



Winn, M. T. (2018). *Justice on both sides: Transforming education through restorative justice*. Harvard Education Press.

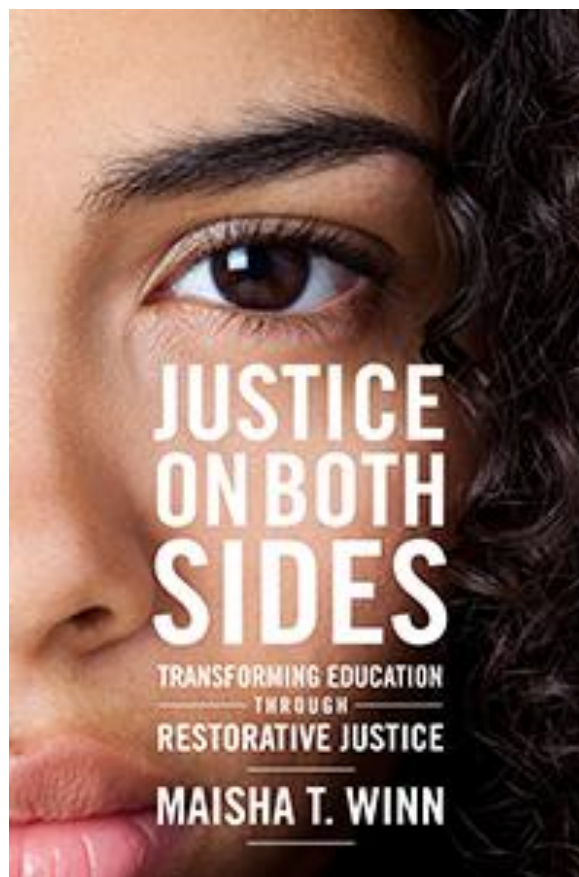
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Restorative justice is an increasingly popular approach being adopted by schools across the country. This approach shifts the focus from a punitive mindset focused on punishing wrongdoing (e.g., suspension and expulsion) to a focus on building community, strengthening relationships, and understanding the root causes of students' actions (Zehr, 2002). Yet, as recent local implementation efforts in Wisconsin and Colorado illustrate, school districts face a host of challenges when attempting to make the shift toward restorative justice (Brogan, 2019; Fried, 2019). In a recent article published in *Education Week*, a former Denver teacher recounts her school's struggles with restorative justice:

Administrators and staff had little to no formal training in how to lead restorative conversations [...] nor did we have the outside partnerships, therapy services, or funding associated with comprehensive and effective restorative justice systems. (Fried, 2019)



Despite such challenges, restorative justice remains a worthy aim and has the potential to reverse racially disproportionate discipline associated with what has been termed the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2005; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeire, & Valentine, 2009; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014).

In *Justice on Both Sides*, Maisha T. Winn takes on this important topic by providing a critical, theoretical foundation for restorative justice in schools grounded in empirical research. Building on Fania Davis’s (2016) work, Winn develops a theory of restorative justice that crucially names the history of racial injustice in the US. Key to Winn’s framing is an understanding of restorative justice that is worthy of its name. Rather than providing a “cookbook” recipe of practices for teachers to follow, Winn contends that restorative justice requires a mindset or paradigm shift in how educators conceive of and respond to students. In line with this argument, Winn makes an important distinction between “restorative justice” and “restorative practices.” Winn critiques schools that rely on the language of “practices,” because she argues that the concept of “justice” requires a deeper commitment to “disrupt[ing] cycles of injustice and inequality” (p. 7). Similar to critiques of culturally relevant pedagogy implementation efforts (Anderson, Bullock, & Powell, 2017), Winn suggests that the true meaning of restorative justice is undermined when teachers and others lack an understanding of its conceptual underpinnings.

Winn advances this line of thinking in subsequent chapters. In Chapter 3, she traces four nested pedagogical stances for teachers who want to engage in restorative justice work, including: 1) History Matters, 2) Race Matters, 3) Justice Matters, and 4) Language Matters. Here, Winn develops a critical approach to restorative justice pedagogy by charging educators with confronting structures

of domination that have historically harmed Black youth, in particular, in their efforts to build community and solve conflict in their classrooms. These pedagogical stances are sure to be useful to educators and researchers, alike, as they seek to understand what “counts” as a restorative justice pedagogy that lives up to its name.

Winn marries the theoretical with the empirical in later chapters, drawing on participant observation and interviews with teachers and students in what she calls “Kennedy High School.” She focuses on the perspective of Student Circle Keepers (SCKs), in particular, or students who are charged with facilitating restorative justice circles. She demonstrates how SCKs understood restorative justice as a means of learning more about their peers, helping them solve conflicts, and creating more equitable school communities. Winn’s analysis of teacher perspectives allows for complexity and contradictions, rather than neat and tidy findings. She paints in-depth “pedagogical portraits” of several educators working at Kennedy High while also applying her ideal pedagogical stances to their approaches. Here, Winn offers an honest look at where educators’ strengths and weaknesses fell in relation to the pedagogical stances. History Matters and Language Matters were strongly exhibited by the educators, while Race Matters and Justice Matters were not as strongly addressed or leveraged.

One important challenge Winn draws from her empirical findings is that the school remained entangled in punitive systems while aiming to do restorative work. For example, Kennedy High referred students to Youth Court, which Winn notes depended on criminal justice discourse. Interestingly, Winn’s young participants did not view Youth Court as contrasting sharply with restorative justice. The relationship between punitive and restorative approaches is perhaps illustrated most vividly in the involvement of Kennedy

High “education resource officer,” Officer Gold, who is tasked with restorative justice work at the school. This officer was responsible for recommending restorative justice to Kennedy High, challenging a punitive system while operating within the criminal justice system. While Winn does not interrogate this issue directly in the book, Erica Turner and I have argued elsewhere that police involvement with restorative justice signals an extension of the school-to-jail nexus, ultimately reinforcing the penal system rather than challenging it (Turner & Beneke, 2019). Certainly, if police officers are to be present in schools, it is preferable that they have training in restorative justice. Yet, this issue raises broader questions about how restorative justice work can challenge punitive systems while often remaining within punitive frameworks.

Winn explores the contradictions and challenges of restorative justice implementation further in Chapter 5, with a focus on the unequal burden born by girls and women of color for doing the work of restorative justice. While a growing body of research has examined how interlacing gender and racial dynamics shape students’ experiences of punitive school discipline (Crenshaw, Priscilla, & Jyoti, 2015; Morris, 2016; Wun, 2015), Winn discusses the gender and racial dynamics that shape student and teacher experiences with restorative justice. Winn shows how the responsibilities of SKCs were compounded by limited commitment on the part of others in the school and lack of true decision-making power. Moreover, she highlights the experience of African American SKCs, who noticed racial disparities in student referrals for restorative circles despite the fact that restorative justice was intended to address such disparities. Women educators of color also felt overburdened by the demands of restorative justice in Kennedy High when balancing it with their regular work. This chapter raises questions about who ought to be responsible for restorative justice work,

whether fixing racial disparities in the school should be the responsibility of youth who are most marginalized by them, and what role adults should play in this process. It also suggests that racial and gender dynamics, organizational structure, and resources (e.g., training and workload) affect educators’ ability to build restorative communities.

While Winn notes that teacher mindsets are key to the success of restorative justice, the book could have benefited from deeper exploration of the role of context in shaping practice. The empirical evidence Winn presents suggests the importance of material (e.g., funding) and other resources (e.g., trainings, personnel) to restorative justice. For example, Winn notes that “teachers were overwhelmed, and right so” due to their already full workloads (p. 140). Further, she highlights one teacher who “struggled to resist deficit discourses of colleagues who had not been trained in restorative justice” (p. 14). Despite these challenges, Kennedy High appears to be relatively well-resourced. The school had a partnership with TRANSFORM, a non-profit organization that provided professional development around restorative justice implementation in schools. Yet, many schools are likely to face calls for restorative justice in more resource-strapped schools and may not have access to quality professional development. Moreover, while TRANSFORM took an explicit racial justice approach, other restorative justice trainings may be less likely to engage teachers in critical dialogue around justice. Like the former teacher in Denver, educators in other school systems may lack outside partnerships, therapy services, funding, and training to support the successful implementation of restorative justice (Fried, 2019). Resources, including access to and type of professional development, are likely to be a central issue in the implementation of restorative justice efforts.

Finally, although perhaps outside of the scope of this book, Winn does not interrogate

the way that restorative justice is integrated with other forms of positive behavioral approaches. Increasingly, schools and districts are adopting a bundle of approaches, often placed under the moniker of “restorative practices,” such as social-emotional learning, trauma-informed care, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (Ispa-Landa, 2017). Moreover, as Winn demonstrates, these approaches are often implemented in punitive contexts that maintain suspension and expulsion policies and youth court programs. Scholarship on policy enactment provides one perspective for considering how such policies, and strands of policies, ultimately come to be enacted in schools, and how this process is shaped by material and other resources (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). Future comparative studies may also provide insight into the way that schools come to enact such “restorative practices” differently, and how this is shaped by school context.

Winn is to be commended for this theoretical and empirical contribution to the field that will be of interest to both educators and researchers. *Justice in Both Sides* provides much needed clarity about the meaning of “restorative justice” and its underlying commitment to dismantling structural inequities. This clarity is particularly important at a time when restorative justice is gaining momentum, and as Winn suggests, schools and districts have the potential to end inequitable school discipline practices. The book bridges the theory of restorative justice with teacher practice while highlighting tensions that practitioners are likely to encounter. For researchers, Winn’s book provides plenty of inspiration for future studies that examine the link between teachers’ perspectives on restorative justice and their enactment of it across school sites.

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About the Reviewer


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