



**Departement Maatskaplike Werk
Department of Social Work**

Building socially just and inclusive school communities through a restorative justice approach

Johnnie Hay
Department Psychology of Education, Faculty of Education, UFS
hayjf@ufs.ac.za

Roelf Reyneke
Department of Social Work, Faculty of the Humanities, UFS

Erna Liebenberg
Free State Department of Education, Xhariep District

South Africa is currently struggling to overcome the societal injustices of the past and present, against the background of the African (?) phenomenon and bane of “the winner takes all” (Dowden, 2005). This phenomenon established itself during colonisation by the Dutch and British, continued with bigger intensity during apartheid, and is unfortunately perpetuated through various means by the current government. One of the most serious consequences of subjugation (of majorities and minorities) in South Africa during the centuries has been that violence (and violation of others’ rights) in various forms seems to have become part of the psyche of the South African nation. Schools have unfortunately not escaped these violations.

Evidence suggests that the punitive approach in schools is much less successful than a restorative justice approach to overcome minor and major violations by learners (Ashley & Burke, 2008). The latter implies a philosophy based on a set of principles that guide the response to violations, conflict and harm – which values healing over hurting and inclusion over exclusion (Morrison, 2005). The core element of restorative justice in the school environment holds that safe and quality schools are consistently developed via reaffirming, repairing and rebuilding of relationships (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007).

In this review paper, we take a look at recent literature on the restorative justice approach (and actions) as applied in schools worldwide, in preparation for a study to be implemented in the Xhariep District of the Free State. It appears as if implementation of this approach in South African schools is somewhat behind other countries, despite the excellent start we made in other areas such as with the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (Howard, 2009).

The paper is rounded off by relating restorative justice to the broader endeavour of social justice.

