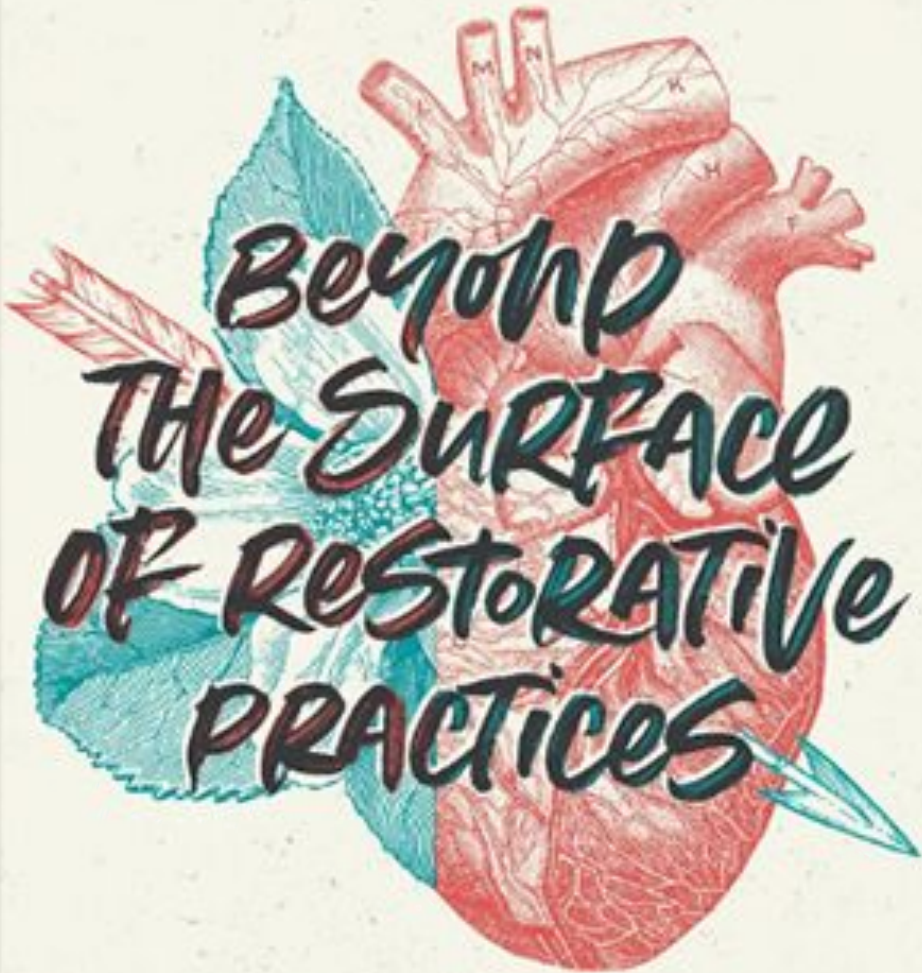




BEYOND THE SURFACE OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

BUILDING A CULTURE OF EQUITY,
CONNECTION, AND HEALING

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INTRODUCTION

We are the sum of all experiences—our own and those that we carry in our ancestral line. We are the beautiful and joyous moments as well as the mundane. We are also those moments that live in the shadows of violence, despair, heartbreak, and disappointment. These experiences form the way we see and walk in the world.

There is a proverb that states that if we stand tall it is because we stand on the shoulders of many ancestors. Dr. Sharon Grant taught me that when we join in relationships, we become a part of each other's bloodlines; this happens because we and generations after us are changed by all that we pour into each other. For this reason, I believe our ancestors include our relatives—those who share our blood—and all of those who provide us with love, support, challenge, and wisdom in this life.

And while we stand on the shoulders of our ancestors, we cannot forget to put ourselves in a position to elevate future ancestors: our children. Your future ancestors are the children in your home and in your classroom, the children who greet you as you enter your school campus, even the children who wave at you in the grocery store from the seat of a shopping cart. They are the children sitting in social service offices with their parents, in detention centers separated from their families as they await asylum, living in foster homes, and sleeping in cars or on the street wrapped in the arms of parents or siblings. We have a responsibility to our past and future ancestors to leave this world a better place than when we entered it. Once we accept our place in this circle of life, we can start to take responsibility for ourselves, our lives, and our future and become the positive change needed.

As educators, we all enter our profession with the valuable and honorable mission of taking responsibility for the learning of our world's youth. But that mission can prove to feel impossible and overwhelming when so many challenges push against us, our students, and our communities. The challenges we face in schools are as diverse as what we experience in life. Life is hard, exhilarating, boring, hopeful, beautiful, scary, blissful, and frustrating for educators and students alike.

The reality is that schoolchildren, educators charged with their learning, and district leaders are all carrying harm and trauma that has been passed down through our system and through our families. As a human species, we have a tremendous amount of work to do regarding racism, poverty, and gender equality. The way to a better world starts with each of us.

I am a forty-something-year-old Chicana, mother, and educator with an intimate understanding of human behavior and the need for healing. I mention my ethnicity and gender because these two factors have great implications in the way we perceive and interact with others. We still live in a world where our Black and Brown children are more at risk to be killed, to not graduate from high school, to live in poverty, and to be pushed into the criminal justice system. Historical trauma and systemic oppression continue to create barriers for our communities of color.

So how do we meet the needs of self, family, students, staff, and our communities with so many different and opposing requirements and desires? How do we push beyond the skin we inhabit and the formative experiences we've lived through in order to meet the needs of those who are so very different? How do we support social, emotional, physical, and academic growth? How do we create a space where students, staff, parents, and community are not just impacted positively but healed and transformed?

We do it by getting back to the ways of our ancestors. For centuries, across the world, our ancestors gathered in circles to create, problem solve, strategize, advise, and hold others accountable. We are conditioned to gather in circles, driven by our need for belonging, connection, safety, play, creativity, and communication. This way of being has come back to us in the form of restorative practices through the restorative justice movement that began in the 1970s. Restorative practices provide educators with a framework for understanding and responding to the actions of students. It also provides educators and students with the space and structure to connect with each other through reflection, listening, and dialogue. Throughout this book I will share different strategies for how to approach and implement these practices.

The honor of sharing these practices does not belong solely to me. While I continue to work with students, educators, and parents, I stepped out of the classroom in 2006, so I invited my spiritual brother, former colleague, and dear friend Pedro Terrazas, to join me by providing the lens of a classroom practitioner. He and I spent many Saturdays together over coffee talking about our work and how to best articulate this practice in words. Pedro is a restorative practices specialist who works with students, parents, and teachers in Chula Vista, California. He's also very connected to the ceremonial ways of our Indigenous ancestors and engages in this work as much more than an alternative approach to discipline. He understands that the work of restorative practices is about a deep connection to the self and others. His voice and experience will be shared alongside the work presented in these chapters in sections called Highlights from the Classroom.

Dr. Enjolie Lourdes Lafaurie and I met in Arizona when I was doing work with the Indigenous women's collective of which she is a founder. We immediately connected. What started out as a professional relationship deepened when I became her professional and personal development coach, and the relationship quickly moved into friendship and an exchange of ideas and practices. While I supported her in realizing her professional and personal goals, she supported me in connecting with my emotions. She is a phenomenal communicator who understands the importance of connection and building relationships. During one of our weekly conversations, she mentioned that she was revising her active-listening lecture, and we began a conversation that led to her contribution to this book.

Dr. Carolyn Gery is a dear friend I met in 2012 when we were both principals of charter schools who had been selected as fellows in the National Institute for Latino School Leaders (NILSL) with UnidosUS (formerly the National Council of La Raza). The NILSL experience gave us the opportunity to collaborate on national-educational-policy recommendations and to serve on panels focused on meeting the needs of Latinos and English learners. I was taken with Carolyn's vocation to research and analyze trauma and resilience.

We later worked together when I sat on the board of a large school system where she served as a chief. Her groundbreaking work there included developing early-warning systems for the high-risk student population the schools served. This allowed for a prescriptive response that culminated in an individual academic and social-emotional plan for each student that detailed the strengths of the student and leveraged those strengths to work on challenge areas. Using a social-emotional plan, a student who is able to persevere and work through multiple stressors, for example, can leverage that ability to apply to feelings of frustration when working with math. Students were then provided a network of support for integrating their social and emotional competencies with their academic competencies. Carolyn offered her lens in trauma for this book as well.

With the contributions of Pedro, Enjolie, and Carolyn, I offer this book to you from my heart, and with the best intentions for you, your family, students, staff, and all those with whom you interact. Throughout this book, we'll share terms with you that are rooted in our beliefs, derived from our culture, and used as part of restorative practices.

There are already several books and training tools explaining the methodology needed to implement restorative practices in classrooms. My intention is to offer even more—going beyond the surface of restorative practices to help you create the space for healing not only in the classroom but in your school systems, homes, and communities. I welcome and thank you for creating this space for healing and for having the courage and commitment to do this transformational work.

-CHAPTER ONE-

Restorative Heartset and Mindset

Why We Need Restorative Practices

In my twenty-one years as an educator, I have witnessed time and time again the power that teachers, staff, and leaders can have on educational systems and, most importantly, on students. Human beings are social by nature, and we rely heavily on our relationships with others to form who we are in this world. We can all turn to our childhoods and recognize that who we have become is largely a result of our experiences with those who raised us (or were supposed to). When we were adolescents, our friends also had a tremendous influence on us. As adults, we continue to be shaped by our relationships with others. We learn so much from them—how to behave, communicate, and speak. Our values are based on this learning. Just as love, joy, celebration, and achievement are a part of our human experience, so are pain, loss, and fear.

We need restorative practices because of this reality. Many of us walk in this life without having healed from the pain, loss, or fear that we received in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Many of us also carry historical and ancestral trauma that, if unhealed, will be passed down to our future generations, causing continuous pain through a cycle of trauma. Healing and learning from our pain and trauma are possible, but only when we are willing and able to reflect on and own all of our experiences—the good, the bad, and the ugly. The truth? This is tremendously hard and scary work. But when we don't do it, we continue to keep ourselves from reaching our true potential for goodness.

Restorative practices provide a framework for being, reflecting, for-giving, and growing. We need this framework because there are so many of us who are carrying trauma that can show itself as fear, hurt, anger, disappointment, blame, distrust, control, self-aggrandizing, insecurity, and so much more. When we don't face these truths within ourselves, we continue to inflict our pain onto others.

Restorative practices are transformational in that they also offer a way of being through which systems and organizations can heal. Educational systems and those who work in them have a great deal of influence on students—on who they are and who they are becoming. Adults in school systems deserve the opportunity to grow and heal from the personal and professional harm that has occurred in their lives. By engaging and becoming truly restorative, teachers, leaders, and school staff can then offer this transformational way of being to students, parents, and their community. Imagine every person being able to communicate their remorse and acknowledge the suffering they inflicted—and ask for forgiveness and the ability to repair the damage. In order for this to happen, adults in school systems need to have the opportunity to grow and heal from the personal and professional harm that has occurred in their lives.

Public education systems carry the tremendous responsibility of providing a free basic education to all students. It is time for the United States to step up and guarantee each student a high-quality education regardless of their zip code or learning needs. The American public education system struggles to meet the needs of our Black and Brown students and has therefore created deep inequities in schools that continue in society.

Our school systems are in crisis. The struggle to ensure equity for our students becomes deeper, darker, and more difficult with each passing day. Why is equity needed? Our school systems were created to promote the ideals of white supremacy, leaving our students who are Black, Brown, Indigenous, low-income, or disabled without the access, opportunity, and sense of belonging of their white peers.

Equity is not a destination; it is a journey that includes institutional reckoning and transformation through healing. The transformation of our system can only happen when we accept the reality of why and how the system was formed and how it has harmed generations of students. Restorative practices provide a compassionate, authentic, and loving way to do this hard work.

Systemic oppression exists as a result of prejudice, discrimination, and racism fueled by microaggressions and implicit biases. This has created inequity that has resulted in academic disparities; the school-to-prison pipeline; generational poverty; and poor mental, physical, and emotional health. To focus on equity requires a transformation of the systems that created the inequity. This transformation must be centered in healing and connection and begins with resetting the foundation upon which these systems are built. The work of resetting the foundations must be collective and include the voices of all those in the community. Then the community must commit to individual, communal, and systemic healing and connection through culturally responsive and culture-sustaining practices; trauma-aware and -informed care; an intentional development of resiliency; and the embracing of restorative mindsets, heartsets, and actions. In order for this transformation to continue, the work must be consistently monitored and adjusted by the community as a whole. This is hard work, but it is so very possible. And we are all worth the work.