

  
**Education Review**      **Reseñas Educativas**  
**Resenhas Educativas**

May 6, 2020

ISSN 1094-5296

**Reimer, K. E. (2019). *Adult intentions, student perceptions: How restorative justice is used in schools to control and engage*. Information Age Publishing.**

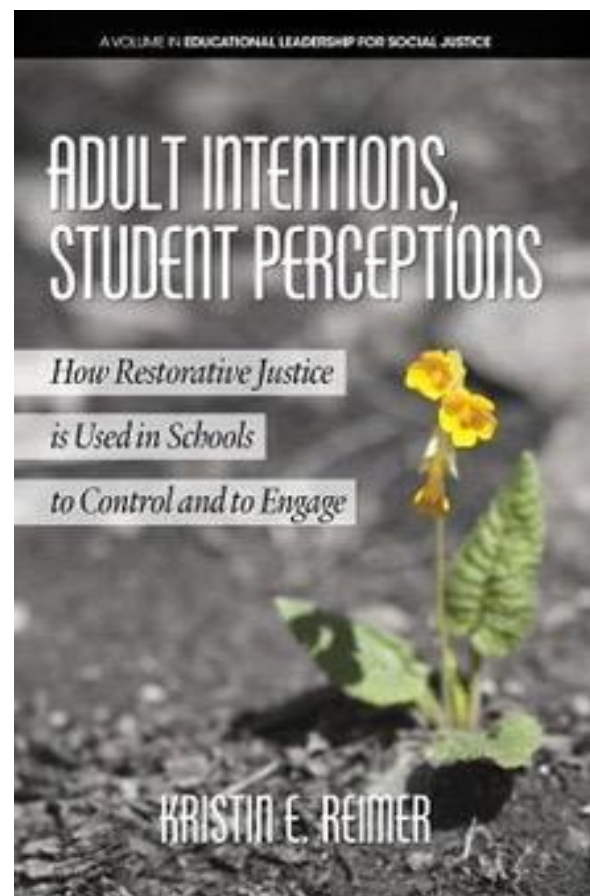
**Pp. 187**

**ISBN: 978-64113-504-7**

**Reviewed by Karlie M. Garcia & Lisa S. Romero  
California State University Sacramento  
United States**

Not long ago restorative justice in education was relatively unheard of, but now it is hard to have a conversation about school discipline without restorative justice being mentioned. An increasing number of books are being published on restorative justice in schools, many are “how-to” guides and markedly fewer offer critical, scholarly examinations of theory and effectiveness (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Winn, 2018). In spite of its popularity, it is not clear to many what exactly restorative justice is, what it promises, or what it is intended to do. Is restorative justice just another discipline tool to control or correct student behavior? Or, is restorative justice something bigger, transcending discipline, aimed at fundamentally changing the nature of relationships in schools?

Kristin E. Reimer’s book, *Adult Intentions, Student Perceptions: How Restorative Justice is Used in Schools to Control and to Engage*, takes on these and other important questions. Reimer offers, in this relatively short book, not just a discussion of restorative justice as a means of discipline, but a more complete and thorough examination of what restorative justice might



Garcia, K. M., & Romero, L. S. (2020, May 6). Review of *Adult intentions, student perceptions: How restorative justice is used in schools to control and to engage*, by K. E. Reimer. *Education Review*, 27.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/er.v27.2815>

mean in schools and how it might be a vehicle to transform not just discipline, but schools themselves.

Reimer is not only a scholar, but also a proponent and practitioner of restorative justice. Her book, drawn from her dissertation research, provides a cross-cultural examination of the implementation and practice of restorative justice. Her research examined two very different schools with two very different approaches, one in Alberta, Canada, and one in eastern Scotland. She begins by providing a history of the two regions to set the background for the very different philosophies and applications of restorative justice. Throughout the book, Reimer provides careful and detailed descriptions of the two schools, incorporating both student and staff perspectives.

Reimer provides two general approaches to restorative justice that she frames as opposite ends of a continuum. The first focuses on restorative justice as discipline, or simply another tool for responding to individual student misbehavior, which represents the approach in the Scottish school. She labels this an *affirmative* approach, also referred to in her subtitle as restorative justice used to “control.” The other approach, which Reimer thinks of as the *transformational* form of restorative justice, is the “engage” form practiced in the Canadian school. Reimer clearly favors the engagement form of restorative justice, seeing it as a way to change schools, create positive relationships, and make students a fully integrated part of the school.

Reimer expands this position through detailed case studies of each school. She provides important regional and cultural context as a backdrop to restorative practices at Rocky Creek Elementary School in Alberta, Canada, by outlining the history of Alberta and the provincial education system. In Canada, responsibility for education lies with

the province where the school is located. In 2012, Rocky Creek enrolled a diverse group of just more than 300 students. It served grades one through six, and offered half-day early education programming for students with special needs and behavior learning assistance programming. Students were from 40 different countries with the predominant groups being Arabic, Somalian, and Aboriginal. English was the second language for 80% of the families. The collaborative spirit of the school was supported through the implementation of the school rules “ROCKY,” which stood for: “Remember to listen, Own your actions, Care for others, Keep your hands to yourself, You can be a leader” (p. 58).

Reimer discussed the Canadian educators’ intentions and student perceptions of restorative justice through observations, questionnaires, learning circles, and student co-researcher interviews. It is clear that most of the educators took a comprehensive approach to restorative justice, and sought to empower students, rather than merely change student behavior. Reimer found that students trusted the adults in their school, had faith in their ability to enforce school rules fairly (e.g., ROCKY), and were confident that problems at school would be resolved through student teamwork with adult guidance. Interestingly, in spite of the school’s strong focus on restorative justice, students were not familiar with the words “restorative justice” and did not appear to know that it was a school priority.

Turning her attention to Royal Mills High School in Scotland, Reimer set the Scottish context. Scotland’s education structure is a national system, curriculum is delivered by local authorities under the guidance of the Scottish government and the public body, Education Scotland. A key difference between Scotland and Canada is that Scotland’s restorative justice ideas are imported as an approach to discipline and not seen as part of a larger social project. This approach contrasts

with the Canadian approach, where restorative justice resonates with native cultures. Royal Mills served a little more than 500 predominantly White pupils in 2012, and was a public, non-denominational, six-year comprehensive school. A key department at Royal Mills was the Pupil Support department, which was an internal unit responsible for behavioral support, guidance, and learning support services. The department helped support pupils who had difficulty coping with school life due to social, emotional, or behavioral issues, and also worked with staff to teach them how to promote positive relationships and good behavior.

The intention behind implementation at Royal Mills was to “model or teach pupils to behave a different way to: behave, deal with their emotions, handle conflicts and issues, and take responsibility for their own actions” (p. 126). Some Royal Mills educators did voice concerns about the new restorative approach, principally, that it was too lenient and ineffective. Reimer found that pupil-pupil and adult-pupil relationships were a focus at Royal Mills. As for adult-pupil relationships, students felt more connected to the Pupil Support department staff as trusted adults than the teachers. But, the students were confident in the ability of adults to help resolve conflicts. Overall, a blend of social control and social engagement were understood and used by educators, which aligned with the pupils’ reported experience.

Comparing the two schools, Reimer concluded that different influences played into the type of restorative justice that was implemented and effective in each of the schools. She found that a key element in the perceived success of the restorative approach at both schools was the extent to which adult intentions and student perceptions of restorative justice matched. When the intentions of the adults – implicitly or explicitly – matched the expectations of the students, the restorative practices were more

likely to have a positive impact on how students experienced school. In essence, Reimer concludes that it may come down to relationships, and alignment between educator and student perceptions and intentions. Though she still favors a transformative view of restorative justice, with its more comprehensive focus on engagement, development, reflection, and facilitation, she does not reject the more modest affirmative approach to behavior adopted in the Scottish school.

In this informative and authoritative qualitative case study, Reimer immersed herself as a participant researcher for an extended period of time in each school and purposely included student voice, so often missing from education research (O’Malley, Voight, & Izu, 2014). As a result, she is able to understand and convey the daily, lived experiences of both adults and students. It is also worth noting that both schools in the study are small and in many ways unique institutions, leading one to wonder how generalizable her findings may be. Also, given the popularity of restorative justice in U.S. schools, and particularly in large urban institutions struggling to manage behavior, curtail exclusionary discipline, and mitigate a racially-biased discipline gap (Losen, 2014), we would have liked to see such a school included. However, in fairness, this is more a limitation of the case study method than of Reimer’s study itself. It is not possible to develop the depth of understanding and insight that this method provides and at the same time examine a broad range of schools.

*Adult Intentions, Student Perceptions* was authored by a researcher and practitioner who understands the day-to-day reality of schools. A variety of audiences would benefit from this book. Students in teacher training programs could use it to heighten their understanding of restorative approaches to school discipline and the overarching importance of student-teacher relationships. Teachers and school

administrators could use it as a starting point to understand and discuss how restorative justice might be implemented, and the difference between a more narrow discipline-focused affirmative approach versus a more encompassing transformative approach. Likewise, this book could be a starting point for policy makers who want to consider ways

that restorative justice might be part of efforts to transform schools and discipline more fundamentally. Though her examples are Canadian and Scottish, her ideas are more than applicable to any school setting interested in improving relationships between students and adults.

---

## References

- Evans, K., & Vaandering, D. (2016). *The little book of restorative justice in education: Fostering responsibility, healing, and hope in schools*. Simon and Schuster.
- Losen, D.J. (Ed.). (2014). *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- O'Malley, M., Voight, A., & Izu, J. A. (2014). Engaging students in school climate improvement. *Handbook of positive psychology in schools* (pp. 329-346). Taylor & Francis.
- Winn, M. T. (2018). *Justice on both sides: Transforming education through restorative justice*. Harvard Education Press.

## About the Reviewers

**Karlie Garcia** is a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership at California State University Sacramento. She earned a Master's degree in Education with an emphasis in Curriculum and Instruction and a Bachelor's in Child Development from California State University Chico. Garcia is an All-American runner in Cross Country and Track and Field.


**Lisa S. Romero** is an Associate Professor in the Doctorate of Educational Leadership Program in the College of Education at California State University Sacramento. Her research interests include trust and school climate, student discipline/discipline gap, equity and school improvement particularly for historically marginalized groups.



**Education Review**

**Reseñas Educativas**

**Resenhas Educativas**

 *Education Review/ Reseñas Educativas/ Resenhas Educativas* is supported by the Scholarly Communications Group at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University. Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*. Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and ***Education Review***, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or ***Education Review***. ***Education Review*** is published by the Scholarly Communications Group of the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University.

**Disclaimer:** The views or opinions presented in book reviews are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of *Education Review*.

Connect with *Education Review* on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Education-Review/178358222192644>) and on Twitter @EducReview