm and fair enforcement of school rules (structure) and a concerted effort to communicate warmth and concern for the well-being of each student as an individual (support; Gregory & Cornell, 2009). According to this theory, neither structure nor support alone is sufficient to maintain a safe and orderly school climate. Students are most responsive to authority and more likely to invest in the community, when they experience a climate of support, high expectations/accountability, and fair process in which their ideas and opinions are taken seriously. In such a climate, student voice is honored and adults express care while remaining firm in shared expectations for behavior. This has implications for creating safer and more
equitable schools in which students of all racial/ethnic groups, sexual identity, and gender expression/identity experience the school as fair and become invested in the school community. The authoritative approach to socializing adolescents infuses proactive, responsive, and restorative RP circles and conferences. As such, *RP-Observe* is comprised of constructs that measure the structure, support, and student voice displayed in circles and conferences.

Using *RP-Observe*, observers rate the *Structure*, *Support*, and *Student Voice* in proactive/responsive circles and restorative conferences. Structure is measured through a single dimension, “Circle rules.” Support is measured through two dimensions: “Positive adult-student respect and responsiveness,” “Positive student-student respect and responsiveness.” Student voice is measured through four dimensions: “Autonomy” “Relevancy,” “Risk-taking,” and “Problem-Solving.” The theoretical constructs guiding *RP-Observe* are as follows:

- **Structure**
  - Circle/Conference rules

- **Support**
  - Positive adult-student respect and responsiveness
  - Positive student-student respect and responsiveness

- **Student Voice**
  - Relevancy
  - Autonomy
  - Risk-taking
  - Problem-Solving
Why is RP-Observe needed? There are a handful of well-established observational tools that have been used to support educators in improving their instruction. For instance, Pianta and colleagues (2008) have created the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and Grossman and colleagues (Grossman et al., 2010) have developed the Protocol for Language Arts Teaching Observation. Both are validated observational instruments used to examine the quality of classroom instruction and support. The tools have a broad function to examine a diverse range of processes in the classroom. Unlike these other tools, RP-Observe is exclusively designed for observations of RP circles and conferences. It cannot be used to observe all types of classroom activities and subject matter, which contrasts with the wider application of other observational systems (e.g., CLASS, Pianta & Hamre, 2009). Given the targeted purpose of RP-Observe, the description of each observed construct is focused on the educator and student behaviors an observer would see during RP circles and conferences.

RP-Observe aims to capture processes specific to proactive, responsive, and restorative circles and conferences. Namely, students in circles and conferences take risks by disclosing meaningful and personal information and, in turn, students and educators respond with empathy and acceptance. In theory, through this exchange, students and educators can get to know each other, build trust with one another, and, ultimately develop a shared sense of community and accountability. RP-Observe aims to capture this process of risk-taking, disclosure, and acceptance. RP-Observe coding has also been shown to be distinct from CLASS when circles were double coded using each observational system. In a small sample of coded proactive and responsive circles, the RP-Observe codes were not correlated with the CLASS codes.

Addition readings and resources on restorative practices
International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), see the following website: http://www.saferstanerschools.org/
References
Gregory A., Clawson, K., Davis, A., & Gerewitz, J. (2014). The promise of restorative practices to transform teacher-student relationships and achieve equity in school discipline. For a special issue on Restorative Justice in the *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*.

Acknowledgements
We would like to thank the NoVo Foundation for supporting the development of the *RP-Observe* Manual. We would also like to thank members of the International Institute for Restorative Practices for their feedback on the content of the manual. We also appreciate educators and students who participated in the research to help forward our understanding of high quality circles.

Additional information
A psychometric technical report discussing reliability and validity of *RP-Observe* dimensions can be obtained by request to Dr. Anne Gregory at annegreg@rutgers.edu. Version: August 1, 2013

For the complete *RP-Observe* Manual, please contact Anne Gregory.