THE USE OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE TO BUILD DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL PARTICIPATION – A PERSPECTIVE FROM SINGAPORE

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Abstract - The appearance of Restorative Justice (RJ) in Singapore in the late 1990s was not without its share of controversies. RJ values such as 'democracy', 'compassion', 'social support', 'forgiveness' and 'non-dominated speech' (Braithwaite &Strang, 2001) at first glance, seems oddly placed in a State that has historically utilised legislations to centralise its political control and (micro)managed its citizens in its pursuit of economic success. This presentation draws on data collected from the first-ever independent empirical research on the use of RJ in Singapore schools. Relying mainly on the use of in-depths interviews with students and teachers from two Secondary Schools, this study examined how the two schools' contexts and cultural demands affected the potential of RJ to build civil participation and democracy. The research shows that the specific context of the school is essential to the analysis of participants' ability to engage in RJ processes such as class conferences and circles. Rather than utilizing RJ as a tool to teach civil participation and democracy, the study found that RJ was predominantly used as a disciplinary tool in order to uphold existing social norms.

Keywords - Restorative Justice, Restorative Practices, School, Discipline, Class conferences, Circles