Intentional Planning for Social-Emotional Learning

A Study of Applied Restorative Practices in the High School Setting

A Doctoral Capstone Project

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

Department of Education

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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June 2025

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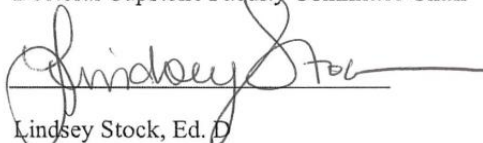We hereby approve the capstone of

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Dedication

The road to completion of this capstone journey has been a process which included the love and encouragement of multiple special people in my life. I would like to dedicate this work to those who have provided unwavering support throughout this doctoral project development.

To my husband, Jason, who has been my rock through all of life's ups and downs for thirty years: You believed in me and stood by my side, demonstrating patience and unconditional love that allowed me the time and space needed to complete this study.

To my children, Olivia and Carter, the two people on this earth who make my life complete: My hope is that my work and persistence to accomplish attaining my doctoral degree will inspire you both to chase your dreams and set goals to aim higher than you ever thought possible.

To my parents, Lawrence and Nancy, who taught me at a very young age to never give up: Because of you both, I am driven to work hard and to lead with compassion and love. To my father, you have inspired me to think outside of the box, to be creative when faced with a challenge, and to keep some resources always in reserve. To my mother, you have shown me the value of a kind heart, a gentle spirit, and you taught me that my only limits are the size of my imagination. You have both always believed in me and for that I will be forever grateful.

To my siblings, Laurie, Ginny, and Brad, who have all championed for my success to see this action research through to the end: Knowing that you were all silently cheering for me in the background was paramount.

To my extended family, Elmer and Marcia who encouraged and supported me.

Acknowledgements

With sincere appreciation and gratitude, I wish to acknowledge:

Anne Fisher, Director of Student Services in the Reading School District, who introduced me to restorative practices and provided me with the opportunity to serve as a restorative practice facilitator in the Reading High School.

Dr. Stephanie Williams, internal chair for this capstone research project at Pennsylvania Western University. You have encouraged, supported, guided, and led me through this entire experience, never losing faith that I could finish this action research and produce a high quality comprehensive final product.

Marti Mando, Director, Edinboro Writing Center, thank you for your editing expertise. Your support and guidance throughout this process was invaluable.

Joannette Shurer, a dear friend whom I met through work. When you moved on to new adventures in your life, the distance did not separate us. You remained a constant positive influence in my life and always helped me to see perspectives from angles I may have not otherwise considered. I have a deep-rooted appreciation for our friendship and your guidance. Thank you.

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Abstract

This action research explores intentional planning for social-emotional learning through applied restorative practices at the Reading High School. The Reading High School has a total enrollment of 4,836 students split between one large high school referred to as the "Castle on the Hill" and three much smaller satellite campuses. This study of applied proactive restorative approaches through the teaching of circle lessons in primarily ninth grade science classrooms targeted three questions. How do intentional restorative practices in classrooms affect student attendance? How do restorative practices and proactive "circles" impact classroom behavior? What is the correlation between restorative practices and a supportive learning environment?

This mixed methods study includes both quantitative and qualitative data collected over a ten-week period through tracking forms, surveys, and interviews. The triangulated data of the study reveal that attendance has improved, although it was somewhat inconsistent, and the social-emotional climate in classrooms did improve as evidenced by survey metrics and reported student perceptions from the five participants in the study. Additionally, it is noted that behavior concerns may require interventions that are targeted, such as proactive restorative circles.

The use of restorative approaches in the high school setting, such as proactive circles, is validated by the findings in this research. There is a need for tailored support to expand and sustain intentional restorative practice implementation across all classrooms. Formal training coupled with refresher training in restorative practices for teachers and staff would provide a stronger foundation for increased use of restorative practices in classrooms.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Our world includes more ways for humans to communicate with one another than ever before in history (Chen et al., 2012). Opportunities for communication in a variety of forms exist for people of every age. Despite these avenues to connect people to one another, the lack of human connection is at an all-time high. Innately, most people have a desire to be needed and value the need for belonging in social circles (McInerney, 2023). Because so much of today's communication originates through electronic devices which lack the human element, challenges have surfaced with relationship building. Kumar et al. (2024) explained that digital distractions from the internet have impacted learning and students' health both physically and mentally. Fernandez et al. (2024) noted that, in today's classroom, email and Google Classroom push notifications and cell phones and Chromebooks aid in teaching and communication. The use of tools and electronic devices impacts the overall educational experience (Fernandez et al., 2024).

Background

In our schools, educating people about how to communicate effectively and develop relationships is a growing need. Relationship building is no longer a skill set that all people have and execute, but rather one that needs to be taught, practiced, and refined (Costello et al., 2010). Restorative practice is a social science which focuses on relationship building and repairing harm that has occurred between people (Costello et al., 2019). When applied in schools, these practices can impact many areas of the educational landscape. Restorative practice is a shift in mindset and a way of being with people that prioritize relationships. In school classrooms, the implementation of

restorative practices has the potential to lead to improved student behavior, increased

attendance, and a social environment that is more positive for the students and the teacher

(Hickman, 2023). Restorative practices in the classroom focus on building a positive,

inclusive, and supportive environment that emphasizes healthy relationships,

accountability, and conflict resolution. Rather than focusing solely on discipline or

punishment, restorative practices aim to address harm, repair relationships, and promote a

sense of community. Evans and Vaandering (2016) found that "nurturing healthy

relationships is an essential element for just and equitable learning environments, as well

as for addressing harm and conflict" (p. 60). Understanding students is a key aspect of

effective teaching and learning. It involves recognizing their unique needs, backgrounds,

and learning styles, and using that knowledge to create a supportive and engaging

learning environment.

Mitchell and Bradshaw (2013) supported that the success of students in schools

depends on their ability to thrive in their environments. A necessary part of a student's

success is their ability to succeed academically. There are many factors that contribute to

a student's ability to achieve and one of those factors has to do with a student's social-

emotional state of mind. Cobb and Krownapple (2019) examined that there is a need for

student investment in strategies and approaches that will lead to a sense of belonging,

equity, and desire for students to be at school. Restorative practices build community, and

the lasting effects of this work can change how a student experiences school (Costello et

al., 2019).

The Reading School District has endorsed the use of restorative practices for the

past five years. Support for the implementation of strategies that embody restorative

practices in the classroom began in 2020 with the hiring of two Restorative Practice

Facilitators at the Middle School Level. Today there are a total of six facilitators across

the district representing each of the five middle schools and the high school. As a

restorative practice facilitator, the researcher has witnessed the impact firsthand of how

restorative practice training and the implementation of the practices can change the

culture of a setting in school. Desautels (2021) explained that students spend on average

1,000 hours in school each year. School can be a place "of connection and inspiration

where students can thrive with healthy interactions" (Desautels, 2021, p. 27). There is

power for positive change when people feel heard and understood as a part of this

process. The dedication of the district to this practice has been demonstrated through their

investment in facilitators and the work has the potential to bring positive change. Wachtel

et al. (2023) used the example of restorative conferencing in schools which began in

1994, in Australia at Maroochydore High School in Queensland, stating that conferencing

has been used in both elementary and secondary schools to respond to a vast array of

problems. The implementation of restorative practices fosters relationship building while

maintaining a level of accountability for actions. Restorative practice also provides

students with a reason to be in school and helps to build communication skill sets that

will last far beyond the high school years. This work requires research. Increasing

graduation rates and keeping students in schools is a goal of the district and restorative

practices can aid in supporting these goals.

Capstone Focus

The need for this study in Reading School District surfaced as a result of

increased student absenteeism, behavior issues among grade nine students, and a concern

from teachers regarding their ability to connect with their students. In this mixed-methods capstone study of ninth grade classrooms at Reading High School, the research will focus on the effect(s) that intentional restorative practices in classrooms have on school attendance, behavior, and the classroom environment. Required formal restorative training will be a prerequisite to this study for classroom teachers who will then implement the practices in their classrooms through daily interaction and eight weekly targeted proactive circle lessons. Qualitative data will be collected through pre and post surveys as well as pre and post interviews. Quantitative data will be collected for student attendance and behavior in the classroom where intentional restorative measures will be implemented. This convergent parallel design will bring together both qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously. There is a growing need to build capacity for student belonging and restorative practices can aid in addressing this need (Costello et al., 2019).

Research Questions

This study explores the impact that intentional proactive restorative practices have on classroom attendance, behavior, and the social environment. The research questions that will be answered in this study are:

1. How do intentional restorative practices in classrooms affect student attendance?

2. How do restorative practices and proactive "circles" impact classroom behavior?

3. What is the correlation between restorative practices and a supportive learning environment?

Benefits of restorative practices in schools include reduced suspensions, improved student behavior, better conflict resolution skills, and a more inclusive and supportive school culture. It also aligns with broader educational goals of developing social-emotional learning and preparing students to navigate challenges in a respectful and constructive manner. Rodman (2007) stated that "only an individual's connection to others will allow the full potential of a healthy conscience to develop, fostering high levels of empathy and confidence and a sense of capability" (p. 51). Restorative approaches go beyond academic achievements and focus on fostering a sense of belonging, mutual respect, and cooperation.

Expected Outcomes

When schools work intentionally to build a sense of community, they create a space where students feel safe, valued, and motivated to succeed academically and socially. Changing the mindset in schools involves fostering a culture that encourages growth, resilience, and a positive attitude toward learning. This transformation can be achieved through several strategies. One of those strategies is intentional restorative proactive approaches in the classroom. Cobb et al. (2019) explained, "Once we've transformed our current culture into a positive one, we can expect a many hundred-fold return on our investment" (p. 89). Restorative practices promote inclusivity by fostering an environment where students feel safe to share their thoughts and opinions. Everyone is encouraged to participate, and no one is left out. Empowering students to take ownership of their behavior, decisions, and relationships helps build self-confidence and encourages positive personal growth. Restorative practices also work proactively by setting clear expectations, teaching social and emotional skills, and promoting a sense of community.

These practices help prevent disruptive behaviors by creating a space where students feel heard and supported before issues escalate. For this study, the goal is that attendance rates in classrooms where proactive restorative practices are being implemented increase and incidents of behavior in those same classes decrease. The environments in the ninth-grade classrooms will become a more positive learning environment for both the students and the teachers. The long-term gain is a targeted increase in school graduation rates.

Fiscal Implications

The direct costs associated with this study include the cost for Restorative Practice Training and the cost for substitute teachers to allow for teachers to attend two days of restorative practice training. This study could be replicated in another district as long as the financial resources exist for training and implementation. Additionally, the cost of not implementing restorative practice methods include the potential for ninth grade students to have to leave Reading High School to attend one of three Read Knight Accelerated Academies, which are satellite high schools in the district for credit recovery due to failure in the ninth-grade year. The implementation of restorative practice measures is necessary to reduce the number of students failing at the ninth-grade level, so they can maintain their place at Reading High School, which would help keep costs to a minimum. Indirect cost includes supplies to carry out the proactive circle lessons to include norms posters, copying costs, and other optional supplies.

Summary

The findings from this study are intended to help spearhead the restorative practices efforts forward within Reading School District and further deepen the understanding of the impact that intentional restorative practices can have in a classroom.

The target goal is for results to show an uptick in attendance, a reduction in behavior issues or problems, and a positive sense of belonging among the students in classrooms. As Reading School District focuses on addressing the social and emotional needs of students, the intentional restorative practice approaches through the teaching of lesson plans and daily interactions with students that are "with them" could result in increased graduation rates in time. Implementing restorative practices can lead to a more positive and respectful classroom climate with improved student relationships, greater emotional regulation, and better overall academic outcomes. It aligns well with a more holistic, student-centered approach to education. "Repairing harm and transforming conflict are important components of Restorative Justice Education. When we prioritize healthy relationships and dignity of each person, we are on the way to establishing restorative school cultures" (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p. 100). Rather than focusing solely on punishment for misbehavior, restorative practices emphasize repairing harm, promoting accountability, and encouraging empathy among students. It is rooted in the idea that discipline should not just be punitive but should also aim to heal relationships and create a positive, supportive school environment (Wachtel et al., 2023).

The history of restorative practice comes from the restorative justice system. Rundell (2023) reminds us that the work of restorative practitioners is aimed to honor human dignity and bring new insights and depth to working with people using fair process to "embrace the understanding of the meaning of relationships" (p. 11). The background and history of restorative practices are explored further in Chapter II.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Humans have a long-standing need to have relationships where they receive treatment with dignity (Bailie, 2019). The desire to belong and have worth through understanding has created the need for a social science called restorative practice. Restorative practices have a foundation in the principles of equity, respect, empathy, and dignity (Vincent et al., 2023). Restorative practice, according to Bailie (2019), is a framework grounded in dialogue that stretches across disciplines and cultures and is still in its developmental stage. Restorative practices started in the criminal justice system.

Restorative Justice

According to Wachtel (2016), restorative practices originated from the criminal justice system. The origin of restorative justice focused on working with offenders to make things right with victims. Restorative practices include a collection of concepts that stem from the work in the criminal justice community (Costello et al., 2019; McCold & Wachtel, 2001). The idea behind restorative justice according to Lang (2013) is to work with offenders by setting up meetings with those they have harmed by their crimes in an effort to hold them accountable and to repair harm that has occurred. Costello et al. (2019) found through restorative justice meetings between offenders and victims, offenders are less likely to reoffend, and positive outcomes have transpired because of the face-to-face interactions.

Restorative justice addresses conflict on a level very different from that of traditional practice. Costello et al. (2019) stated that restorative justice focuses on making amends between those who have been harmed and those who have harmed. Wachtel et al. (2023) explained that "in the decade between 1986 and 1996 the American prison

population more than doubled, from 744,208 to 1,630.940" (p. 149). There has been a

history in the criminal justice system lacking consistency. According to Wachtel (2016),

as a result of delays in court rulings and the structure of the system, offenders often

receive short-term and meaningless penalties. Wachtel (2016) argued that those who have

committed heinous crimes should be confined, but there are many offenders who could

participate in restorative conferencing, and through education and ownership of their

offense, could reintegrate into society and be productive citizens.

     This process of teaching empathy and understanding had been influenced by

Archbishop Desmond Tutu due to his dedication to upholding human dignity. Archbishop

Desmond Tutu received the Nobel Peace Prize, and this event was the start of the

movement in restorative justice (Lang, 2013). The first meeting between victims and their

offenders happened in 1974, when a probation officer, Mark Yantzi, facilitated a meeting

between two teenagers and the people they harmed by vandalizing their property

(Wachtel, 2016). As a result of the meeting, all parties agreed on the need for restitution.

     The focus of this framework in the justice system is "community-centered harm-

prevention by redefining harm, conflict, violence, and broken rules or laws as harm to

relationships and reimagining justice as addressing the root issues of harm" (Trout et al.,

2022, p. 31). Restorative justice has many definitions; however, Weitekamp and Kerner

(2023) noted that one difference between restorative justice and restorative practices is

that restorative justice is a program that many societies have used over the years to

resolve and manage conflicts, while restorative practice is a shift in mindset. Pranis et al.

(2003) highlighted the notion that members of a community make connections with one

another and have a duty to understand that each has roles in society that matter.

Restorative justice is a framework to address harm which is community centered. Wachtel (2003) stated that "beyond the formal criminal justice ritual, there are an infinite number of opportunities for restorative interventions" (p. 85). According to Kohll (2018), the restorative approach in the criminal justice system has made its way into schools as a way of addressing the indifferences happening in populations of color and those historically underrepresented. Restorative practices have evolved from restorative justice.

Restorative Practice

Restorative practice is a social science that explores how to achieve social discipline and build social capital by people experiencing learning that is engaging and requires action and decision-making skills (Wachtel, 2016). Expressly stated, restorative practices are the "human need to belong" (Bailie, 2019, p. 5). Lang (2013) specified, "Restorative practices are a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through collaborative learning and decision making" (p. 68).

The use of restorative practices in schools has become more popular because the practice has the potential to help create more positive communities in schools as well as promote safety, equity, and open doors to options for discipline that are much less exclusionary (Zakrzewski et al., 2021). Restorative practices intentionally teach interpersonal skills, build community, and address conflict through repairing harm (Darling-Hammond, 2023). The framework of restorative practices supports the needs of students following trauma. These practices in schools use language that centers around the term harm and focuses on addressing conflict or misbehavior. According to Darling-

Hammond and Gregory (2023), "There are six pillars for measuring restorative practice

implementation in districts and schools: culture, learning, practices, exposure, structures,

and outcomes. Measurement at each level can help districts and schools overcome

sticking points" (p. 10). Another way to view restorative practices is by exploring the

restorative practice continuum. The purpose of the restorative practice continuum is to

"maximize positive affect, minimize negative affect, minimize our inhibition of affect,

and do as much of all three as possible" (International Institute for Restorative Practices

Graduate School [IIRP], 2021, p. 10).

Restorative Practice Continuum

The five-step restorative practice continuum is outlined in Figure 1. Costello et al.

(2019) highlighted the importance of this model's outline of the five approaches to

restorative practice applications.

Figure 1

Restorative Practice Continuum
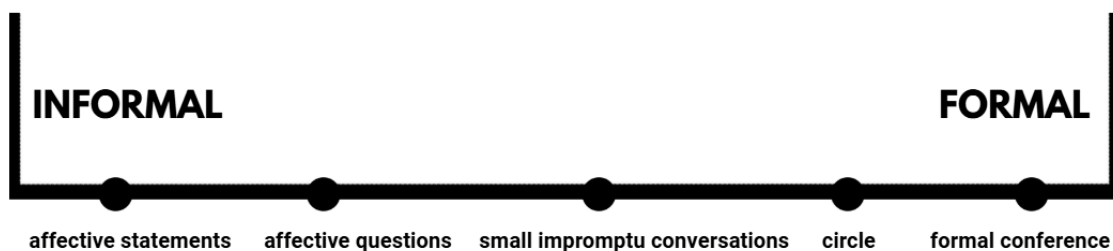
Note: Image adapted from 2019 *The Restorative Practices Handbook for Teachers,*

Disciplinarians and Administrators (2nd ed), Costello et al., 2019

In Figure 1, the steps include affective statements, affective questions, small impromptu conversations, circle or large group, and formal conference (Costello et al., 2019). The strategies from the continuum are useful together or separately and implementation does not have to be in any order.

Affective Statements

Affective language, which is a way of expressing feelings authentically in relation to an event or behavior, provides an opportunity to discuss and process unhealthy choices and explore how those choices impact others (Wachtel & Costello, 2009). Affective statements can be useful with people in any type of setting. Costello et al. (2019) outlined that affective statements are a way of "expressing your feelings" or "sharing impact" (p. 11). It is necessary to be able to express feelings, both positive and negative alike, to be able to release emotion which is "the first step toward fostering healthy group dynamics" (Costello et al., 2019, p. 11). It is essential when using affective statements to be as specific as possible to promote feelings and expectations around behavior. Costello et al. (2019) identified affective statements as "the most informal process on the continuum" (p. 10).

Affective Questions

Affective questions are the second process in the continuum. Affective questions are very similar to affective statements in that the design of affective questions are meant to foster open dialogue by being specific around questions that define behaviors and actions. There are a series of formalized questions that the International Institute for Restorative Practices Graduate School in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, has put into practice. The following restorative questions from the International Institute for Restorative

Practices Curriculum are asked when a person harms another intentionally or

unintentionally:

> The restorative questions asked to respond to challenging behavior:
>
> - What happened?
>
> - What were you thinking at the time?
>
> - What have you thought about since?
>
> - Who has been affected by what you have done and how were they affected?
>
> - What do you think you need to do to make things right?
>
> The restorative questions asked to help those harmed by others' actions:
>
> - What did you think when you realized something had happened?
>
> - What impact has this incident had on you and others?
>
> - What has been the hardest thing for you?
>
> - What do you think needs to happen to make things right? (IIRP, 2021, pp. 84-
>   85)

These restorative foundational questions have moved from a conversation that

started in informal conference conversations to a more formalized print version of those

same questions onto business cards. O'Connell, past director of IIRP Australia, is

credited with making the questions more formalized and accessible to families, staff,

students, and the community (Wachtel & Costello, 2009). The restorative questions do

not ask "why" when discussing with people who have offended or when discussing the

impact on victims. This practice is designed to keep conversations moving toward

resolution (Wachtel & Costello, 2009).

Braithwaite (2002) outlined that when relationships grow stronger, people are much less likely to cause harm. This notion supports the idea that offenders can seek to repair harm after the offense but can also build community and positive relationships even before an event takes place that requires a consequence. In restorative practice, punishment takes a back seat, and the focus becomes about repairing harm and building community, according to Costello (2019).

Small Impromptu Conversations

Small impromptu conversations are in the middle of the continuum. Informal meetings with students can happen at any time. Affective statements and sometimes affective questions are useful to resolve impromptu situations or conflict, but small impromptu conversations offer another restorative strategy. Costello et al. (2019) defined small impromptu conversations as a way of intervening early when small problems surface to minimize the problem and allow students to think about their behaviors and express feelings. Restorative practice can happen inside the classroom or outside of the school resulting in dialogue development and relationship building. Restorative practices may also include the use of strategies to mediate conflict to settle disagreements and assist students in making things right with others (Darling-Hammond, 2023).

When using small impromptu conversations, this response is another opportunity to give students a voice regarding a conflict or a situation that needs resolve. According to Costello et al. (2019), it is imperative "to separate the deed from the doer" (p. 4).

Circles

Circles, sometimes called large group meetings, according to Costello et al. (2019), are more formal than affective statements, affective questions, and small

impromptu conversations. There are a variety of types of circles in restorative practices to include check-in circles, proactive circles and responsive circles. All circle meetings are flexible and can be very effective in building community among a group of people. Restorative practices, while not a program, is a way of working with people to address problems and to put things right through conversations, meetings, and interactions with others (Bevington, 2015). This practice can take the form of an informal conversation but can also be more formal through an organized restorative circle with a direct purpose and a topic of study for discussion. It is imperative that everyone in the setting can share without concern for retaliation. Additionally, there should be no psychological discomfort (Kervick et al., 2019).

Restorative circles directly impact how people interact and mesh with their surroundings while at the same time confronting the use of culture and language that has been restrictive (Parker & Bickmore, 2020). Circles can "provide a forum to respond to conflict and wrongdoing" (Costello et al., 2019, p. 22). Hemphill (2022) pointed out the need for proactive strategies to be in place before responsive strategies will have a lasting impact. The circle process repairs harm, restores, builds trust, engages participants, builds relationships and community (Adamson, 2020). According to IIRP (2021), 80% of restorative practice work should be proactive and 20% of restorative practice work should be responsive. Heye (2023) stated that proactive circles are "circles that focus on connection, openness, and security" (p. 5). Rodman (2007) made the point that to keep healthy kids healthy, established norms must exist within a community. They must be clear, defended, and supported. Equally important is the support for students as people in

a community. Establishing norms as a part of the circle process aids in building

community.

Formal Conferences

The last process on the continuum is formal conferencing. In school settings

where students break rules and have a need for discipline, formal conferencing offers

restorative solutions as a follow up to an infraction. Wachtel (2016) stated that if students

own their actions, they could reintegrate back into the schools as better people because of

restorative interventions, using techniques such as conferencing. This type of meeting is

the most formal of all the processes on the continuum and takes the longest amount of

time to execute (IIRP, 2021). Restorative conferencing also tends to involve a large

number of people, agencies and families in an effort to restoratively work with an

individual on reintegration back into the community (Costello et al., 2019).

Other professionals that might attend a formal conference meeting could include

social workers, counselors, probation officers, and police. These meetings involve the

families of the offender and foster the development of a written plan that includes input

from all parties involved (IIRP, 2021). Formal conferences can sometimes be useful in

lieu of a suspension or expulsion in schools (Costello et al., 2019). Without cooperation

and ownership by the offender, the process of restorative formal conferencing is difficult

to do. Schools will sometimes pair a consequence with a follow up formal conference.

Disciplinary measures may have to be instituted to follow school protocol as well as a

restorative conference meeting (Berkowitz, 2019). The five steps of the continuum can

assist with restorative strategies, but it is equally important that fair process is observed to

get the highest degree of buy-in from people.

Fair Process

The three principles of fair process are:

- Engagement - Involving individuals in decisions that affect them by asking for their input and allowing them to refute the merit of one another's ideas.

- Explanation - Everyone involved and affected should understand why final decisions are made as they are. This creates a powerful feedback look that enhances learning.

- Expectation Clarity - Everyone involved and affected should understand why final decisions are made as they are. This creates a powerful feedback loop that enhances learning. (IIRP, 2021)

Kim and Mauborgne (2003) created the fair process structure to support that people may not always get what they want, but if the three elements of fair process are observed, the outcome is easier to support. Fair process states that "individuals are most likely to trust and cooperate freely with systems - whether they themselves win or lose by those systems - when fair process is observed" (IIRP, 2021, p. 56). It is equally important when talking about fair process to define and understand what fair process is not (Vander Vennen & Braganza, 2022). It is not a way of finding cohesiveness and full agreement with all people, it does not satisfy the wants and needs of all the people, it is not a process to "accommodate every individual's opinions or interests, needs or interests; it is not about democracy where everyone gets a vote" (Vander Vennen & Braganza, 2022, p. 8). Restorative practices focus on doing things "with" people and this is explained in the social discipline window framework (IIRP, 2021).

Social Discipline Window

In Figure 2, the terms WITH, NOT, TO, and FOR outline a framework for ways in which people respond to the actions of others' wrongdoing. The illustration below shows that there are four combinations of responses to wrongdoing based on the level of support and control that exist (IIRP, 2021).

Figure 2

Social Discipline Window
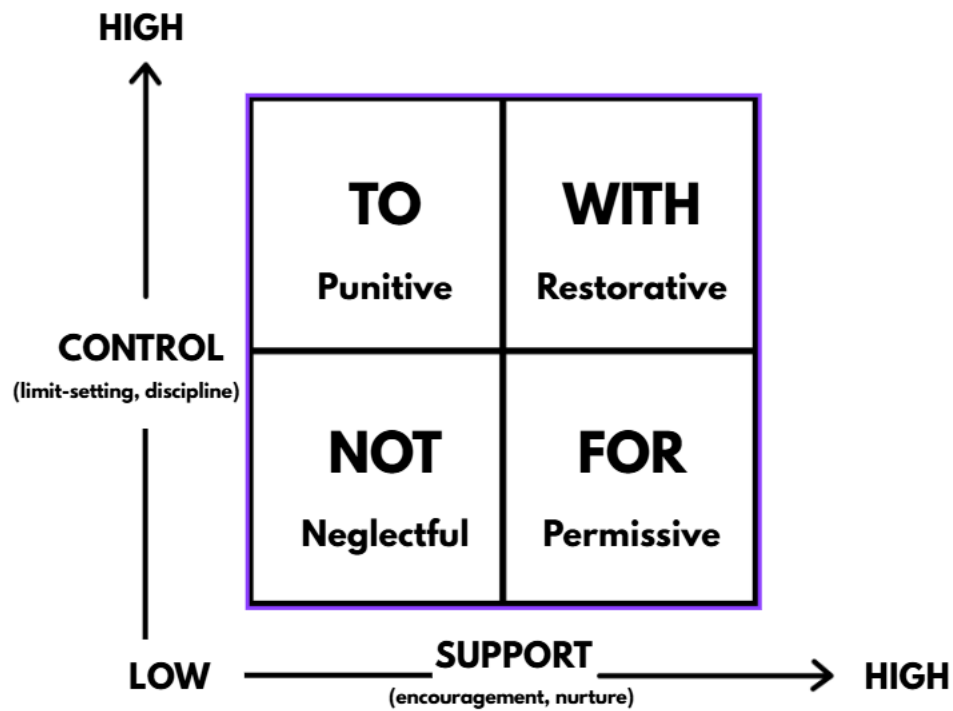
Note: Image adapted from 2019 *The Restorative Practices Handbook for Teachers, Disciplinarians and Administrators* (2nd ed), Costello et al., 2019

Costello et al. (2019) explained:

> The model in Figure 2 suggests that educators, or anyone in a position of
>
> authority, can take the best of both axes and achieve high levels of nurturing and
>
> support with high levels of expectation and accountability. The idea is to support
>
> students and engage them in finding ways to curb their own negative behavior. (p.
>
> 49)

With the goal for "educational access and equity for all" working with people can make change meaningful and sustaining (Berkowitz, 2019). Restorative practices focus on communication and deal largely with emotion. Understanding how to cope with the emotion of shame is a cornerstone in restorative practices.

Compass of Shame

The Compass of Shame Scale originated from the work of Nathanson and Tomkins (International Institute for Restorative Practices Graduate School, 2021). Shown in Figure 3 below, the compass of shame is a scale that measures the various coping styles to shame. There are four quadrants on the compass of shame (Nathanson, 1992). The compass of shame illustrates "how human beings react when they feel shame" (IIRP, 2021). It is imperative for school leaders to understand why students may respond in certain ways to various topics and situations.

Figure 3 explains further how people may respond to shame. Nathanson (1992) observed that when the shame response is triggered, humans respond with "attack other," "attack self," "avoidance," or "withdrawal." "Attack other" occurs when people blame others for behaviors. "Attack self" happens when people blame themselves, sometimes turning to self-injurious behaviors to cope. "Avoidance" is denial and may be paired with

actions that elicit a shameful feeling. "Withdrawal" is a shame response where people want to disappear. When positive affect is disturbed or interrupted, most people feel one of the shame responses (Nathanson, 1992).

Figure 3

Compass of Shame

Withdrawal:
• isolating oneself
• running and hiding

Attack Other:
• 'turning the tables'
• blaming the victim
• lashing out verbally
  or physically

Attack Self:
• self put-down
• masochism

Withdrawal

Attack Other

Attack Self

Avoidance

Avoidance:
• denial
• abusing drugs and alcohol
• distraction through thrill seeking
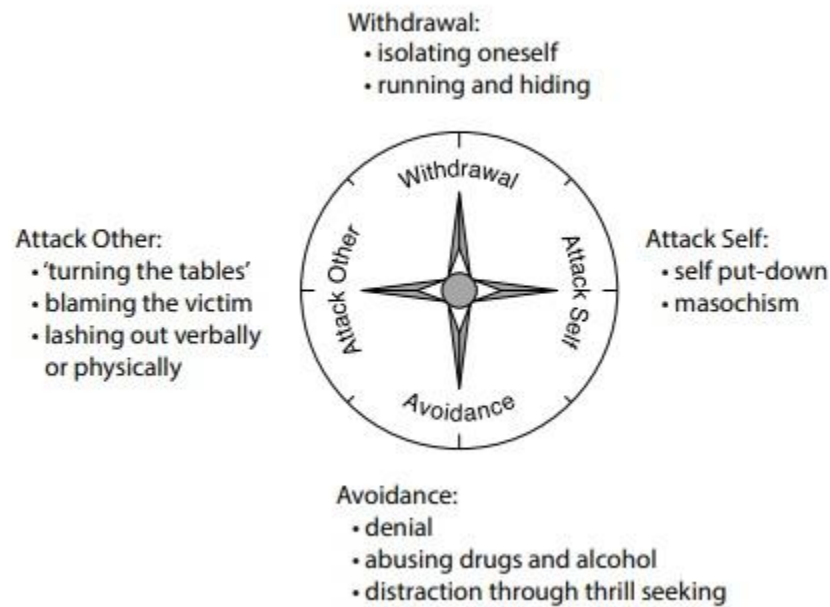
Note: Image taken from 1992 *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self.*,

W.W. Norton & Co. 1992

In Figure 3, Nathanson (1992) revealed that children learn at an early age how to assimilate emotion to scenarios in their lives, and then they protect themselves by adopting coping mechanisms or styles from the compass of shame. Vagos et al. (2019) suggested that "both the development of shame proneness and of preferred shame-coping styles occurs in parallel with the development of the self" (p. 95).

Shame feelings usually do not last long, but having an understanding about the compass of shame gives people a better perspective when instituting restorative practices that may cross into areas of misbehavior or wrongdoing (Costello et al., 2019, pp. 69-71). "Shame and shaming both operate in teachers' professional behavior and in school systems" (Leitch, 1999, p. 17). Some research suggested that "shame can be implicated in important ways in student adjustment to the learning environment" (Johnson, 2012, p. 3). This study of restorative practices has a requirement of a two-day restorative practice training. Training is an essential component to restorative practices.

Restorative Practice Training

The training of teachers to use the circles in their classrooms comes from the International Institute for Restorative Practices Graduate School in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (IIRP, 2021). The goal is for staff members to become a restorative practitioner of their own space. With the implementation of restorative practices and specifically restorative circle work from the restorative practice continuum, identifying when a school's culture fails to align with the aspects of the continuum can be a sign that additional training and resources may be needed for the teaching staff to fully implement what practices with fidelity (Benvington, 2015). Results are accomplished through training staff and students alike in restorative responses. Darling-Hammond and Gregory (2023) advised that it is imperative to monitor and measure staff practices to be sure that all aspects of restorative practices implementation include conflict resolution and community-building. Restorative practice training annually for school staff should be of the utmost importance according to the Denver School-Based Restorative Practices Partnership (2017).

In a study conducted by Peart (2023), the outcome revealed that two of the study participants made requests for refresher training in restorative practices that caters to the needs of their school demographics and their community at large. Having a better understanding of the struggles that students may face when not in school could allow stakeholders to be more mindful and intentional in their restorative responses. Beyond those findings, this study outlined that there is no implementation model that addresses all of the concerns of all schools (Peart, 2023).

There is an essential need to personalize training and outline strengths of the populations in schools and to consider community demographics and challenges (Peart, 2023). The need for restorative practice training in schools can be supported:

> When schools are perceived to have behavioral climate problems, punitive reform efforts often employ a deceptive but alluring logic. The pervading thought is that poor behavioral climates can be addressed through lowering tolerance for undesired behaviors, and in the process increasing punitive responses to students exhibiting said behaviors. (Huguley et al., 2022, p. 139)

According to Prince (2021), urban schools are heavily laden with trauma experiences. Those experiences touch the lives of the students and the adults in the buildings. Prince (2021) went on to point out the need for more mental health professionals in schools to help address trauma. Psychologists, school counselors, social workers, and agency professionals are an asset to schools to address the needs of students, but only to the degree in which they are trained in their professions. Darling-Hammond (2023) outlined in his study that there is a need for training of school resource officers (SROs), school

staff, and those in leadership roles to have the movement toward a transformation in the culture.

According to Wachtel and Costello (2009), restorative practice training encouraged learning and growth that resulted in a positive change in staff response and, ultimately, student behaviors. Staff shifted away from punitive responses and focused on encouraging students to think about what they had done and who was affected by their actions. Another consideration was how they would repair the harm that had been done as a result of their actions. Training staff in restorative practices teaches skill sets that can be applied to the classroom. One goal of the restorative practice application is that student attendance will improve.

Attendance

Heightened absenteeism and student refusal to attend school and classes while in school is linked to school phobia, emotional distress, and social anxiety (Gubbels et al., 2019). In schools, social anxiety has also impacted classrooms and how they function academically. There was an uptick after the pandemic in students of social isolation, absenteeism, and lower success rates in academics, and evidence of poor peer relationships (Bano et al., 2019). In a study conducted by Watts and Robertson (2002), the findings show that the number of absences, tardy students, and suspension all decreased after instituting restorative practices. Implementing these practices in the study from 2016-2018 supported the hypothesis that the addition of these services would bring the number of students who were absent down as well as reduce the issues that would lead to discipline.

Student attendance in schools is a vital part of the daily expectations for student success. The rate of attendance definition includes the ratio of the number of students over the course of a year who have been in school compared to the number of students required to be in school for that given year (Law Insider, n.d.). In a study conducted by Gubbels et al. (2019), intentional interventions are needed in classrooms to reduce absenteeism in schools as well as to reduce the dropout rate. Preventive strategies have shown to have the most positive impact. Restorative practices along with social emotional learning SEL have been outlined by Manassah et al. (2018) as avenues to explore for addressing the daunting challenge schools face regarding low performance, frequent school discipline challenges and absences.

Darling-Hammond (2023) reported that from 2013 - 2019, the increased use of restorative practices reduces safety and behavior issues to include gang membership. Additionally, this study found improvements in the health of students, less illness, and reduced rates of depression. Lastly Darling-Hammond (2023) noted, "Improvement in educational outcomes, including reduced absence rates and improved GPAs" (p. 8). Student behavior is another aspect of a student's day that directly impacts the classroom community and academic success.

Behavior and Discipline

According to Wachtel et al. (2023), "Our schools, are experiencing more disciplinary problems, more violence, truancy and dropouts" (p. 149). Osta (2020) said that "the way we respond to our crisis is the crisis" (p. 1). Consideration and research into the ways in which students' emotional needs are being addressed in schools is a valid concern. Bornstein (2018) found in his study that there was an establishment of morning

meetings that became a part of the daily rituals in classrooms. While these changes were making a slow and steady impact with out-of-school suspensions dropping by 45%, and in-school suspensions dropping by 80%, some teachers were operating from a place of fear as it relates to previous mandates and accountability, so they struggled to fully adopt new ideas for classroom change. There is inequity in schools when it comes to race, and the inequity often surfaces through "discrepancies in school discipline" (Manassah et al., 2018, p. 22).

According to Vincent et al. (2023), restorative practices have been useful as a way of approaching discipline and this approach comes from the judicial system where restorative justice began. Restorative practices, which are modeled after restorative justice, have had positive impacts on the school climate and behaviors in schools. School discipline has traditionally been exclusionary in nature and this type of punitive response often leads to consequences like detention, suspension, and even expulsion (Vincent et al., 2023). The philosophy of restorative justice puts the notion of repairing relationships at the top of the list when some type of harm happens. In a study conducted by Darling-Hammond (2022), academic performance improved with regular restorative practices, and there was a decline in the rates of discipline that was exclusionary in nature. The study found over 265,000 middle school students that spanned the state of California, with the most academic achievement improvements and highest rates of decline in out-of-school suspensions, were those who had maximized opportunities with the use of restorative practices (Darling-Hammond, 2022).

Huang et al. (2023) studied the implementation of restorative practices through a model called the RP Project with SEL and racial equity activities in 18 schools with

students in grades one through twelve. Although this two-year study was cut short by

one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the results are worth noting. The study found

that students who had a history of out-of-school suspension were much less likely to get

suspended after the intentional intervention of restorative practice implementation for a

year. The intentional interventions included five main components: professional

development and training in restorative practices, staff coaching, community building

circles that include plans to meet the needs of the grade levels in which they were being

implemented, social-emotional learning and training for the delivery of the SEL

curriculum developed specifically for each grade level. As a result of this study, the use

of restorative practices as a means for reducing out-of-school suspensions for those who

have a history of suspension and academic struggles may prove to be effective.

To fully engage in restorative practices, Vincent et al. (2023) stated that educators

must fully evaluate and explore the impact that behaviors are having on oneself or others

and move away from a formalized, traditional discipline that focuses on compliance.

Wachtel et al. (2010) pointed out from his research that with the "zero tolerance" policies

that exist in schools, the negative statistics continue to grow around student suspension

and expulsions (p. 149).

Bornstein (2018) noted change when restorative practices were put into place. A

shift in mindset and practice took place when the in-school suspension room became a

reflection room. This response gave students a chance to process, de-escalate, resolve

conflict, and repair harm. Costello et al. (2019) discovered that most schools have

reported that disciplinary referrals and actions have been significantly reduced as a result

of restorative practices. Students have also reported that there is a different feel in the school and that feeling is more positive.

Darling-Hammond (2023) found that students who were exposed to restorative practices not only had a decrease in the number of suspensions for all students, but that the duration of the suspensions also decreased for the white students engaged in those same restorative practices. Restorative practices, when implemented with fidelity, have an intent to change how schools view punitive discipline. Mavrogordateo and White (2020) showed that when restorative practices are employed, for the purpose of reducing punitive actions, less response is required from the administration for misbehavior.

Cruz (2023) researched restorative practices as an alternative way to manage student behavior over a span of time. According to his findings, over a three-year period, there was a reduction in referrals for discipline when restorative practices were in place in four Texas secondary campuses, and there was an increase in student attendance as well (Cruz, 2023). There was a reduction in the use of suspension and expulsions because of the reimplementation (Cruz, 2023).

One finding by Watts and Robertson (2002) revealed an uptick in the number of incidents reported related to discipline compared to the group not receiving restorative interventions. The increase in reports and informal referrals may suggest that using restorative practices as an alternative to punitive discipline, like suspensions, may yield more informal discipline reports and referrals, which suggests a change in how student behavior is managed and addressed. As the shift transpires from punitive to restorative, the steps taken to change these practices may require more work up front. Another consideration is the effect that restorative practices have on the environment in a school.

Environment and Culture

School culture, as defined by Prince (2021), is "the sum total of the behaviors and interactions of all adults and children, their attitudes and norms, and the extent to which the school is safer, supportive, healthy, engaging, inspiring, and challenging for all" (p. 35). Prince (2021) went on to define school climate as "the collective perception of how well a school provides suitable conditions for learning, for positive social, emotional, and character development, for all staff to grow professionally, and for parents, families, and community resources to become engaged in the school" (p. 35).

Adults in school settings can foster a culture for students where dignity is honored for each member of the group by being in tune with how body language is expressed, tone is used, and the way in which expressions and communications are conveyed (Wachtel & Costello, 2009). The main themes that surfaced from a study by Starnes (2023) were the importance of conflict resolution, how restorative practices can have a positive impact on student behavior, and that communication rises to a high level of importance in building trust. When the staff become connected to one another and are in tune with emotions, Desautels (2021) stated that the students will reap the benefits of this "emotional contagion" (p. 49). Starnes (2023) found that when evaluating the beliefs and attitudes of teachers about school climate and restorative practices that "adopting restorative techniques by educators has a favorable effect on the climate in the classroom and the school as a whole" (p. 92.) According to Gregory and Evans (2020), the interest in restorative practices over the last two decades has grown, and many schools are looking to improve relationships between students and teachers with the use of restorative practices.

Velez et al. (2020) recognized that the beliefs of the educators and their attitudes matter when implementing restorative practices in schools. Restorative practices have been shown to influence the school and social climates in schools and have impacted the way in which both staff and students experience the school environment in a positive way. According to Heye (2023), it is the philosophy of The International Institute for Restorative Practices that using circles in classrooms can impact the group as a whole and change the learning environment as well as make a difference in the culture of a classroom. This formal process can produce rewards for the students and the adults in a school setting. Watts and Robertson (2021) noted in their findings that more research on how to use school wide sustainability through training and resources to change school culture and make a transformational shift, is necessary. The use of proactive circle lessons in the classroom will be the main focus of this study. Circles are one strategy used to apply restorative practices.

Circle Application

According to Joseph-McCatty and Hnilica (2022), one year of restorative circles practice inside of a large urban high school in a mid-sized urban city benefited the school community. The study found that after 36 restorative circle lessons were conducted with students, there were connections between student belonging and teacher safety and connections between student circle commitment and student ownership. This study also found that teacher buy-in had an impact on the overall effectiveness of the circle meetings. Heye (2023) stated that because of circle meetings, students and teachers will be happier and that teachers will teach better. According to a study by Leaton (2018),

teachers are already very skilled at adapting and conversing with their students, and running circles is really an extension of those conversations.

In a study conducted by Franza (2023), the use of restorative circles produced four themes to include: a stronger sense of community (as students learned about one another), plans for future goals and aspirations were explored on a deeper level, there was an increase in the feeling of school connectedness with teachers and growth among students in the area of emotional and social well-being. Intentional planning for circle implementation is necessary in order for the process to be most impactful for the participants (Manassah et al., 2018).

Gazit et al. (2023) reported that when principals of students from underprivileged high schools used frameworks to promote collective decision making, there was a direct positive impact on their student body. What is more, while there are barriers to students with disadvantaged backgrounds, coming together with a framework for students to be able to make decisions as a group collectively, had a positive impact for those students whose rollout of the participatory frameworks was slow and intentional.

Hempill (2022) found that when using proactive circles in 9th grade physical education classes in North Carolina, that these practices are not only applicable to this type of setting, but that practice circles were a prerequisite for the use of healing circles to address harm and conflict. "Facilitating circles is about creating community. A circle provides a space to hear each other's voices. Building relationships proactively will help when the community experiences a conflict" (Adamson, 2020, p. 10). To adopt the restorative practices in schools, a mindset shift is necessary.

Shift in Mindset

Restorative practice implementation requires change. Some educators may struggle to make the necessary 180-degree shifts in their roles. Daily (2023) suggested the idea of making small changes over time in increments of 2-degrees. The analogy focuses on an airplane making 2-degree changes over time slowly. The end result is that the plane is now flying in a whole new direction because of those small changes. Small changes can bring about huge rewards. When a person becomes consistent with the 2-degree changes, it can result in a positive change in the outcomes of life. The implementation of restorative practices in a classroom to the 2-degree shift is paramount because small changes in the classroom with the use of affective statements and questions as well as the use of circles can have the potential to impact the culture of the room over time (Daily, 2023).

A plan for restorative practices or "strategic blueprint" should have clear goals and high expectations that start at the superintendent level and principal level. The result is a more sustaining buy-in from the staff, and this idea is what creates a shift in the culture of a school. It is a way that the systems help the district "help principals help teachers help students" (Hickman, 2023, p. 11). Research has shown according to a study conducted by Hall et al. (2021) that participants expressed the shift in mindset takes several years and that the most impactful results can be seen over time. An unnamed restorative practice specialist from the study further explained: "If this is going to something intentional, if this is going to be something that lasts, and becomes sustainable, it has to be done slowly… like a Native person, I'm thinking 7 generations from now. I'm thinking this work right now, these couple of years, that's just the pebble in the sand" (as

cited in Hall et al., 2021, p. 375). Caring for each other will be learned by example and

expectation (Rodman, 2007, p. 51). The shift to restorative practices comes with

difficulties that must be considered. Barriers can cause the implementation process to

slow down or even stop.

Barriers

In a study conducted by Joseph-McCaddy and Hnilica (2023), one barrier that

emerged from the year-long study of restorative circle implementation in 2015-2016 for

the "Safer Saner Schools Restorative Practices Intervention" was that the qualitative

findings "suggest that educators' felt their use of circles took too much time" (p.

8). Some additional resistance to circle use can result from lack of knowledge:

> If the foundational elements of restorative practices are not fully understood,
>
> according to the policy and interventions will not be implemented well, the
>
> outcomes will be inconsistent, and teachers and leaders will not want to buy-in.
>
> Participants (n = 8, 67%) indicated a lack of accurate knowledge to be a
>
> significant barrier to implementation. (Hall et al., 2021, p. 374)

Joseph-McCatty and Hnilica (2023) also found that while using circles to a high degree in

classrooms without moving from low-risk questions to a variation of topics and

questions, students and teachers can feel what the author calls "circled-out" (p. 7).

Systems change is necessary, according to Wachtel (2003), "If systems are not

innately restorative, then they cannot hope to affect change simply by providing an

occasional restorative intervention. Restorative practices must be systemic, not

situational" (pp. 86-87). "The field needs a model of culturally responsive restorative

practices that allows for adult staff transformation as well as the healing of interpersonal harms" (Lustick, 2021, p. 1285).

There is a need to have quality questions and quality time spent when with students in circles (Joseph-McCatty & Hnilica, 2023). The circles should promote relational growth, community, and include problem solving. The size of circle groups, in the study conducted by Joseph-McCatty and Hnilica (2023), revealed that the impact of a group that has high numbers exceeding 25 students is less productive.

The school environment and the shift in operational mindset to restorative practices requires this opportunity for students, staff, and administrators to be able to face biases in their organizations (Bornstein, 2018). There also need to be spaces in schools where staff and students can resist forces that are oppressive and build meaningful relationships with one another. In a study conducted by Bevington (2015), factors suggested barriers to the implementation of restorative practices in the classroom. Some of the barriers outlined included lack of space, lack of time, the training level of the staff members, the emotional state of the staff and /or the student at the time of the restorative intervention and a lack of confidence in the restorative process as a result of limited exposure or practice. The application of restorative practices in the classroom is not without obstacles.

Challenges

Gregory and Evans (2020) identified a 3-5 year timeline in order to see measurable gains with restorative practices in schools as well as a change that is measurable. People who may endorse punitive responses to behavior may need more time for the practical application of restorative actions before fully endorsing the practices.

One study by Reimer (2019) found that when there was a lack of trust between educators, the implementation of restorative practices in classrooms made it difficult for the modeling of such practices in classrooms. Furthermore, teachers who struggle to have positive relationships with their peers lack the ability to model the expected restorative practices with fidelity in their classrooms, resulting in a much less effective outcome (Reimer, 2019).

Hickman (2023) highlighted the idea that purpose is essential to the implementation of any new initiative. The purpose must align with the overarching goals of the school district as set forth in the comprehensive plan, the school vision, and systems that are in place to promote restorative practices. Research by Hickman (2023) conducted over the past five years has indicated that there is a great deal of evidence to support that there are a number of schools implementing restorative practices in a haphazard manner. The lack of expectations, partial implementation of restorative practice, the lack of clear goals, and the focus on small subgroups in the populations such as counselors or social workers has limited the impact of restorative practices with teachers and school districts at large (Hickman, 2023).

When it comes to the implementation of restorative practices, there have been challenges to its implementation in schools to include the need for cultural shifts, as well as factors and pressures in society (Hall et al., 2021). More research on the topic of restorative practice implementation in the classroom is necessary.

Future Research

As a school leader, Desautels (2021) highlighted that the modeling of connection from leaders with staff is critical. There is a direct link between the workplace

environment and educator wellness. Mavrogordato and White (2020) found that school leadership is a key factor in the implementation of the restorative methods as those leaders can both "enable and obstruct practices" without even knowing fully the degree of the impact of the decisions being determined around the behavior.

Ortega et al. (2016) warned:

> As restorative approaches gain traction in schools, the resulting tension between the two vastly different philosophical approaches presents a new set of challenges for school officials to navigate. Current punitive school policies emphasize zero tolerance, which sustains a climate of fear and punishment. (p. 466)

The Compass of Shame highlights another area of consideration for further research among students' shame, and their level of engagement in schools (McWilliams, 2017). It may not be possible to impact every student by changing the culture of a classroom; however, recognizing students' academic emotions and finding ways to connect with students through positive experiences in the classroom may significantly have an effect on student motivation (Arnold, 2024).

In research, Mrowka et al. (2024) looked beyond the lens of the High School Level and the potential impact of restorative practices' circle work at the collegiate level. The findings outlined that "restorative practices can contribute to liberation when implemented explicitly, with intention, and with an eye towards transformative and systems-level change" (p. 80). While the focus of this study was on restorative practice circle work at the high school level, exploration of proactive circle practices in higher education could benefit from further exploration.

McCluskey et al. (2008) found that some challenges in the implementation of restorative practices in schools led to other questions like "What are we restoring to?" and "What are the nature of the relationships we have in school? (p. 29). These authors pointed out that there is still a disconnect between theory and practice when it comes to making a true change in a school system that is lasting and impactful. There is evidence that school leaders strongly influence practices in the classroom. Goddard et al. (2019) further explored the impact of buy-in from top-down leadership on the lasting effects of restorative practice can be explored. Restorative practices are a field that requires continued research in the school setting.

Summary

The restorative practices' framework uses the "language of the social sciences," according to Bailie (2019), to provide a way in which to promote human dignity through belonging, voice, and agency (p. 13). Research findings by Gonzalez et al. (2019) showed that schools with successful restorative practices were made up of teachers who implement restorative practices by using healthy behavior, respectful practices, and modeling of restorative values. Change is necessary in schools according to because "scant attention is paid to healing. The focus is on punishment" (Wachtel et al., 2010, p. 149). When adults speak the truth and are authentic, students can better relate and build a community with the adults (Berkowitz, 2019). Lasting change in an organization takes time, buy-in from stakeholders, training, education, and support.

In a study conducted by Peart (2023), one participant noted that there was a need for the faculty members to build trust among themselves to develop their own sense of community. Themes of community building emerged from the study and quickly rose to

the top on the list of qualities that matter most in restorative practices. Further, the use of

a common language across the district and in buildings emerged to support ways that

restorative practice can be most effectively implemented (Peart, 2023). In some cases,

many staff received training in schools in the way of restorative practices, but without a

plan for implementation, fidelity to the principles of restorative practices was lost

(Hickman, 2023). A "human capital plan" helped dramatically with sustainability of

restorative approaches in school districts (Hickman, 2023, p. 11). Restorative practices in

schools created a framework that invites patterns, which were likely to produce social-

emotional outcomes that are positive (Marcucci, 2021). A "universal message of purpose

and support" from the school leaders to the teachers must be in place from the onset of

the implementation of new initiatives to include restorative practices. For lasting and

transformative changes to take place, there must be transparency and open

communication with stakeholders to include parents and the community.

Restorative practices, when implemented with fidelity, allowed all stakeholders in

the school organization to feel a sense of belonging, foster leadership, and prioritize

human dignity for all (Hickman, 2023, p. 13). Rodman (2007) explained:

> Reclaiming youth will only thrive in a restorative community. To achieve the
>
> happy, productive adults who voluntarily support the norms of the community,
>
> professionals need to be high in concern for kids and supportive of the community
>
> they build together. (p. 51)

Hall et al. (2021) agreed that there is a need to be very intentional with the shift to

restorative ways in schools for the highest degree of effectiveness.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This chapter provides the background for the research conducted and explains the methods that were used to complete the action research. Rundell (2023) defined that "the field of restorative practices, as a social science that builds awareness in relationships, is valuable to understanding human beings" (p. 11). This study explored relationships and community among staff and students at Reading High School formally through the teaching of restorative practice lessons.

Purpose

Relationships in the classroom or lack thereof may have an impact on the results that teachers are able to achieve with their students. This study looked at how building those relationships through formal proactive circle lesson plans taught over an eight-week span may have an impact on the teacher's viewpoint of the use of restorative practices in the classroom. The study also explored how intentional restorative practices being used in classrooms impacted attendance and behavior. The findings from the study are expected to show that by establishing relationships in the classroom using components of restorative practices to include affective statements, affective questioning, small impromptu conversations, and formal circle lessons that students will respond more positively and be more open to learning when they feel a sense of community in the classroom. According to Kligman (2021), "Circles are inclusive structures by nature, their power is not just in the form. They build on our social connections to amplify specific functions" (p. 11).Additionally, the findings are expected to show an improvement in attendance and a decrease in the number of behavioral concerns reported in classrooms using restorative practices.

Wakeman (2017) highlighted that communication is a vital part of human interaction: "Conversations and questions are the primary tools to redirect our thinking away from 'perfecting circumstances' and spur thinking about how to succeed in the circumstances as they exist" (p. 43). As a part of this study, communication strategies were encouraged between students and teachers as they used a pre-determined set of lesson plans with specific guiding questions to elicit participation and responses from students that would build trust and communication. The communication bridge included relationships both between students and with the teacher in the classroom. The questions asked were all minimal risk level, providing opportunities for students to build trust and a sense of community among the group.

Reading School District is an Urban District located in Berks County, Pennsylvania, with a student population of 16,081. Reading High School is the fourth largest high school in Pennsylvania. The high school population for grades 9-12 for the 2024-2025 school year is 4,836. With its diverse population, elevated levels of poverty and transient students, the challenges for student success are unique. The population includes students who are Hispanic/Latino, Black, White, Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, and two or more races. The graduation rates continue to suffer, and there is a need to look specifically into the inner workings of the classrooms to identify reasons for student struggles and lack of success. The learning environment is one main focus in the classrooms. A closer look at the day-to-day interactions between students and teachers may provide data that could help to identify needs for change and improvement.

The Reading High School students have an exceptionally low attendance rate by classroom. Poor attendance has contributed to students not being promoted to the next grade because they lack the credits necessary to advance. Desautel (2021) talked about the "power of emotional contagion" and how students pick up on nonverbal communication and are more in tune with emotion when they are feeling unsafe, rough, or agitated (p. 6). At Reading High School, students will often come to school but spend the day avoiding class. Class skipping is possible in part due to the vast size of the high school which has many locations where students can go unnoticed. When the social relationship between the teacher and the student is compromised or nonexistent, students may choose to leave the classroom. There is a need to explore how restorative practices may have a positive impact on students attending class and staying in class. Positive relationships are built on integrity and trust. Cobb and Krownapple (2019) confirmed that the idea of "presumed positive intent means that we focus on the positive and cultivate an appreciative mindset," and this intent allows people to foster positive assumptions about themselves and those with whom they have relationships (p. 193).

Costello et al. (2010) believes that the uptick in inappropriate behaviors in schools is a direct reflection of the loss of connectedness in our society, and this quantifies the need for restorative practices. There is a need to explore further how behaviors in classrooms may or may not be present as a result of relationships that exist between the teacher and the students in the classroom. Examination of student behavior before, during, and after proactive restorative lesson plans allow teachers to better understand the root causes behaviors that could disrupt the learning process. Proactive circle lesson plans are designed to build community through low-risk questioning and have the potential to

move into higher risk questioning as relationships and trust among a group of people

strengthen.

A series of eight proactive circle lessons were designed and delivered to the

participating classrooms as a part of this study. Restorative lessons are meant to build

community within the classroom setting. Hite and Donohoo (2021) highlighted the

importance of protocol or what they call an "agree-upon guideline for conversations" (p.

88). These protocols work for school teams to be able to foster deeper conversations

about relevant topics. While some protocols are prescriptive, according to Hite and

Donohoo (2021), others offer more objectivity. Teaching scripted proactive restorative

lessons and setting norms in circle meetings with students is an example protocol in

classrooms that set the stage for meaningful conversations to take place.

Setting

This study took place in Reading School District at the Reading High School. The

Reading School District is an Urban District comprised of students from many ethnic

backgrounds, primarily Latino and Hispanic. The school district is located in Berks

County in southeastern Pennsylvania and Reading serves as the county seat of Berks

County, situated roughly 56 miles northwest of Philadelphia.

The Internal Review Board application was completed for this study and approval

was granted on November 15, 2024, for the study to be conducted. Final approval to

proceed with the action research was granted through an email and a formal approval

letter sent from IRB in the email as an attachment outlining the details of the approval to

proceed with the action research (Appendix A).

As a component of the study, after the approval was granted, consent forms were issued to the five participants in the study and signed before any research was conducted. The consent forms for this study were issued to all five participants (Appendix B). A letter of support was received on August 5, 2024, from Reading School District granting permission to proceed with the action research (Appendix C).

The specific setting for this study took place in five ninth grade classrooms within the school. While the layout of each of the classrooms looked different and had varying numbers of students, each teacher was given the same material from which to deliver their circle lesson instruction. Each of the classroom teachers taught a series of eight lessons, one per week to one of their sections or periods throughout the day. The lessons were created in advance and provided for the teachers (Appendix D). Each lesson included the type of circle (proactive), the goal of the circle, multiple circle questions, environmental factors for consideration, technology and resource considerations, accommodation and translation considerations as well as a note about the need to have a talking piece for the circle lessons. The timeline for the study was a total of 10 weeks. The teaching of the lesson plans to students involved the use of "fair process components of explanation, engagement, and expectation clarity" along with role modeling with school staff, students, parents and community which leads to a "restorative paradigm" (Rundell, 2023, p. 20).

Participants

The participants in this study included five teachers in the Reading High School. As a prerequisite, each participant completed a formal two-day training course on restorative practices that was presented internally by trained staff of the Reading School

District. The content used in the training comes from the International Institute of

Restorative Practices in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (IIRP, 2021). Cobb and Krownapple

(2019) stated, "Introspection leads to awareness and to our better selves. It requires effort

and this effort, we believe, must be made in order to successfully undertake the journey to

meaningful change" (p. 155). During the training, there were many scenarios embedded

that required the participants to self-reflect and consider a shift in mindset toward

restorative practices, leading to change. This training set the stage for the participating

teachers to teach their circle lesson plans with the knowledge of restorative practices as

outlined by the International Institute of Restorative Practices.

　　　　All five teachers in the study completed 19 pre survey questions and participated

in a one-on-one interview with the researcher answering 12 questions prior to teaching

their lesson plans in classrooms. Each of the five teachers answered 19 questions in a post

survey at the completion of the lesson plan delivery and participated in a post interview

with the researcher, answering 12 post interview questions. The participants in this study

used restorative practices in their lesson plan delivery. "Social science research as it

relates to restorative practices is conduced to better understand communal, relational, and

behavioral phenomena" (Adamson, 2020, p. 9). The participants carried out the use of

such practices to explore further the impact of the social environment, attendance, and

behavioral impacts.

Research Plan

　　　　The examination of the truth by an individual allows work to be accomplished

and success to be reached, while not allowing circumstances to stand in the way

(Wakeman, 2017).

This study explored three main questions about restorative practices:

1. How do intentional restorative practices in classroom affect student

   attendance?

2. How do restorative practices and proactive "circles" impact classroom

   behavior?

3. What is the correlation between restorative practice and a supportive learning

   environment?

Figure 4 outlines the action research steps taken in this study. It carefully outlines

how various steps occurred in the action research before other steps could be

taken (Wakeman, 2017).

Figure 4

Restorative Practice Action Research Flow Chart
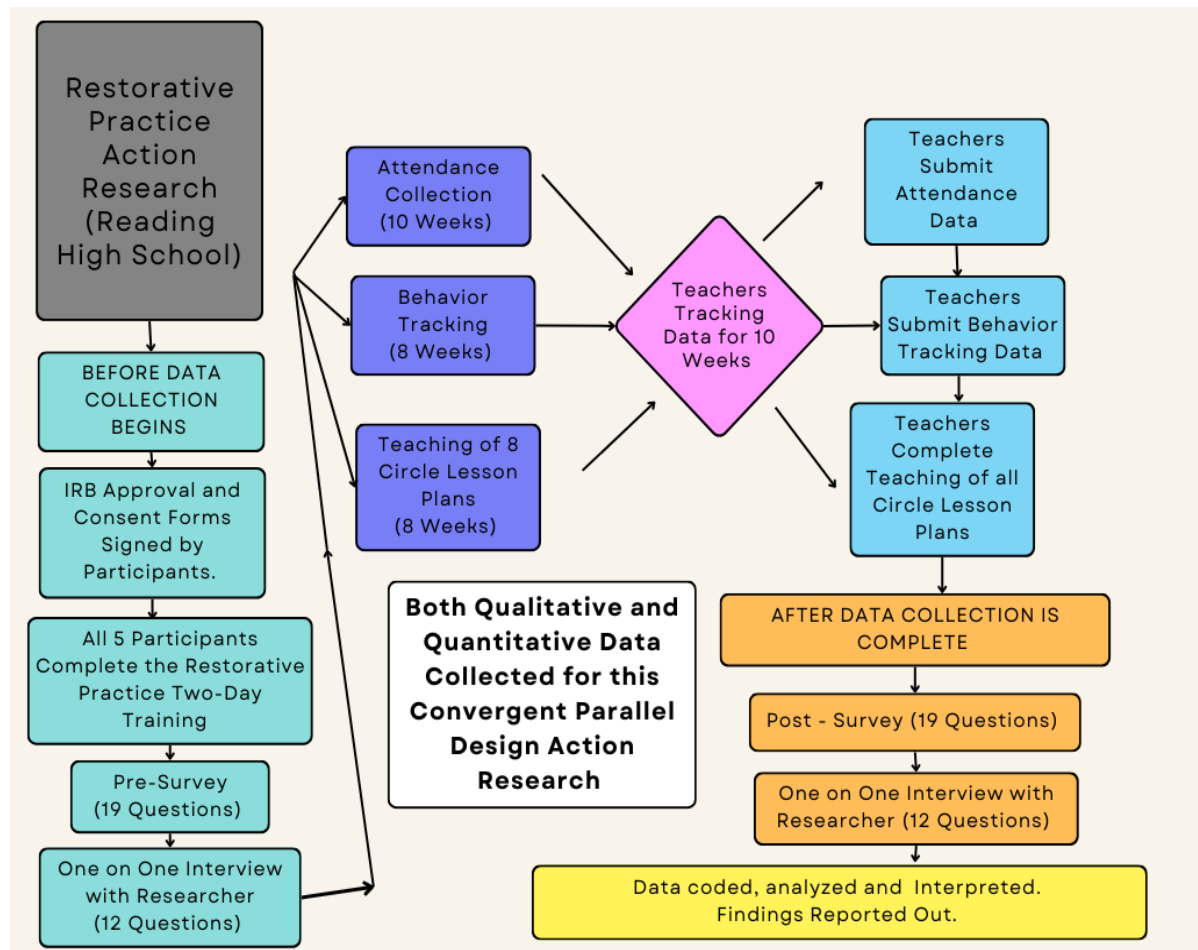
Note. Figure 4 was created by the researcher using Canva to provide a visual representation of the research steps conducted.

One of the main components of the study was the delivery of proactive circle lessons over the period of eight weeks. The lessons were delivered by the five participating teachers and circles were conducted for each with a talking piece. The circle meetings with guiding questions for each lesson were restorative practices in action in the classrooms. The lesson plan topics are outlined in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Circle Lesson Plan Topic List

Proactive Circle Lesson Plan Schedule for Action Research - Restorative Practice

PROACTIVE CIRCLE LESSON PLAN TOPICS BY WEEK	
Week 1	Norm Setting and Introduction of the Talking Piece
Week 2	Creating a Safe and Positive Classroom Environment
Week 3	Understanding School Rules
Week 4	Relationship Building Circle
Week 5	What does Success Mean?
Week 6	Picturing my Future
Week 7	Friendship, Community Building, Planning for the Future
Week 8	Goal Setting and Motivation

1 LESSON PER WEEK	IN 9TH GRADE CLASSROOMS	READING HIGH SCHOOL

Note. Figure 5 was created by the researcher using Canva to highlight the topics of study used in the action research for circle lesson plans.

Tolle (2004) identified the need for being present in the face of situations that may cause intense emotional reactions. The teaching of circle lesson plans to students as a proactive measure puts teachers in a natural position of being present with students and engaging in meaningful conversation. This study, which is based on the principles of restorative practices in the classroom, included components taken directly from the two-day formal restorative practice training, a prerequisite to this study for action research participation. To further elaborate on the skills sets that teachers utilized during these lessons, it is imperative to review and consider what the restorative practice continuum

states for guidance and strategies. Figure 6 outlines the steps of the continuum and

highlights the need to incorporate a variety of responses to students in the circle lessons.

Figure 6

Restorative Practice Continuum with Detail by Step

Restorative Practices Continuum from the *International Institute of Restorative Practices* (IIRP)

Affective statements
Brief comments about how others were impacted by the person's behavior.

Affective Questions
Affective Questions are one step further; asks questions such as, who was affected, how they were affected, etc.

Small Impromptu Conference
Occur when a few people meet briefly to address and resolve a problem.

Circles
More formal RP that allows everyone to have some say in what should happen as a result of the wrongdoing

Formal Conference
Brings together offenders, victims and communities of support to repair harm and promote healing.

Adapted from Costello, B., Wachtel, J. & Wachtel, T. (2010)., Restorative circles in schools building community and enhancing learning.

Note. Image taken from 2010 *Restorative Circles in Schools: Building Community and Enhancing Learning*, IIRP, Costello and Wachtel (2010)

Such responses may have included affective statements, affective questions, and

small impromptu conversations. The diagram above shows the steps in the restorative

practice continuum and outlines how each can be used with people when being

restorative. While the focus of restorative practices in a responsive situation is to repair

harm and talk about who was affected by others' actions, for the purpose of this study, the

approach is proactive and circle lessons were not addressing harm or wrongdoing, but

rather building community and capacity for each person in the classroom to have a voice. The use of affective statements is the first strategy on the continuum. Figure 7 shows examples of how to use those statements with students appropriately.

Figure 7

Affective Statement Example Chart

AFFECTIVE STATEMENTS DEFINED

TYPICALRESEPONSE	AFFECTIVE STATEMENTS
Nice job on your project.	I am so impressed with the results of your final project.
It doesn't always rain in Seattle.	I am so excited you can sightsee in Seattle when the sun is shining.
Thank you for getting strait to your work.	I am thrilled that we are all ready for class.
Stop teasing Sandy.	I'm uncomfortable when I hear you tease Sandy.
You shouldn't do that.	When I saw you shove past people in the hall, I was worried that someone was going to get hurt.

Note. Image adapted from 2010 *Restorative Circles in Schools: Building Community and Enhancing Learning*, IIRP, Costello and Wachtel (2010)

The use of restorative questions is the second strategy on the continuum. This is very specific with guiding questions that are used for two different situations. One set of questions is used when repairing harm that has been done, and the other is used when people have been wronged and are trying to repair or understand their own feelings. Figure 8 demonstrates both sets of questions.

Figure 8

Formal Restorative Questions

RESTORATIVE QUESTIONS

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG
What happened?
What were you thinking at the time?
What have you thought about since?
Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way have they been affected?
What do you think you need to do to make things right?

WHEN PEOPLE ARE AFFECTED
What did you think when you realized what had happened?
What impact has this incident had on you and others?
What has been the hardest thing for you?
What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

Note. Image adapted from 2010 *Restorative Circles in Schools: Building Community and Enhancing Learning*, IIRP, Costello and Wachtel (2010)

Figure 8 was created by the researcher using Canva to show restorative questions for those who have been harmed (left) and those who have harmed (right).

"When you speak out, you are in your power. So change the situation by taking action or speaking out if necessary or possible; leave the situation or accept it [SIC]. All else is madness" (Tolle, 2004, p. 82). While restorative practices have been used proactively and responsively across many disciplines, for the purpose of this study and the lessons that were implemented, a proactive approach was taken. These open circle lessons provided a platform for students to speak out, share their ideas, and be heard and understood. While the questions in the study for each lesson were low risk, conversations

had the potential to develop and go to a deeper level. Each individual teacher in the study used the lesson plans and guiding questions with their groups to run proactive circles and had the potential to build community within the classroom.

Research Design, Research Methods and Data Collection

Adamson (2020) stated that research can be informative for restorative practices through understanding data and using the data to inform decisions to make changes for continued improvement. The research design for this study was a mixed methods design. The design was a convergent parallel design also known as a convergent design. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and examined. The qualitative and quantitative data were both collected simultaneously. Each of the data sets were analyzed separately and independent of one another. The results of the findings were mixed to provide the most comprehensive findings. Both the qualitative data and the quantitative data in this study were considered to have equal weight. One was not considered more important than the other. Figure 9 outlines the specific timelines for data collection both qualitative and quantitative.

Figure 9

Data Collection Phases and Timeline

Doctoral Capstone Project Data Collection Plan and Timeline Document			
	Before Research Begins		
Consent Forms	Signed Consent Forms	Consent form completed, submitted, and approved by IRB and presented to research participants.	All Consent forms from all 5 participants have been signed and submitted to the researcher. (Early January)
Prerequisites:	*All Participants must have completed the two day Restorative Practice Training before beginning the study. Three participants are trained and two are finishing day one of training in January/February.*		
Research Questions	*Types of Data to Collect (Qualitative vs Quantitative)*	*Data Sources (Detailed Explanation of Data to Collect)*	*Timeline for Data Collection*
1	How do intentional restorative practices in classrooms affect student attendance?	Quantitative	Daily attendance tracking for 10 weeks for the classroom where the restorative proactive student lessons are being taught. This will begin on the first day that the teacher teaches his/her lesson plan. There are 8 weeks of lesson plans and attendance will be tracked daily for 10 weeks. Research participants have been provided a tracking sheet for this data.	January - This will begin after the formal pre-interview has been conducted and after the pre-survey has been submitted.
2	How do restorative practices and proactive "circles" impact classroom behavior ?	Quantiative	Daily behavior tracking for 8 weeks for the classroom where the restorative practice student lessons are being taught. This will begin on the first day that the teacher teaches his/her lesson plan. There are 8 weeks of lesson plans and behavior will be tracked daily for 8 weeks. Research participants have been provided a tracking sheet for this data.	January - This will begin after the formal pre-interview has been conducted and after the pre-survey has been submitted.
3	What is the correlation between restorative practices and a supportive learning environment?	Qualitative	Pre-Survey shared with all 5 research participants. Each has been directed to take the survey (19 questions pre-approved by IRB) after they have completed two days of Restorative Practice Training. (Three of the participants are trained and two are finishing day two of training.)	End of January/ Early February
3	What is the correlation between restorative practices and a supportive learning environment?	Qualitative	Pre-Interview Questions (12 questions) will be asked to all 5 participants in a one on one interview with the researcher. Interviews will be audio recorded. All questions have been prepared in advance and have been approved by IRB.	End of January / Early February
3	What is the correlation between restorative practices and a supportive learning environment?	Qualitative	Teaching of Restorative Practice (Proactive) Lesson Plans. 8 plans to be taught one per week to one class period.	Beginning at the end of January/ Early February
3	What is the correlation between restorative practices and a supportive learning environment?	Qualitative	Post-Survey shared with all 5 research participants. Each participant will take the survey (19 questions pre-approved by IRB) after they have completed eight weeks of lessons in the classroom of their choice.	April/ May
3	What is the correlation between restorative practices and a supportive learning environment?	Qualiatative	Post-Interview Questions (12 questions) will be asked to all 5 participants in a one on one interview with the researcher. Post interviews will be conducted after all of the lesson plans have been delivered to the classroom of their choice. Interviews will be audio recorded. All questions have been prepared in advance and have been approved by IRB.	April/May

Note. The researcher created Figure 9 to outline the steps of the action research and show the timeline for each component of the study.

The International Review Board Application was completed and submitted for approval on August 10, 2024. The IRB required three revisions prior to final approval and requested additional information and clarification throughout the process.

The first set of data collected included qualitative data in the form of a pre survey. This survey consisted of 19 questions. The survey results were compiled and coded. The survey was conducted before the start of the teaching of lessons (Appendix E).

Additional qualitative data was collected through interviews that were held prior to the lesson plans being taught. In these pre-interview sessions, 12 questions were posed by the researcher in a one-on-one setting with each of the five participants. Answers to each of the 12 questions were recorded, evaluated, transcribed, and coded at the conclusion of the pre interviews. The pre interview questions have been included (Appendix F).

Quantitative data was collected from all five teachers in the form of attendance. The tracking of attendance occurred in the classroom and during the class period where the circle lesson plans were executed. The attendance tracking took place for ten weeks. It began the same week that the circle lesson started and continued for two weeks after the lesson implementation was completed. The tracking forms used for the attendance collection have been included (Appendix G).

Quantitative data was collected from all five teachers in the form of behavior tracking. This tracking took place over the course of eight weeks. The behavior data collected was not collected daily like the attendance data but rather was collected when there was an uptick in behavior that warranted a notation from the group of students that were receiving the circle lessons. The evaluation of behavior as a quantitative measure

was relevant to what was happening in the classroom. Evans and Vaandering (2016)

identified thoughts about relationships in schools and stated that the "quantity,

complexity, and reach of relationships that occur in a school are mind-boggling" (p. 59).

Evans and Vaandering (2016) go on to say that it is vital to nurture relationships that are

healthy to achieve equitable and just learning environments as well as for managing

conflict and harm. This study explored relationships in the classroom environment and

noted when behavior outbursts persisted despite the community building that was taking

place through restorative practices. The behavior tracking form has been included

(Appendix H).

At the conclusion of the data collection from the teachers in classrooms and after

all eight lesson plans had been taught, next steps included a collection of post quantitative

data. "The most important aspect of protocols is that they provide structure and safety for

teams to work together in meaningful and productive ways that embed reflective

practices in their day-to-day work" (Hite & Donohoo, 2021, p. 89). The structure of the

restorative practice lesson plans was very specific, and each plan was set up to guide the

participants through each lesson with purpose and specificity. The plans were proactive

and included specific goals which gave each participant the structure needed to carry out

the lessons with consistency and purpose. Data collected from the participants after the

lessons had been carried out was crucial to the findings.

All five teachers in the study completed a post survey which included 12

questions. The data collected from both the pre, and the post survey results were coded,

compared, and analyzed. The post survey questions have been included (Appendix E).

Each of the five teachers in the study also completed a post interview that was held one on one with the researcher. Each of the interviews were held in a private setting either in the researcher's office, the teacher's classroom, or a conference room to ensure privacy. Those meetings were audio recorded on an I phone and then transcribed on the computer using Google Docs: Voice Typing. This approach was used during both the pre-and-post interview sessions. Pre and post answers from the action research participants were coded, compared and analyzed for the purpose of this study. The post interview questions have been included (Appendix I).

Fiscal Implications

This study was conducted with minimal cost both directly and indirectly. Initial teacher interest in participating in the action research was marketed using a tri-fold pamphlet explaining the study and detailed expectations of participants (Appendix J). Direct cost involved included $25.00 gift cards for each of the research study participants. This totaled $125.00 and was paid for by the researcher. The software used for creating figures was Microsoft Excel and this is part of the Microsoft Office package which the researcher previously purchased. Canva was also used and the researcher paid for a license to use this software. Lastly, Google suite tools were used to include Google Forms for the survey and Google Sheets for the tracking forms. Indirect costs to the school district included the cost for the teachers who participated in the study to be restorative practice trained for two days. This cost included substitute teacher coverage as well as the cost incurred by the district indirectly for insurance and benefits for those teachers participating in professional development. Additionally, there was a cost to the school district to provide two trainers for this training event who were internal trainers

but were absent from their home buildings for two days to complete this training. Indirect

costs also included utility costs, teacher wages and benefits, copying costs for lesson

plans, and planning costs for teachers in the study who needed to prepare for the delivery

of circle lesson plans one time a week for eight weeks.

Validity

Research questions for this study were clear and targeted to gain understanding

about restorative practices and the impact they may have in a classroom setting. The

questions followed the SMART formula and were specific, measurable, achievable,

relevant, and time bound. The approach to this action research was multifaceted which

led to a convergent parallel design, a more comprehensive approach to collecting,

interpreting, and analyzing data to arrive at conclusions that are valid. The problem was

well defined for this action research study. The validity of the research is supported by

using the analysis tools in Microsoft Excel, which were used to create tables and figures

for both the qualitative and quantitative data that was collected.

A comprehensive review of the literature revealed the need for continued research

in and around restorative practices in schools. While the literature review provided depth

and breadth of information to support the use of restorative practices in the justice

system, it also revealed a need for more intensive studies in schools to determine the full

extent of the impact of restorative practices. Specific to this study was the

implementation of proactive restorative practices and this study did not explore

restorative practices being used responsively. This research could lead to a separate study

altogether.

Data collected for this study was comprehensive and taken from across multiple data sets in an effort to cross-validate findings and reduce bias. The collection of both quantitative and qualitative data has added to the complexity of the study and has provided a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions being asked the data collected to identify conclusions.

The stakeholders in this study included teachers from five separate classrooms. Each teacher has a caseload of grade nine students. All participants had varying skill sets and years of experience in the classroom. This diversity further enhanced the findings and results of the study. In Adamson (2020) stated that restorative practices "cut across disciplines" and "provide a comingled approach to theory and application" (p. 6).

Summary

The study of restorative practices and how the intentional application of those practices impact the student environment, attendance and behavior was explored for this action research. Proactive circle lesson plans were taught for eight weeks as one aspect of the study. Heye (2023) credited circling as a tool to "make a real difference to the living and learning environment of a class, a teaching team and a school" (p. 1). The results of the circle lessons and their impact are reported out through the teacher interview and survey data. Additionally, a look at the attendance and behavior data will also have a direct impact on the findings reported out from this study. Adamson (2020) wrote that "many fields of study focus on or include the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Restorative practices cannot claim to be the original or sole discipline concerned with human interaction, but it can offer some new and helpful perspectives" (p. 6). As a result of this study, the intention is to explore those perspectives as they relate to ninth grade

classrooms when applied with purpose. In restorative practices, there is "agency in

meeting human needs" participants have a voice and a sense of belonging (Rundell, 2023,

p. 20). There is a need for establishing norms and using practices that are predictable and

consistent by practitioners. Norm setting and intentional application of restorative

practices through this action research was intentional to give both teachers and students a

voice and establish a sense of community in the classroom.

     While the school setting has many challenges and at Reading High School the

obstacle of building relationships which could have an impact on attendance, behavior

and the social environment exists. This research set out to explore how restorative

practices applied in the classroom setting could positively influence short term goals of

student attendance and behavior as well as the long-term goal of graduation from high

school. Wakeman (2017) offers the perspective that "people's choices, and the

consequences that go with them, should be made visible and undiluted. You don't need to

rescue people unless they are truly at risk or the greater good is threatened" (p. 107). This

study has explored the impact that restorative practices, applied in a proactive nature,

allow student choice and offer opportunity for trust building and community connections.

According to Braithwaite (2010), the fundamental hypothesis of restorative practices is

that human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make

positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things with

them, rather than to them or for them. It is the nature of the process, not the outcome,

which makes the response restorative or not.

     Along the same lines of Braithwaite's fundamental hypothesis, Nelson (2017)

stated that "most employees want to feel valued, and they typically get motivated when

they have a purpose and are making a difference to the organization" (p. 195).

Additionally, they want a comfortable place to work, and they want to enjoy what they do

each day. Restorative approaches can help both the teachers, and the students feel

purpose and meaning. Schools and other organizations that only use the responsive

aspects without building the social capital beforehand are less successful than those that

also incorporate the proactive approaches (Wachtel, 2010).

      Research data was compiled, coded, analyzed and interpreted for this action

research. The findings from the data collected and the interpretation of those findings are

outlined in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

In this action research study, there were multiple sources used in the data collection process. This mixed methods design included both qualitative data and quantitative data collection before, during and after the teaching of eight weeks of proactive circle lessons in primarily ninth grade science classrooms. Data was collected in text format through pre and post interviews and a survey. Additional quantitative data was collected through attendance and behavior tracking forms. The findings are described in detail below through text, figures, and visual tables to demonstrate a clear representation of the results. More in-depth discussions and details are provided in this chapter to fully explain the results of this study.

Data Analysis

The action research for this study was conducted using a mixed method, embedded design. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, and multiple data sources were utilized to triangulate the results of this study of the implementation of proactive restorative circle lessons in primarily ninth grade. As a prerequisite to participation in this study, each teacher was required to attend the two-day formal restorative practice training offered through the Reading School District. Two teachers out of the five had not been previously trained and completed the training prior to starting the study in January. Data was collected for a total of ten weeks. A pre-survey was administered to the five teacher participants in the group before proactive lesson plans were delivered to classrooms. Additionally, a set of pre-interview questions was asked prior to the start of the teaching of the lessons. Answers to the interview questions were recorded, transcribed, and coded based on findings. Lesson plans were designed by the

researcher which included all low-risk questions and were all proactive in their design.

Participants administered one lesson per week to one class for a total of eight weeks.

Concurrently, attendance was tracked for the class period receiving the lessons and

notable behavior incidents were also recorded. At the conclusion of the eight-week

period, attendance collection continued for two more weeks. A post-survey was

administered to the teacher participants as well as a post-interview which was recorded,

transcribed, and coded.

Results

This study included data from multiple sources and when triangulated reveal the

following. The triangulated data of the study reveal that attendance has improved,

although it was somewhat inconsistent, and the social-emotional climate in classrooms

did improve as evidenced by survey metrics and reported student perceptions from the

five participants in the study. Additionally, it is noted that behavior concerns may require

interventions that are targeted, such as proactive restorative circles.

The continued use of restorative approaches such as community circles is supported by

the data, but there is a strong need for customized support to sustain and scale

improvements across all classrooms. Formal restorative practice training and refresher

training for the teachers and staff would provide a level of support for increased use of

restorative practices in classrooms.

Study Participant Selection

The study participants were selected based on the grade level that they teach at

Reading High School. The target population in classrooms for this action research was

primarily grade 9 students. The study participants were all teachers of students in grade

nine. There was one participant whose classroom included a mix of students in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12. The study was advertised through a flyer which outlined all of the requirements of the study, and all five participants volunteered to complete the necessary requirements. The study began in the second semester at Reading High School after consent from each participant had been signed. Participants chose the week that they wished to begin teaching their lessons and then implemented the required lessons weekly for eight weeks. Table 1 shows the demographics of the participants in this study.

Table 1

Study Participant Demographics

Study Participant Demographics			
Descriptor	*Descriptor Detail*	*Frequency*	*Percentage*
Gender			
	Male	*4*	*80%*
	Female	*1*	*20%*
Age			
	20 - 25	*3*	*60%*
	26 - 31	*1*	*20%*
	55 - 60	*1*	*20%*
Ethnicity			
	White	*5*	*100%*
Level of Education			
	Bachelor's	*3*	*60%*
	Master's	*2*	*40%*
Teaching Experience in Reading School District			
	1 - 3 Years	*4*	*80%*
	5 - 7 Years	*1*	*20%*
Public School Teaching Experience			
	1 - 3 Years	*4*	*80%*
	30 - 33 Years	*1*	*20%*
Course Content Assignment to Teach during Circle Lesson Execution			
	Ecology	*4*	*80%*
	Environmental Science	*1*	*20%*

*Note.* Table 1 was compiled by the researcher using Canva based on study participant demographics.

Figure 10 reveals participants' work history in public education and is a visual

representation of the variation of time spent practicing teaching.

Figure 10

Teacher Participant Years of Public Education Experience

Please mark the number of years you have been teaching in public education.
5 responses

Legend:
- 0 - 3 Years
- 3 - 5 Years
- 6 - 11 Years
- 11 - 15 Years
- More than 15 Years
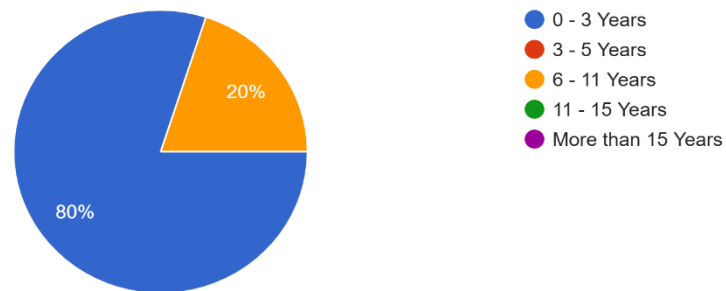
Note. Figure 10 was taken from the Google Forms survey which was administered to the

participants at the beginning and at the end of the lesson plan delivery. Eighty percent of

the participants are teachers who have less than three years of teaching experience in

public education.

Quantitative Survey Results

The qualitative survey was created and administered using Google Forms as the

platform and can be found in Appendix E. The researcher has extracted the graphs below

which are a direct comparison of responses from participants for both the pre-survey and

the post-survey. Survey questions were designed to explore teacher perceptions about

their classrooms and restorative practices before teaching eight weeks of lessons and after

the lessons had been administered. The questions below were designed to explore the

correlation between restorative practices and a supportive learning environment. Findings

are noted under each set of comparisons for the survey. Both the pre and the post survey

did not limit the participants to one answer per question. There were some questions

where the participants answered in multiple categories for the same question.

Figure 11

Question 2 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey

Pre-Survey Results   **Post-Survey Results**

The results of this question in Figure 11 showed an increase in teacher beliefs that

students demonstrated an understanding of classroom norms and rules after the proactive

circle lessons were taught. One participant marked both agree and undecided in the post

results which accounts for the extra answer in this set, however, that same individual also
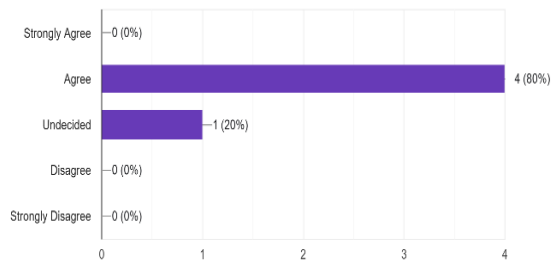
marked agree.

Figure 12

Question 3 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey

Pre-Survey Results   **Post-Survey Results**

Students demonstrate and model ownership of the classroom norms.
5 responses
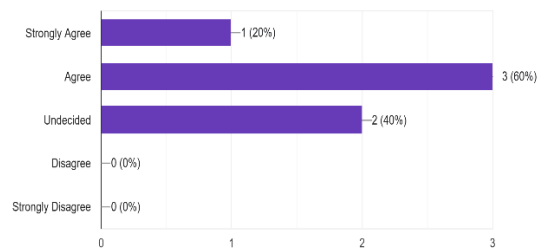
Strongly Agree	1 (20%)
Agree	3 (60%)
Undecided	2 (40%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)

Students demonstrate and model ownership of the classroom norms.
5 responses

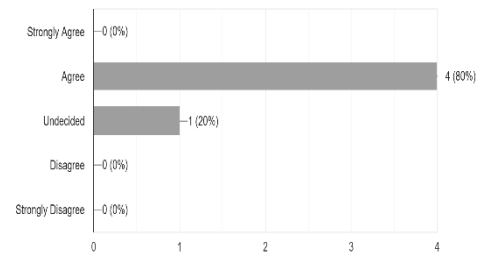|	
Strongly Agree	0 (0%)
Agree	4 (80%)
Undecided	1 (20%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)

Figure 12 reflects that 40% of the teachers were undecided about students being able to demonstrate modeling and ownership of the classroom norms. One participant marked two answers for the pre question in this set. That participant marked both strongly agree and agree. After the lessons had been taught, all but one of the participants agreed that students demonstrated and modeled classroom norms. The first lesson in the eight-week series of proactive circle lessons was designed to teach and establish norms.

Figure 13

Question 4 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey

Pre-Survey Results   **Post-Survey Results**

Students are regularly engaged during their classroom learning time.
5 responses
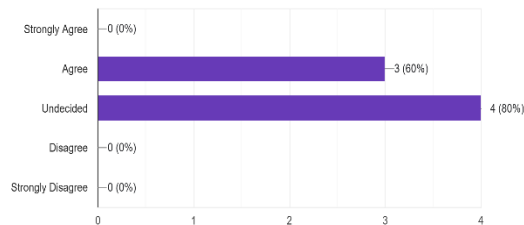
Strongly Agree	0 (0%)
Agree	3 (60%)
Undecided	4 (80%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)

Students are regularly engaged during their classroom learning time.
5 responses

Strongly Agree	1 (20%)
Agree	4 (80%)
Undecided	0 (0%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)
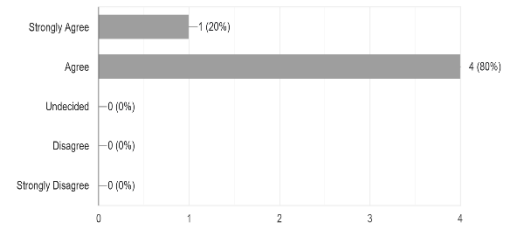
There was a 60% response from teachers initially indicating that they agreed students are regularly engaged in their classrooms during instructional time shown in Figure 13. There was an 80% response from the group labeled undecided. Two of the participants marked both agree and undecided on this question. The post survey, given after the proactive circle lesson plans were taught, indicated an increase in teacher beliefs about students being regularly engaged during classroom learning time with 100 % indicating that they agree or strongly agree, showing an increase from the pre survey result.

Figure 14

Question 5 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey

Pre-Survey Results   **Post-Survey Results**
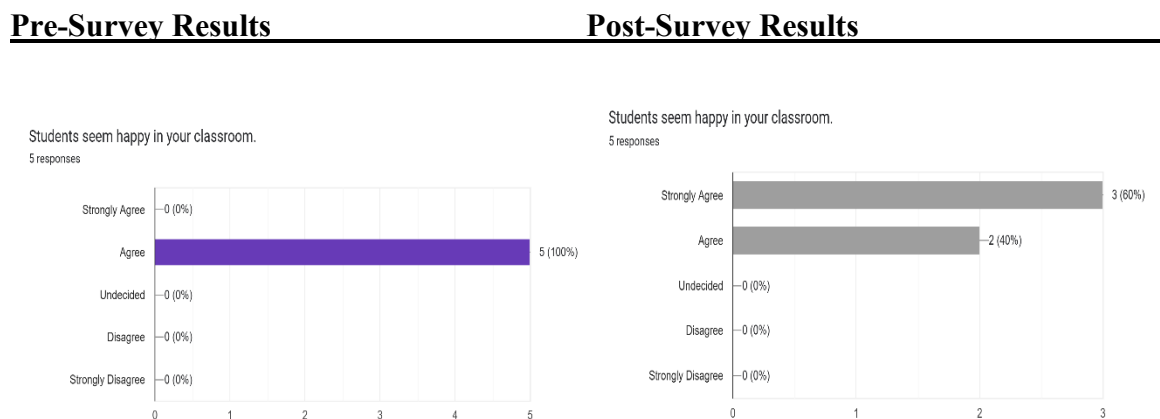
This research study explored the correlation between restorative practices and a supportive learning environment. In Figure 14, there was a 60% increase between the pre and post set of data regarding students being happy in the classroom. All of the teachers agreed that students seemed happier in the classroom after the restorative practice intervention of proactive circle lessons.

Figure 15

Question 6 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey

Pre-Survey Results **Post-Survey Results**
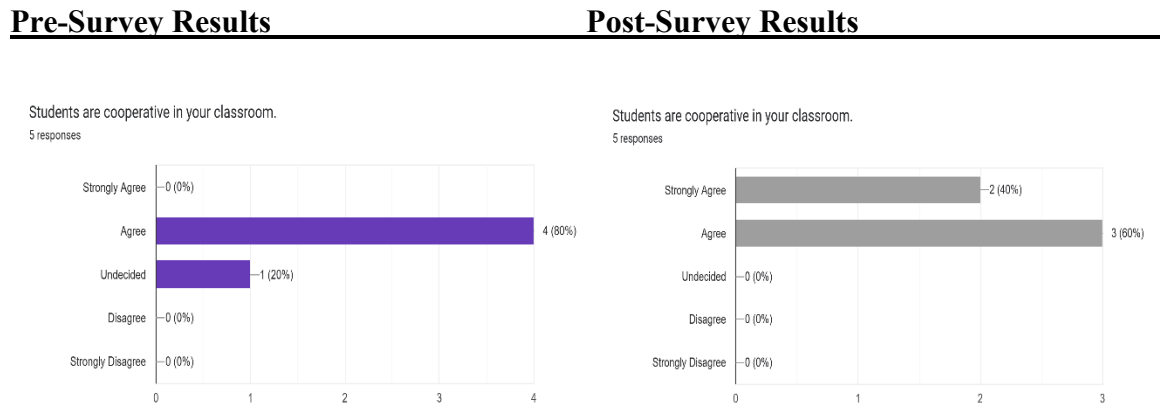
Prior to the start of the restorative practice intervention of proactive circle lesson plans, 80% of the participants reported cooperative students in their classrooms as shown in Figure 15. After the intervention, two of the teachers indicated that they strongly agreed that students were cooperative, an increase of 40%.

Figure 16

Question 7 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey

Pre-Survey Results **Post-Survey Results**
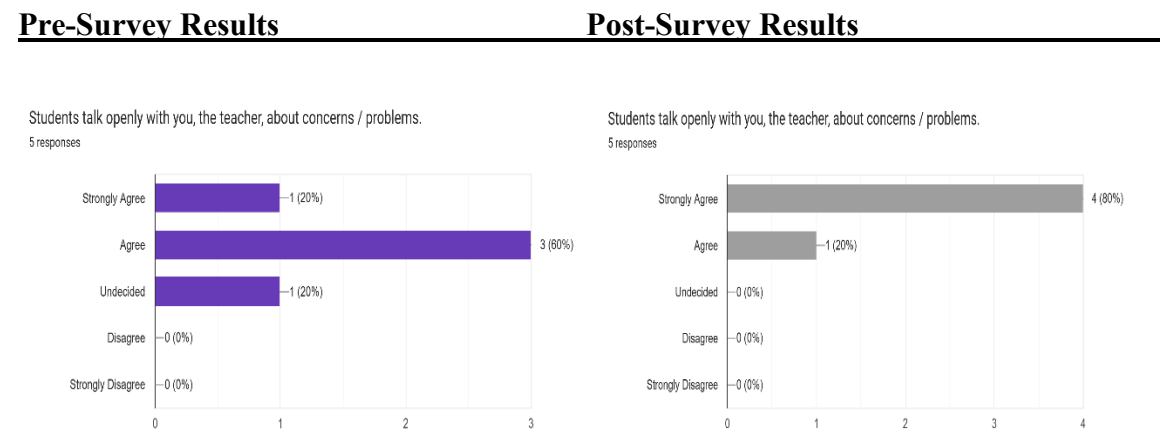
Figure 16 clearly shows an increase in agreement responses across all the participants from the pre to the post survey data collected regarding students and their

willingness to talk openly with the teacher about concerns or problems. Worth noting: 4

out of 5 people said that they strongly agree after the restorative lessons had been taught.

Figure 17

Question 8 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey
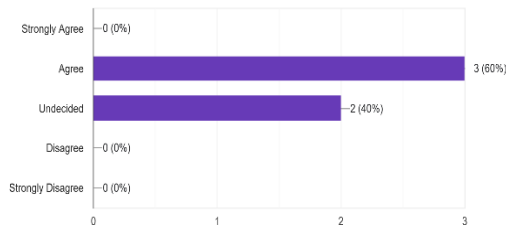
Pre-Survey Results   **Post-Survey Results**
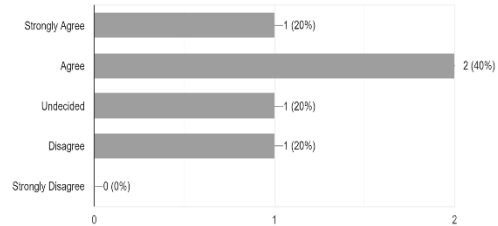
Trust was the focus of the question above in Figure 17 and the results of the

survey from pre to post were widespread. While most people agreed before teaching their

lessons that students trusted one another in the room, after the completion of the

restorative practice lessons, the participants had very different thoughts about trust

amongst their students.

Figure 18

Question 9 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey
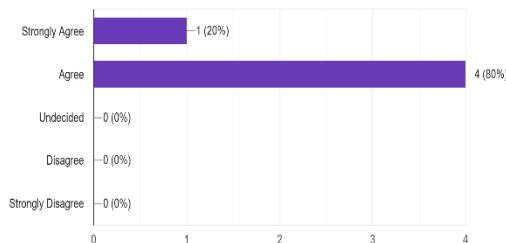
Pre-Survey Results   **Post-Survey Results**
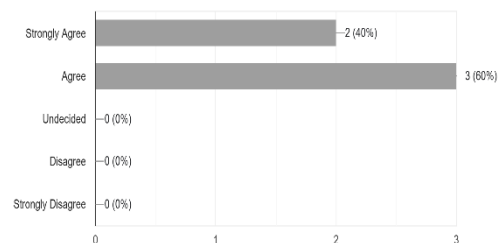
The responses from the teacher participants about whether the students trust the teachers showed minor change from the pre to the post responses shown in Figure 18. One individual in the study group moved from agree to the strongly agree category after the lessons had been delivered.

Figure 19

Question 10 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey

Pre-Survey Results   **Post-Survey Results**
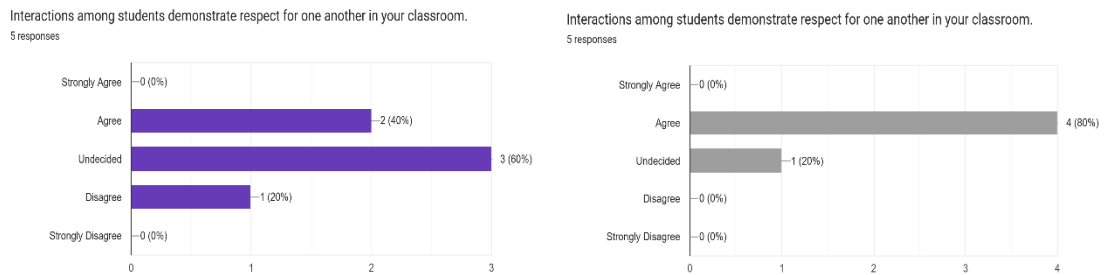
In Figure 19, the participants moved from mostly undecided and the disagree category to the agree category where they indicated that interactions among students demonstrated respect for one another in the classroom more so following the delivery of eight weeks of proactive circle lesson plans.

Figure 20

Question 11 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey

Pre-Survey Results   **Post-Survey Results**

Interactions between you, the teacher, and students demonstrate respect.
5 responses
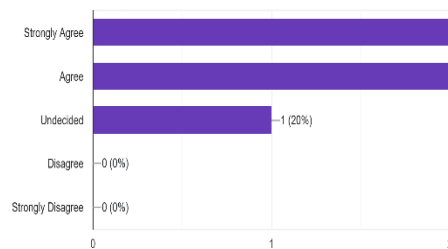
Strongly Agree	2 (40%)
Agree	2 (40%)
Undecided	1 (20%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)

Interactions between you, the teacher, and students demonstrate respect.
5 responses

Strongly Agree	2 (40%)
Agree	3 (60%)
Undecided	0 (0%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)
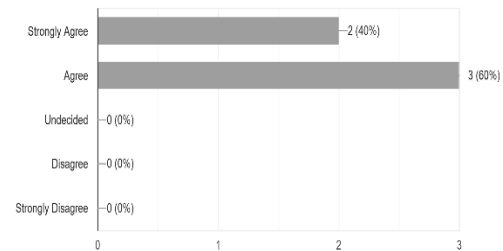
Teachers indicated in Figure 20, that students demonstrated respect for the teacher both before and after the delivery of lessons.

Figure 21

Question 12 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey

Pre-Survey Results   **Post-Survey Results**

Students are cooperative during your lessons in the classroom.
5 responses
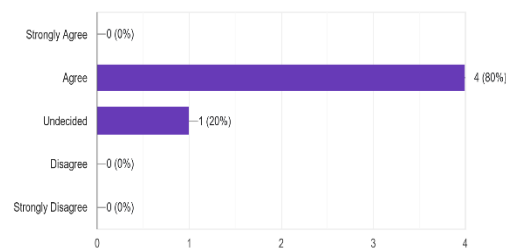
Strongly Agree	0 (0%)
Agree	4 (80%)
Undecided	1 (20%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)

Students are cooperative during your lessons in the classroom.
5 responses

Strongly Agree	1 (20%)
Agree	4 (80%)
Undecided	0 (0%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)
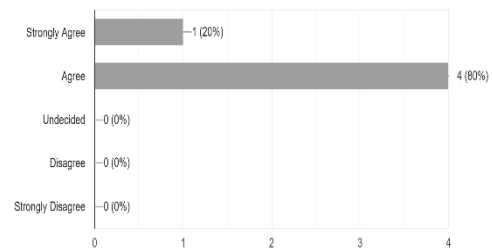
The teacher participants reported an increase in agreeability around cooperation from the start of the teaching of proactive circle lessons to the conclusion of the delivery of the content. No teachers reported undecided in the post responses shown in Figure 21.

Figure 22

Question 13 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey
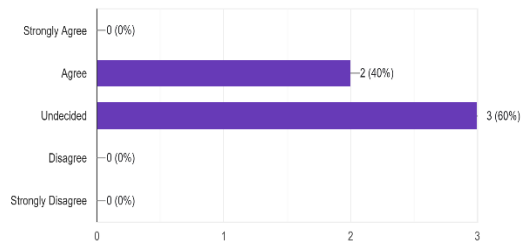
| **Pre-Survey Results** | **Post-Survey Results** |
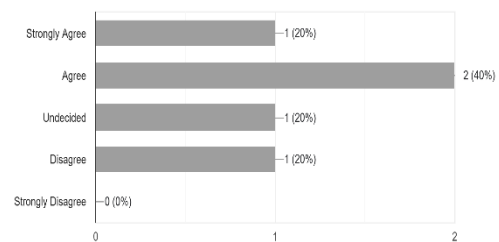
Much like the question about trust and whether or not the students trusted one another in the classroom, the results in Figure 22 were similar in nature pertaining to students and their ability to show empathy toward one another in the classroom. At the onset of the action research, the participants reported mostly agree and undecided. After the lessons had been taught the participant group revealed a larger split in their responses to this same question.

Figure 23

Question 14 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey
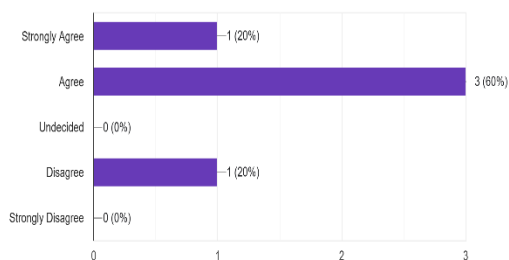
| **Pre-Survey Results** | **Post-Survey Results** |
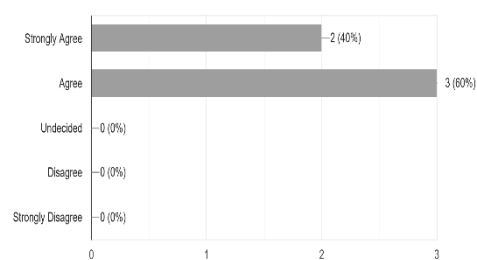
The findings for the question in Figure 23 indicated an increase in agreeability among the participants that the classroom environment provides opportunities for students to have a voice. The responses to the post survey were all in the strongly agree and agree categories after the delivery of the lessons.

Figure 24

Question 15 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey

Pre-Survey Results   **Post-Survey Results**
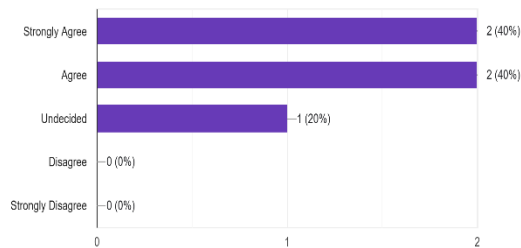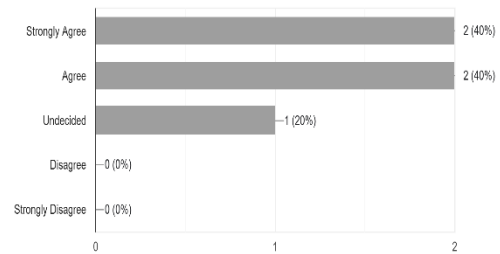
The results from the question about students feeling heard and understood in the classroom in Figure 24, remained unchanged from the pre to the post data collection.

Figure 25

Question 16 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey

Pre-Survey Results   **Post-Survey Results**

The results from the question in Figure 25 about whether or not teachers had

established a formal process for students to share with the teacher about concerns or ideas

showed a variation in responses before lessons were delivered. The results indicated after

the lessons were taught that all five participants agreed that there is now a formal process

in place for students to share with their teachers.

Figure 26

Question 17 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey

Pre-Survey Results   **Post-Survey Results**

There is a formal process in your classroom for students to share with one another about concerns or ideas.
5 responses

Strongly Agree	0 (0%)
Agree	1 (20%)
Undecided	0 (0%)
Disagree	4 (80%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)

There is a formal process in your classroom for students to share with one another about concerns or ideas.
5 responses

Strongly Agree	0 (0%)
Agree	5 (100%)
Undecided	0 (0%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)
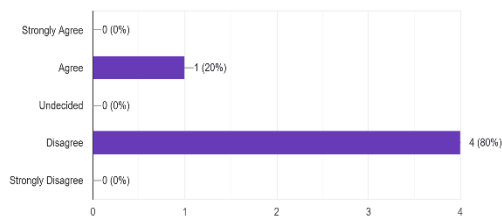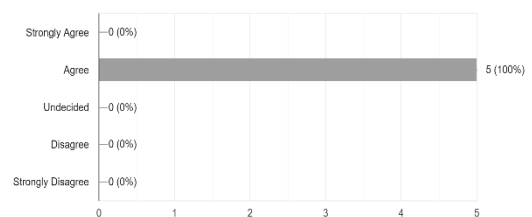
The findings of the questions above revealed a notable change from the pre to the

post set of data collected about whether there is a formal process in the participants'

classroom for students to share with one another about concerns. Figure 26 showed that

after the circle lesson plans had been taught, all five participants agreed there is now a

formal process in place as compared to before the lessons started.

Figure 27

Question 18 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey
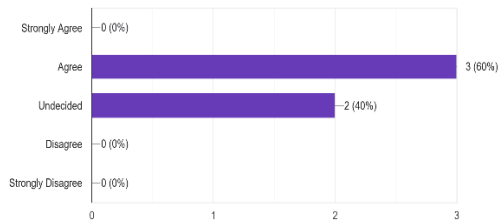
Pre-Survey Results   **Post-Survey Results**
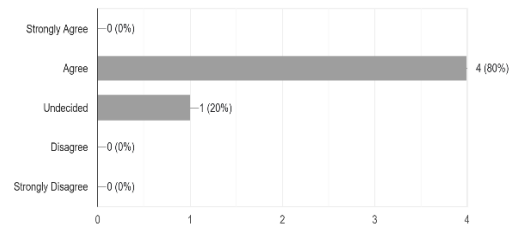
Figure 27 revealed that one participant moved from the undecided to agree

response to the question about students caring for one another.

Figure 28

Question 19 Responses from the Pre and Post Survey
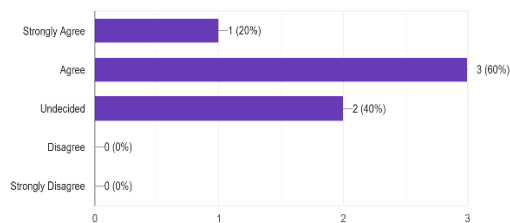
Pre-Survey Results   **Post-Survey Results**
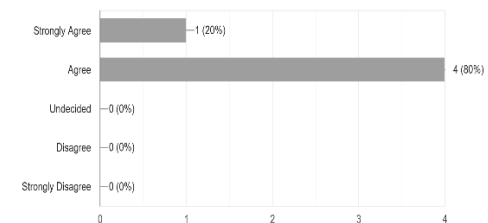
Two of the participants in Figure 28 were undecided during the pre-survey about

whether the students in the classroom cared about the teacher. After the lessons were

taught, all participants reported that they agreed the students did care about the teacher in

the classroom.

Figure 29

Comparison Chart Summary Results of All Survey Data

Key	
Strongly Agree	4
Agree	3
Undecided	2
Disagree	1
Strongly Disagree	0
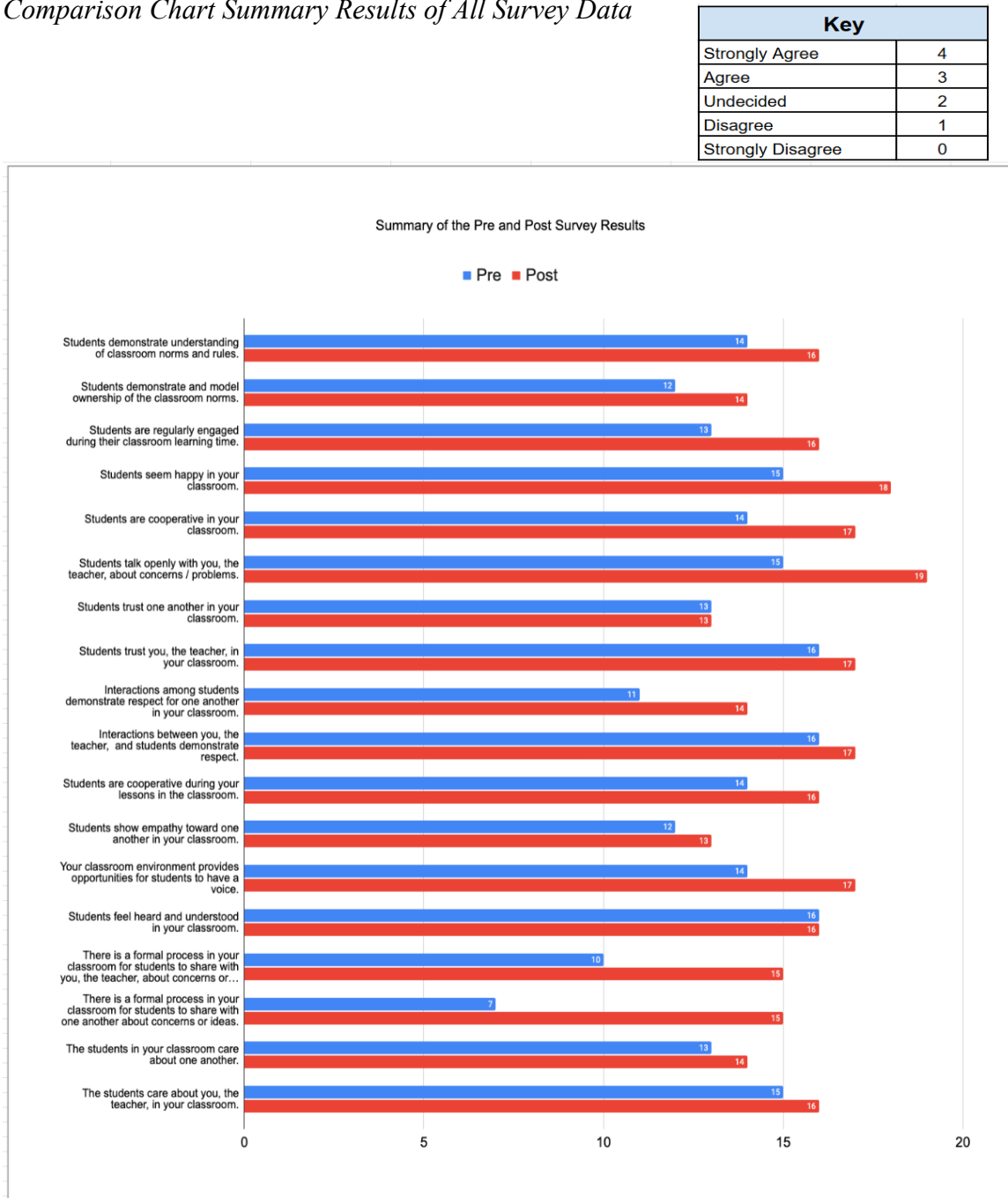
Note. Figure 29 was created by the researcher using Microsoft Excel.

  A numerical value was assigned in Figure 29, to each survey response shown in the key above. The results shown are the summation of all the responses. The chart

reflects a comparison of the pre and the post responses to determine if teachers were more in agreement or less in agreement with each statement. The numbers on the chart are a representation of the summation of all five participant responses for each statement for both the pre and the post surveys. A higher number represents a stronger degree of agreement among the group for each statement.

When considering the summary data for the survey results, the participants showed more agreement with all the statements with the exception of two after they administered the proactive circle lessons in their classrooms for eight weeks. The two statements where the responses stayed the same were: students feel heard and understood in your classroom and students trust one another in your classroom. The first area that showed significant change was students having a formal process to share with the teacher about concerns and ideas. The most significant change was the increase in agreement among the participants after teaching the lessons that there is a formal process in place in their classrooms for students to share with one another about concerns or ideas.

Attendance Data Results

Figure 30

Attendance Data Results - Eight Weeks of Circle Lesson Delivery

	Average Class Size	8 Week Daily Average Attendance	Average Attendance on Non-Circle Days	Average Attendance on Circle Days	% Change in Attendance on Circle Days
Teacher #1	27.2	20.4	20.2	21.5	6.3%
Teacher #2	25.3	18.8	18.7	19.4	3.5%
Teacher #3	26.8	22.7	22.4	22.6	1.2%
Teacher #4	28.8	21.9	21.9	22.1	1.1%
Teacher # 5	23.0	19.3	19.5	18.8	-3.9%
TOTALS	26.2	20.6	20.5	20.9	1.6%
Freshmen Only	27.0	21.0	20.8	21.4	3.0%
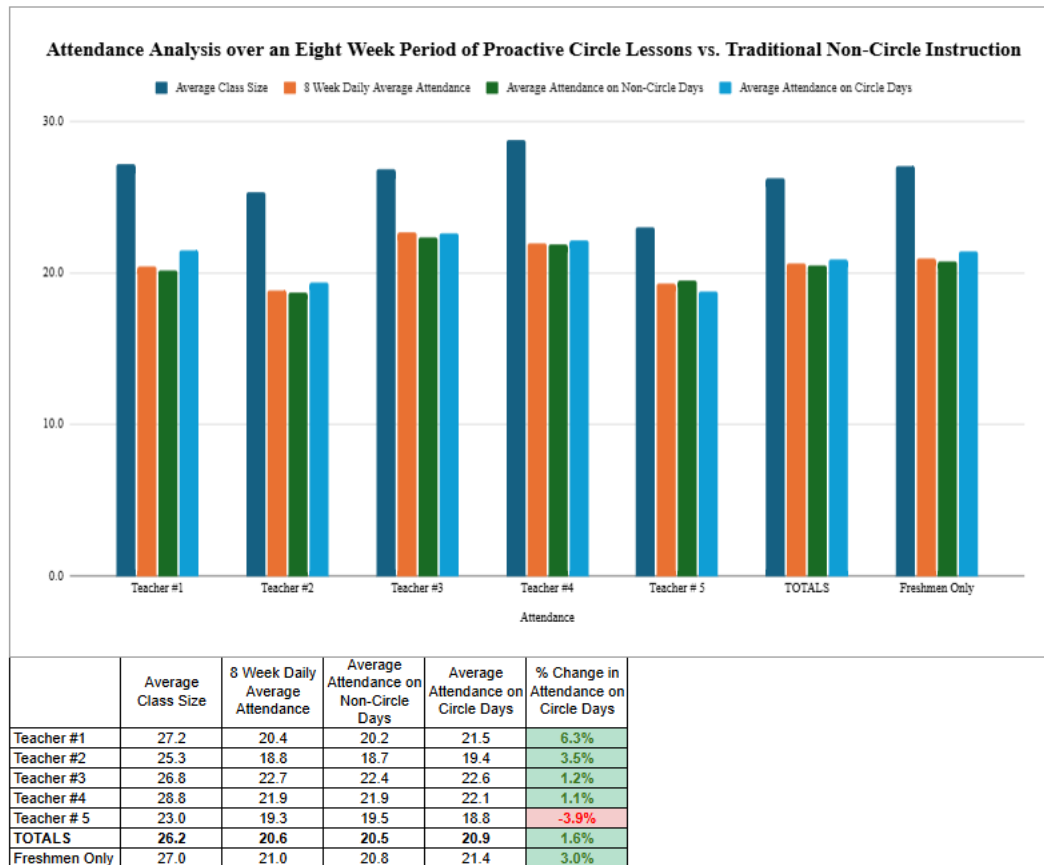
Note. Figure 30 was created by the researcher using Microsoft Excel.

Attendance data was tracked for a period of ten weeks shown in Figure 30. This chart highlights the attendance for the first eight weeks of the study, during which time the participants delivered weekly proactive circle lesson plans to one of their classes during the week for eight weeks. The research question investigated was how do intentional restorative practices in classroom affect student attendance?

The results of the attendance tracking revealed a slight increase in student attendance in four out of the five classrooms where restorative practice lessons were

implemented. The data above shows the attendance comparison on the days when circle

lessons were administered verses those days when there was not a planned proactive

circle lesson. While the average attendance on non-circle days was 20.6, on the days

when circle lessons were administered there 20.9 students in attendance. There is not

much statistical difference between these two numbers. This chart also shows the

difference when the ninth grade only classrooms were extrapolated out of the data. In this

case, those totals went from average daily attendance for freshman on non-circle days of

21.2 to 21.4 on circle lesson plan days.

When this data was separated out by participant, four of the five participants had

an increase in attendance on the days that they had circle lessons planned for their classes

as compared to a non-circle day. While restorative practices may have factored into

resulting numbers, it is possible that other outside unknown factors could have

contributed to the attendance rates. Spring break was during the eight-week lesson

planning delivery and some participants noted during their interviews that spring break

can cause attendance to decrease. In the data shown above, decreases were not observed

except for teacher five. This classroom had a varied make up in student population to

include students who were freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. All the other

classes were freshman only. Additionally, the class taught by teacher five was a semester

long class that began in January, right before the action research started. All the other

classes were year-long classes and had been running since August of 2024, when the

school year began.

Figure 31

Attendance Data Results - Week 9 and 10 Post Circle Lesson Delivery

	Week 9 and 10 Average Class Size	Week 9 and 10 Daily Average Attendance	Week 9 and 10 Attendance on Non-Circle Days	Week 9 and 10 Attendance on Former Circle Days	% Change in Attendance on Former Circle Days - Weeks 9 and 10
Teacher #1	26.0	20.7	20.7	20.0	-3.50%
Teacher #2	24.3	17.9	17.9	20.5	12.68%
Teacher #3	28.7	22.1	21.9	21.2	-3.48%
Teacher #4	28.0	23.0	23.0	23.0	0.00%
Teacher # 5	23.0	20.3	20.3	19.5	-4.10%
TOTALS	26.0	20.8	20.8	20.8	0.35%

Note. Figure 31 was created by the researcher using Microsoft Excel.

The attendance chart in Figure 31 outlines the total attendance in five participating classrooms for weeks nine and ten of the study. During weeks nine and ten, the proactive circle lessons had stopped in all classrooms. Attendance data tracked for the following weeks showed that there was a decrease in the number of students who attended the class period that stopped doing the circle lessons in three of the classes. One set of attendance data remained the same and one set increased the number of students coming to class. While restorative practice lesson plan implementation may have been a factor for students attending class, there may be other unknown variables to explain why

students had a decrease, an increase, or consistent attendance. Because teacher two's

attendance increased so significantly in the two-week period, this result skewed the data

found in the totals section of the chart to look like there was an increase overall in the

attendance on average between all five teacher participant classrooms. When broken

down by class, the data reflected decreases for the most part.

Behavior Tracking Results

This action research explored a key question about behavior. How do restorative

practice and proactive "circles" impact class behavior? Data was collected about behavior

over a period of eight weeks concurrent with the teaching of restorative proactive circle

lessons. The tracking of behavior differed from the tracking of the attendance data in that

it was only noted with a tic mark on a chart that was provided by the researcher before

the study began when behaviors occurred. The behavior tracking chart included a set of

specific behaviors for tracking and a section labeled other. The specific behaviors tracked

included: students being escorted out of the room, students failing to comply with

classroom norms, students who frequently disrupted class, students who would not stay

seated, and students who left the classroom during instruction. If other non-compliant

behaviors were observed, they were recorded under the section labeled other and notes

were made by the participants about the behavior.

Figure 32

Behavior Data Results in Pre-Established Categories
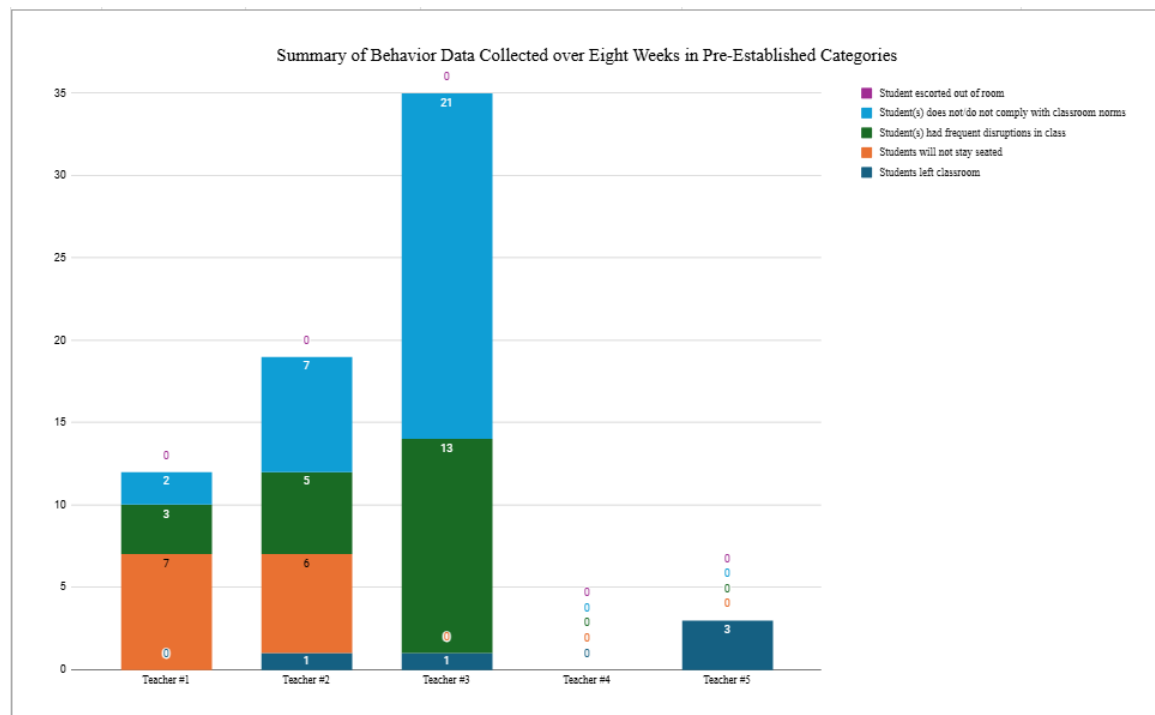
Note. Figure 32 was created by the researcher using Microsoft Excel.

Figure 32 is a graphic representation of the behavior tracked by all five participants over eight weeks. This chart only includes the pre-established categories for tracking. The findings indicated that one teacher had no incidents of behavior to report. The most significant behaviors were students who failed to comply with the classroom norms. There were 30 incidents of non-compliant behavior reported about classroom norms between three teacher participants. The second highest category for behavior tracking was students who disrupted the class. There were 21 reports of disruptions over the course of eight weeks. The third most notable behavior was students refusing to stay seated. There were 13 reports of this behavior. Teacher participant number four had nothing to report. This participant had the most experience as a classroom teacher,

between six and eleven years, while the other participants all have had less than three years of teaching experience. Whether time and experience played a factor in these results is unknown.

Figure 33

Behavior Data Results in "Other" Category with Descriptors
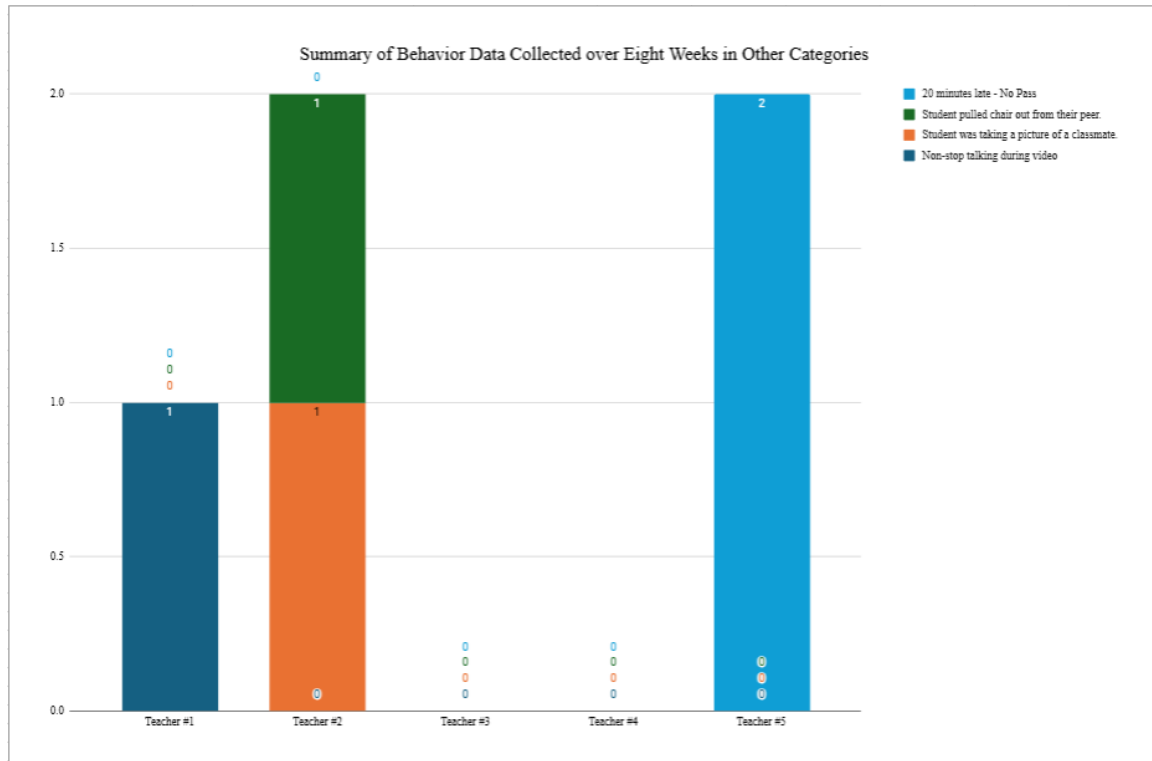
Note. Figure 33 was created by the researcher using Microsoft Excel.

The data shown in Figure 33 is a summary of the extra behavior data that was recorded which was not one of the predetermined categories for tracking. There were four primary "other" behaviors noted to include being late to class, pulling a chair out from under another, taking a picture in class, and excessive talking during a lesson. There were not many behaviors noted here, but the reasons why students were misbehaving and not engaged in the content of the lesson for the day, while unknown, made teaching for the participants more difficult than if behavior reports had not needed to be recorded.

Qualitative Interviews Pre and Post Results

Interviews were conducted with all five of the participants before the action research started and after the action research concluded. The qualitative interviews included questions about restorative practices. After collecting the data, the researcher explored possible correlations between restorative practices and a supportive learning environment, attendance, and behavior. All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Those transcriptions were then evaluated and coded for themes and patterns. The results are outlined below.

Each participant answered twelve questions. The questions can be found in Appendix E. The following codes resulted from the pre and post interviews with five participants: community, safe, comfortable, sharing, relationships, environment, positive impact, student voice, feeling heard, conversation, participation, and commitment.

Community

The theme of community was very present in the interviews. One participant expressed, "To me, I really like the community building, and I really like giving the students a voice." The patterns around the word "community" highlighted classroom community building as a goal using restorative practices. One participant reported how they would share with others the value of restorative practices as it related to community building by saying, " I would tell them that I feel like it is a good way to encourage students who might not be used to talking in a big group to help motivate them and to build a community that they could all have together." Another participant shared an example of how the restorative circles helped to build community: "Using a restorative circle before you need a restorative circle, was a really great way of building a classroom

community and I had not thought of trying to use it that way before, but it worked really well."

The interviews revealed that most of the participants talked about the importance of community in their classrooms. One participant stated, "I really just like having conversations more than I thought, which the kids really liked. It helped to build a community." The use of the proactive circle lessons in the classroom for eight weeks led another participant to comment, "They would look forward to the circles. It built the community in the room and helped them socially grow a little bit because they were talking to people they had not before." The idea of building community in schools through restorative practices was supported by another participant:

> Community: Just getting the kids to talk to each other right now is huge. If you
> can start that early, you are going to make things a lot easier in terms of class
> discussion or getting kids to talk to you, getting the buy-in from kids so they
> know that you actually care about them as a person, instead of just like you only
> care about them sitting down.

Safe

In the school setting where the eight weeks of lessons were taught, the theme of being safe emerged from the data. One participant remarked, "It is such a safe space that they are able to share whatever their answer is, or whatever they feel about something or whatever their thought is. It is invaluable."

Relationships

The act of building relationships is part of the process of restorative practices. Relationships emerged as a frequently mentioned topic. "I pride myself on building

relationships with my kids, but I never thought that that would be a good way to do it and to get some kids out of their comfort zone a little bit," stated one of the participants. Another participant shared, "The way that I know some of my kids now is completely different than the relationships we had before. I felt like we had positive relationships beforehand, but this has just blown it out of the water."

Environment

Environment surfaced as a theme from the interviews. One participant said, "I feel like restorative practices could be really helpful, especially during the beginning of the year to develop relationships and have that open environment feeling like that safe feeling that everyone can share and there are no wrong answers to certain aspects of different topics."

Positive Impacts

Time was spent in the interviews discussing restorative practices and the implementation of the lesson plans. One participant shared in their interview that "we 'Maslow' before we 'Bloom' because you cannot learn anything if your basic needs are not met." This participant shared about the need for positive impacts on the students in the classroom for optimal learning opportunities, but that we must not overlook basic needs first.

Commitment

Restorative practice is a shift in thinking. It is a change in mindset. One participant remarked about commitment to restorative practices: "Having a commitment to restorative practices would be doing that every day. Continually building that

community in the classroom, treating all the students equitable, making sure they get everything they need to succeed in class." Another participant expressed:

> If you are going to commit to a practice, then it needs to be a part of, not necessarily every day, but it does need to be recurring, it doesn't need to be something that takes a large amount of time all of the time, but is something that students know is going to happen and understands the expectations and norms when it happens.

Commitment as a theme emerged for another participant who said:

> I think commitment means different things for different people. For me, it means finding a way to include some pieces of restorative practices in my general teaching and classroom strategies. As I look to the future, it has changed the way I manage when kids are not doing what they should be doing.

Figure 34

Quantitative Data Summary Results of Codes
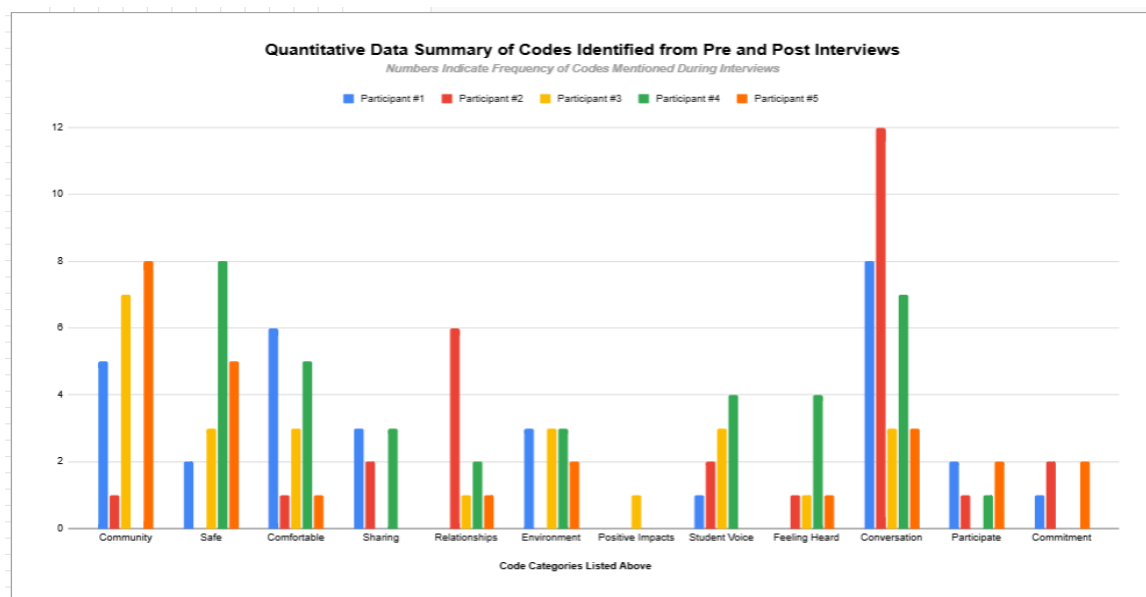
Note. Figure 34 was created by the researcher using Microsoft Excel.

Figure 34 shows the breakdown of the codes that were analyzed for this capstone study. The chart was created in excel. The themes of community, safety, comfort, relationships, and conversation all surfaced at least six or more times throughout the interview transcripts.

Figure 35

Summary of Code Results Separated by Pre and Post Responses

Summary of Qualitative Data Codes Separated into Pre and Post Responses
Data Represents 5 Participant Responses for Each Code
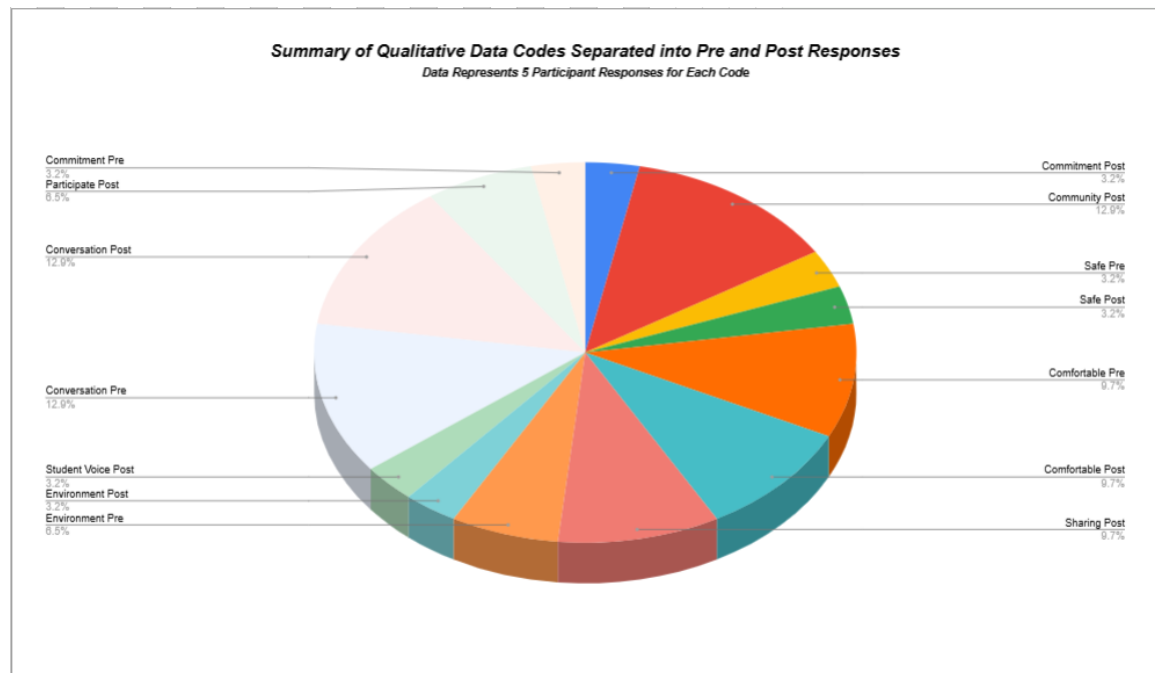
Note. Figure 35 was created by the researcher using Microsoft Excel.

Figure 35 was created in Microsoft Excel for the purpose of separating out the themes between the pre and the post interviews. The most represented theme was conversation in both the pre and the post interviews.

Discussion

The mixed methods research design used for this study included pre and post interviews, pre and post survey data, ten weeks of attendance data, and eight weeks of behavior data. All data was compiled and triangulated to address the three research

questions in this study about the impact of intentional restorative practices as a result of the delivery of eight proactive circle lessons across five classrooms in the Reading High School.

Summary

The findings of the research have been reported out in chapter IV. A final thought regarding teachers implementing restorative practices in classrooms stated by a research participant mentions:

I believe that we need to show teachers the benefits to the practice as opposed to one more thing they have to do, it should not be looked at like that. It should be viewed as this is going to support my practice and help my children to have a better place where they can learn and talk and grow. Who is giving it to them if we don't give it to them? If everyone says, well someone else will do it, then they are never going to get it.

Chapter V will summarize the results and outline conclusions, applications, and limitations. Further explanations of the data collected will be explored and discussed.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

Reading High School is the fourth largest high school in Pennsylvania. The school is in Berks County, in the city of Reading, Pennsylvania, which offers deep diversity and history. The high school population between the main campus and the three satellite campuses for 2024-2025 school year is 4,836 students. The Reading High School receives students each year from five separate middle schools, and those incoming ninth grade students are placed in classes and are expected to find success and acclimate to new surroundings swiftly. While there is some support in place for this transition, ninth grade students often struggle to adjust to the attendance expectations and the rules for behavior, while making new connections. Ninth grade students in the Reading School District have a history of not passing the required number of classes to be promoted to the next grade level, and, as a result, the school district has opened three satellite schools called the Red Knight Learning Academies to accommodate students who fail to earn credits for promotion to tenth grade. When this happens, students leave the main high school building and go to a satellite school to recover credits. These students often miss the typical freshman year experience and the opportunity for students to really connect with other students and their teachers. Restorative practices offer a way for students to build relationships and communities within their classrooms to promote attendance, appropriate behavior, and a social environment that fosters success.

This action research focuses on intentional planning for social-emotional learning through applied restorative practices in the Reading High School. The process involves five participant teachers and five classrooms where intentional proactive circles were

taught for a period of eight weeks to primarily ninth grade students. The study reveals findings for each of the three research questions focused on restorative practices. Prior to the start of any action research, all the participants were formally trained for two days in the Reading School District using the formal restorative practice training model from the International Institute of Restorative Practices in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

The study took place in Reading School District in five science classrooms consisting primarily of ninth grade students. There was one classroom that included students in grades 9 -12. This class was also a semester class versus the other four classes which were year-long classes. Each of the five participants used tracking forms for attendance (ten weeks) and behavior (eight weeks) and was provided eight proactive circle lesson plans which were delivered to their classes, one per week for eight weeks. Pre-and-post interviews and surveys were conducted with the five participants.

Conclusions

Connections may not always be visible to the naked eye, but they exist and are vital for survival. The theme of relationships emerges prevalently from this research. Wachtel et al. (2010) believes that "the most critical function of restorative practices is restoring and building relationships. Because informal and formal restorative processes foster the expression of affect or emotion, they also foster emotional bonds" (p. 16). In this study, formal processes from the restorative practice continuum were implemented in five classrooms for eight weeks. Tolle (2004) explains:

> When you are full of problems, there is no room for anything new to enter, no room for a solution. So, whenever you can, make some room, create some space, so that you can find the life underneath your life situation. (p. 63)

This capstone project provides research that creates space and room for continued exploration. There is a need to give students a voice and address problems in schools in order to maximize student engagement in the classroom setting. The solutions in this study outline the need for continued restorative practices in the Reading High School and define themes that warrant continued development.

Marshall (2023) illustrates:

Despite educators using the language of empowerment, students simply do not get opportunities to fully actualize empowered decision making. It takes an evolved educator to get students to a place where they can exercise their agency to such a degree that empowerment becomes next level. (p. 177)

The data captured in this study is a depiction of the action students take when applied restorative practices are delivered through proactive circle lessons. They demonstrate more willingness to be a part of the conversational process in the classroom which could lead to more empowered decision making. Restorative practice training provides teachers and staff the tools needed to create a safe and collaborative space for learning.

Smith (2019) believes:

Teachers will serve as coaches, experts, and mentors to students, building relationships with them that focus on their social well-being. [. . .] They will help them find their place in the world, teach them how to contribute to it and find joy and meaning in their lives. (p. 92)

The results from the action research questions reveal new findings which

contribute to the understanding of the effects of the use of intentional restorative practices in the Reading School District. Action research in schools provides opportunities to learn how to improve practices resulting in positive impacts and changes in the school setting. At Reading High School, the implementation of applied restorative practices through proactive circle lessons helps students find happiness, feel safe, and build community.

Research Question 1

How do intentional restorative practices in classrooms affect student attendance? This research data was collected through a tracking form over a ten-week period. The attendance was tracked during the period when the circle lessons were taught and then for two more weeks after the circle lessons ended.

Stamford (2024) states, "Connection and communication between humans are essential for our survival in many ways" (p. 175). Communication with students from the teachers about the importance of being present in class is a vital role for classroom teachers. The attendance results of this study indicate that student attendance rates in the freshman classes increased by 3% on the day of the week when the proactive circle lessons were implemented. The overall totals for class attendance across all five classrooms show a 1.5% increase on the circle lesson plan days as compared to non-circle days. One interesting finding is that the class that showed a decrease in attendance during the circle lesson plan days was a mix of student grade levels and was also a semester-long class that had just started meeting in January, shortly before the lessons began. The data collected indicates that circle lessons may have been the reason or a contributing factor for students to be present during the circle lesson plan class periods each week.

The researcher recommends that the Reading School District consider requiring

proactive circle lessons to be taught at the onset of the school year for at least four weeks

to build community and set norms for the classrooms. This recommendation is a result of

the data collected from the participants, through the pre and post survey as well as the pre

and post interviews, who all stated that positive relationships with students established

through proactive circle lessons give teachers and students a formal process to express

ideas and concerns.

Attendance tracking took place for two weeks after lesson plans were complete

and no longer being used. The attendance data show a decrease in attendance, on average,

on the day that the lessons were delivered in three out of the five classes. One class

showed a 12% increase in attendance, and one class showed no change in attendance. It

can be concluded that students' attendance did change from the prior weeks in the

designated class period after circle lessons subsided. While the decline in three classes

was 60% of the participants, the decline was 3.48% or higher for all three classes. It

could be concluded that the decrease is attributed, at least in part, to the ending of the

circle lessons. Rundell (2023) said, "Furthermore, affirmations and acknowledgements go

a long way in making someone feel seen and valued. Therefore, these practices should

become consistent and predictable in promoting stability and nurturing" (p. 16). Because

the practice of teaching the lessons was predictable and students knew it was happening,

it gave them more autonomy to make choices about attending class on the given circle

lesson day.

Stamford (2024) reminds us, "It is also important to remember that

communication goes two ways: there's a speaker and a listener. Both have a

responsibility in processing an interaction" (p. 199). One participant from the study states:

> I think that restorative practices are important in education. Students come in and if they don't care about anything they might not go to class, they might skip class, they might not participate in conversations, but if they actually care about it and they are passionate about it, they will be more willing to put forth that effort.

Communication from the teacher to the students about the scheduled lessons is important in the process of allowing students the opportunity to look forward to the class and be present.

The fiscal implications related to student attendance are the cost to the school district for three extra satellite schools which accommodate mostly freshman students who failed to attend school and lacked the credits they needed to be promoted to the next grade level. These costs are significant and while the relocation of students from the main building to the satellite schools works, there is a sense of failure that accompanies these students when they are relocated. A restorative approach to solving concerns about attendance would be a more proactive action.

Research Question 2

How do restorative practices and proactive "circles" impact student behavior? Behavior tracking occurred for eight weeks in five classrooms. The tracking included only those behaviors that teachers recorded that fit into the pre-established categories, or in the case where the behavior was a disruption and not in a pre-determined category, it was coded as "other" and a notation about the behavior was recorded. Behaviors were tracked for the whole week for eight weeks during the class period that included the

students who were receiving the intentional circle lessons. Stamford (2024) states, "We bond over shared experiences, particularly ones that are emotionally charged" (p. 191). When behavior incidents are a focus of what is happening in the classroom, emotions often play a role. How students are feeling and the type of experiences they are having influence their moods and actions. Teachers report from the study that students communicated more and were more conversational because of the intentional restorative practices used during this study. Increasing the use of restorative practices from the restorative practice continuum is a recommendation from the researcher to the Reading School District to minimize behavior problems. The participants found that the restorative practice interventions made students feel safe, built relationships that otherwise did not exist, and increased communication among students and with the teacher.

Classroom norms are established in the first proactive circle lesson with students. The norms are set as a group and decided on together. The data show that there are 30 incidents of students failing to follow the established norms. While 21 of those incidents were in one classroom, two other classrooms also report norms violations at least two times. Norms guide the direction of restorative practices in the classroom, so it is possible that high degrees of non-compliance may lead to a need to revisit and rewrite the norms for the classroom. The researcher recommends that the Reading School District focus on having all teachers establish norms at the beginning of the school year or semester and revisit those norms periodically with students to identify any need for change.

To improve the success rate for students in school, disruptions need to be kept to a minimum. This data reflects behaviors for eight weeks for approximately 129 students.

Refusing to stay seated is another form of disruption and accounts for 13 incidents of behavior violations. Evans and Vaandering (2016) explain, "Transforming conflict mean addressing the immediate situation and at the same time building capacity to strengthen relationships. Without conflict, needs may remain unmet, and harm may go unacknowledged" (p. 93). Incidents of reported behaviors often lead to conflict in the classroom. While it may be necessary to have some conflict, teachers need to maintain a balance of control. This can be accomplished through building relationships in proactive circles. The researcher recommends Reading High School implement the required circle lessons, so that when a responsive circle is necessary to address conflict or harm, the practice for doing so is already in place.

Wachtel et al. (2010) believe, "Sometimes teachers worry that they are being asked to be counselors or social workers and solve young people's problems. Rather, circles provide a practical forum for the resolution of underlying feelings that intrude into the classroom and disrupt learning" (p. 74). Circle lessons and the implementation of intentional restorative practices directly impact, in a positive way, the number of behavior problems that arise in a classroom setting.

The fiscal implications related to behavior issues in the classroom involve the need for extra space in the high school where students are sent when the behavior escalates beyond the teacher's control. The academic success room is a space currently utilized for this purpose and the school district pays a full-time certified teacher to operate this space. Having more classroom control to reduce the need for such a space would be a cost savings for the school district and be a more restorative approach to

holding students accountable and managing behaviors.

Research Question 3

What is the correlation between restorative practices and a supportive learning environment? Evans and Vaandering (2016) suggest that "cultural transformation is possible only when Restorative Justice Education is implemented in a context where people are honored as worthy and interconnected" (p. 105). The qualitative data show that teachers see improved social environments in their classrooms after eight weeks of lessons. They report that students know one another's names, which they did not know before the lessons began, students now share answers during circle time and now offer answers during instructional time. One participant from the study said about restorative practices:

> There is more metacognition going on. Why are we doing this? What are our actual motives behind things? What does the future look like? If I am thinking about that more and students are thinking about that more, then there is more thought and meaning behind the things we are doing in class which makes things a whole lot more valuable. If you are doing something just because you are told to do it or because you hear it is the thing to do, you do it and you don't really care about it. If there is more passion behind it, it gets students more interested and involved and more willing to collaborate with you and other people.

The findings show that there is a need for restorative practices in classrooms at Reading High School and the results indicate students want to feel safe, have a place to communicate with their peers, a means for sharing with their teacher, and an avenue for conversation. Restorative circles provide that platform, and the researcher recommends

that the Reading High School formally train more of the teachers and staff in restorative

practices to make lasting positive impactful change. Costello et al. (2010) state, "Circles

are as old as the hills. Human beings' earliest discussions were held in circles around the

fire…we may find this ancient form of social discourse helps us address our greatest

challenges" (p. 113). Teachers face challenges daily and the need for student engagement

and belonging is at an all-time high. Circles can help build community in classrooms

which could reduce absenteeism, reduce behavior incidents, and create pathways for

students to be promoted to the next grade level and eventually graduate. Costello et al.

(2010) state, "The proactive use of circles offers even greater promise for improving

relationships, creating community and transforming the whole school environment" (p.

4). Training staff to be restorative practitioners in their own spaces gives them the tools

they need to help students have a voice and feel heard and understood. Marshall (2023)

shares:

> Teachers are the primary leaders in shaping the classroom cultural dynamic
>
> because the classroom is their area of control. In formulating the structures to
>
> ensure a safe and orderly learning environment, teachers institute processes and
>
> procedures that reflect what they believe is necessary to create the type of space
>
> conducive to maximum learning. (p. 41)

Restorative practices are those processes, and this research supports the need for

more consistent proactive circles in classrooms to build community and foster

relationships.

The fiscal implications related to restorative practices and the social environment

involve the cost of training teachers and staff. The formal training lasts two full days for

teachers and staff. There is a cost associated with paying the trainers in the summer or

securing substitutes for the trainers during the school year. Likewise, there is a cost to the

district to secure substitutes for teachers and staff to be trained. This investment,

however, could result in reduced costs overall if restorative practitioners (trained teachers

and staff) are exercising these practices in their classrooms. Additional costs could

include teacher payment for after-school trainings and materials for the trainings, such as

the restorative practice cards and the restorative practice books.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the sample size. While the research was completed

using five participants, additional research could be obtained using a larger sample size

across Reading High School. One participant in the study said:

> I would have to see how more students would respond to it because it is such a
>
> small sample size at the moment, but I felt that students looked forward to sitting
>
> down on Thursdays and talking for about 20 minutes or so just to see how we are
>
> doing and how we are feeling just to get through things. I think it was like a
>
> highlight of the week for students in my class.

This sample group was limited to teachers in the Science Department, and this too could

be expanded to include a more diverse group of educators. Most educators in this study

have less than three years of experience. A future research design might include teachers

with more varied years of experience in public education.

Smith (2019) summarizes findings from Fisher (2018):

> Several factors prevent school districts from prioritizing social connections. She
>
> blames a lack of time, a singular focus on what students know verses who they

know, and a cultural inclination to protect children from the outside world rather

than expose them to it. (p. 31)

Another limitation is that of time. More time needs to be spent tracking attendance

beyond a two-week period to get a more accurate comparison of attendance on days when

circles are taught versus non-circle days. Additional time could be spent on behavior

tracking as well and investigating how and why students go to the academic success

room.

There was some variation in the implementation of the circle lessons in one

classroom. This participant did not stay consistent with the days of the week that circle

lessons were taught. Because students may not have known the day of the lesson until

they arrived at class, it is difficult to know if the attendance data taken for this class has

any relationship to the teaching of the lessons.

Marshall (2023) points out: "To get students more fully engaged in their learning,

teachers have to do a lot of learning themselves about personal barriers they put in place

that hinder students' ability to become empowered, agency-practicing individuals" (p.

206). In this study, the researcher did not monitor the teaching of the proactive circle

lessons. Teacher participants report a variety of experiences while teaching the lessons,

and some report they were more consistent than others in following the framework

provided. Fidelity checks during the delivery of the lessons could possibly improve the

data collection.

One barrier that surfaces in the interviews is that of language. Because Reading

School District has a diverse population, language barriers and cultural differences can be

reasons for students to refrain from class participation. This is also true for participation

in a restorative circle lesson. One participant clarifies:

> There is always going to be one or two kids that are not going to share in the
> circles. I need to find better ways to accommodate ELL students when they are in
> the circle. Because you either you get a google translator on the board or you have
> to have one of the kids sit there next to them and have them translate.

The Reading School District has a very diverse population and a study involving direct student participation and feedback could capture more results and findings related to restorative practices in the classroom.

The collection of behavior data is broad, and consideration should be given to changing the way this is collected to make it more directly related to the restorative practices in the classroom. The behavior data collected was not compared to outside classes not receiving the intervention of restorative circle lessons.

Lastly, researcher bias as a limitation is a consideration. The researcher works in the Reading School District as Restorative Practice Facilitator and trainer. The role being very closely related to the research study could have implications.

Future Research

Holt-Lunstad (2021) says, "We know that satisfying social connection is vital to overall well-being. Research shows that it will not only improve long-term mental, emotional, and physical health outcomes, but it can also increase longevity" (p. 176). Restorative practices increase social connections for students in classes and in schools. Further research could explore connections with restorative practices and physical health as well as mental health in schools.

While the research in this study uses circles as a tool for promoting social connection, the delivery of lessons was limited to the proactive approach. Further research should be explored using responsive circles with students in a high school setting to determine the value of the circle meeting and its effectiveness to repair harm. Evans and Vaandering (2016) document, "Conflict is inevitable within any relationship where there is a sense of mutual concern for another. When conflict emerges, the tendency is to seek a resolution. Professional development for conflict management or conflict resolution in schools is important" (p. 87).

Responsive circles are meant to address conflict, and this research is necessary to explore the full application of restorative practices. Costello et al. (2010) point out, "Responsive circles are not limited to problems. You may also react when things go right" (p. 86). Exploring the use of responsive circles in classrooms for positive interventions is another area for further research.

Responsive circles can help to establish community in the school systems. Smith (2019) says about community:

> Perhaps identity serves as the most accurate definition of community: our interests, pursuits, and perceptions of ourselves and the world around us. Given this definition, we can identify characteristics important to the concept of communities, such as diversity, shared circumstances, collective gain, and perhaps most important, social interaction. (p. 20)

The topic of community building is explored in this study, however, connections to academic success are an area that requires additional research. The implementation of restorative practices in classes increased conversation, but the impact of the connections

related to curriculum is another topic for future investigation. Student engagement in

classrooms correlated with student grades is a topic for further exploration.

One last consideration would be to study the effects of restorative practices over a

longer period to evaluate connections to graduation rates. Rundell (2023) identifies,

"Further discussion about using the restorative questions and continuum of care can guide

us in making restorative decisions" (p. 16). Tolle (2004) illustrates that restorative

practices are necessary in schools for individuals to have a means for building

community, conversation, creating a sense of safety, and ultimately being able to work

through conflict and move to a place of acceptance and peace.

Summary

This mixed methods action research study conducted over the period of eight

weeks at Reading High School focuses on three questions:

> 1. How do intentional restorative practices in classrooms affect student
> attendance?
>
> 2. How do restorative practices and proactive "circles" impact classroom
> behavior?
>
> 3. What is the correlation between restorative practices and a supportive
> learning environment?

Stamford (2024) believes that "building connections with other people is a part of

finding meaning and purpose in life" (p. 175). The findings of this study show that

restorative practices applied in classrooms using a proactive approach have positive

impacts on the student body. The data supports an increase in attendance rates in

classrooms where restorative proactive circle lessons are taught and restorative

conversations are taking place. Behavior incidents were few and were "minor" in nature. Teachers report that their classrooms now have a formal process in place for students to share with students and for students to share with teachers about ideas and concerns. Students seem happier in classrooms, demonstrate respect, and talk more openly with their teachers after intentional restorative interventions were put in place. Students have more of an active voice, are more cooperative during lessons, and demonstrate more respect for one another than before this research began. Stamford (2024) argues, "Ultimately, we all want to be seen, to be heard and understood, and be loved unconditionally" (p. 175). Teachers reported that students felt heard and understood during restorative practice interventions.

Tolle (2004) remarks, "So the only place where true change can occur and where the past can be dissolved is the Now" (p. 60). Restorative practices in schools need to start now and lasting change will take effect almost immediately. The power of words and human interaction can be seen through these results. Smith (2019) states:

> The transition to modern learning environments necessitates influence. As educational leaders, we face resistance a hundred years in the making. Our task doesn't focus on making people comply with our demands - a passive outcome of leadership - but take ownership of an enduring effort that calls for adapting new habits, behaviors, and systems. (p. 54)

The change process takes time and the use of restorative practices in schools is a shift in mindset. The implementation of restorative practices requires intentional efforts and purposeful action. Through the implementation of restorative practices, positive changes in schools can be immediate and impactful for both students and teachers.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A.

IRB Approval Letter

PennWest
UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
250 University Avenue
California, PA 15419
instreviewboard@pennwest.edu
Melissa Sovak, Ph.D.

Dear Sherry,

Please consider this email as official notification that your proposal titled "Intentional Planning for Social-Emotional Learning. A Study of Applied Restorative Practices in the High School Setting" (Proposal #PW24-032) has been approved by the Pennsylvania Western University Institutional Review Board as submitted.

The effective date of approval is 11/15/2024 and the expiration date is 11/14/2025. These dates must appear on the consent form.

Please note that Federal Policy requires that you notify the IRB promptly regarding any of the following:

(1) Any additions or changes in procedures you might wish for your study (additions or changes must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented)

(2) Any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects

(3) Any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in (2).

(4) To continue your research beyond the approval expiration date of 11/14/2025, you must file additional information to be considered for continuing review. Please contact instreviewboard@pennwest.edu

Please notify the Board when data collection is complete.

Regards,

Melissa Sovak, PhD.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix B.

Informed Consent Document

<u>**PENNSYLVANIA WESTERN UNIVERSITY**</u>
<u>**INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**</u>
<u>**Online Informed Consent Form from Sherry Cowburn**</u>
<u>**Reading School District / Reading High School**</u>

<u>***Title of Study:***</u> Intentional Planning for Social-Emotional Learning. A Study of Applied Restorative Practices in the High School Setting.

<u>***Principle Investigator:***</u> *Sherry L. Cowburn*, Pennsylvania Western Student and Employee of Reading School District. This study is being conducted as part of my Doctoral requirements in the Doctoral program for Educational Administration and Leadership.

<u>**Key Information**</u>
You are being asked by <u>*Sherry Cowburn*</u> (Pennsylvania Western University Student and Reading School District Employee) to participate in a research study. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may stop anytime. You have been selected to participate in this study because the focus group is 9th grade students and you are a teacher of 9th grade students.

<u>**Purpose of the Study**</u>
The purpose of the study is to learn how the implementation of intentional proactive restorative approaches impact the classroom.

<u>**Description and Expectations**</u>
In this study, you will be asked to complete a two day formal restorative practice training held at Reading School District. The training will be completed before any research begins in your classroom. The training is a district required training. You will be asked to teach a series of eight pre-developed lesson plans over the course of eight weeks to one of your classes. Examples of the topics for the lesson plans may include boundaries, norms, goal setting, empathy, affective statements, respect, and building community. You will be asked to track school attendance and classroom attendance for the duration of 10 weeks using a form provided to you for tracking. You will be asked to track incidents related to behavior for 10 weeks on a form that will be provided to you for the class in which you are teaching the lessons. Prior to the start of the lesson planning implementation, you will be asked a series of interview questions and given survey questions to complete. At the conclusion of the study you will be asked post interview

questions and will be given a post survey. Your data tracking forms for attendance and discipline events will be collected at the conclusion of the study for review and data interpretation.

Research Time Commitment

It will take two 6 hour days of training prior to the start of this study to be prepared for implementation. It will take about 30 minutes a day for eight days to complete the lesson plan portion of this study in your classroom with your students. The survey and interviews that will be conducted as a part of this study will take about 2 hours. One hour prior to the start of the study and one hour after the study has concluded.

Potential Risks in this Study

The potential risks during the study are very minimal but could include social risks. The circle lesson plans could lead to conversations that explore social/ emotional topics. The risks will be minimized by the classroom teacher using the restorative approach in the execution of the circle lesson plans. Remember, you may stop taking the survey at any time. In addition, if you feel the need to talk with someone, you may contact the PennWest Edinboro counseling center at 814-732-2252, or for emergencies, call 814-732-2911.

Study Benefits

There may be some direct benefits to participants from the research. The students involved may have positive impacts as a result of the practices being implemented. The teachers in the study may benefit from gaining experience and application of restorative practices in the classroom. The research will help researchers better understand how targeted restorative practices in classrooms through intentional proactive lesson planning and execution impact the classroom social environment, discipline, and attendance.

Security of Data

Remember, taking part in this study is voluntary. If, while taking the survey, you feel uncomfortable or no longer want to participate, you may stop at any time. To stop taking the survey, you may notify the researcher that you no longer wish to participate. The survey will be given on the computer.

Consequences of the Study

There are no consequences if you decide to stop participating in this study.

Collection of Information

There is no identifiable information collected from you during this study; all other information from this study will be confidential within local, state, and federal laws. The PennWest University Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the research records. The study results may be shared in aggregate form at a meeting or journal, but there is no identifiable information to be revealed. The records from this study will be maintained for a minimum of three (3) years after the study is complete.

Sharing of Research Findings

Your information collected in this research *may* be used or distributed for future research, even if all your identifiers are removed.

Questions about the Research

If you have questions about the research or a research-related injury, you can contact williams_s@pennwest.edu. If you have a question about your rights as a research participant that you need to discuss with someone, you can contact the PennWest University Institutional Review Board at InstReviewBoard@pennwest.edu.

Copy of this Informed Consent

If you would like a copy of this informed consent, please print this screen or contact williams_s@pennwest.edu.

Survey Consent

By clicking on the "I agree" box and continuing with the survey, you have acknowledged that you have read the informed consent and are at least 18 years old. Also, you acknowledge that you agree to participate in the study and have the right not to answer any or all the questions in the survey. Finally, you understand your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may quit the study at any time without penalty.

☐ I AGREE

Appendix C.

Reading School District Letter of Support

August 5, 2024

Dear Mrs. Sherry L. Cowburn,

I am writing this letter as your formal approval to conduct a Capstone Research Project in the Reading School District. This approval letter includes permission to work with our students and staff at Reading High School and Reading School District personnel to conduct the study in order to learn more about how restorative practices impact our school. As part of the study, you have permission to conduct interview questions, surveys, and gather data related to your research. Additionally, you have permission to identify the Reading School District in your study and use the district name. I understand the study is set to begin in August of 2024 and conclude in the summer of 2025. Dr. Lindsey Stock is your external chairperson, so you may direct questions about your study to her or to me. At the conclusion of your program, your degree from Pennsylvania Western University will be a Doctorate in Administration and Educational Leadership (Ed.D.). Best wishes during this next year in your studies and I look forward to having you share your findings with the school district.

Sincerely,

JuliAnne Kline

Ms. JuliAnne Kline
Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning
Reading School District
klinej@readingsd.org

Appendix D.

Circle Lesson Plans

Reading School District

Restorative Practice Circle Lesson Plan #1

Circle Topic: Norm Setting and Introduction of the Talking Piece

Type of Circle: _Proactive_   Responsive

Goal of Circle: To introduce and practice using the talking piece and to establish class norms with the students for circle meetings in the classroom.

Circle Questions: Explain the need for the norms and the purpose of the talking piece. Select a talking piece of your choice that you think will have meaning to your students. This circle will be a sequential go around circle.

  o If you had an unexpected free day, what would you do?

  o Share a "norm" expectation that you would like to see in this classroom.

  o How do norms help in a classroom setting?

  o I feel happy when…

Environmental Factors: Give consideration to each individual you are working with in your classroom during this time and his or her needs.

Technology/Additional Resources with Links: There are none needed for this lesson.

Accommodations/Translation Needed: Decide if you need a translator so that can be arranged in advance of your circle meeting(s).

Notes: You will need a talking piece for this lesson.

ADAPTED FROM IIRP UPDATED 04/2024

Reading School District

Restorative Practice Circle Lesson Plan #2

Circle Topic: Creating a Safe and Positive Classroom Environment

Type of Circle: *Proactive*   Responsive

Goal of Circle: To explore the values and behaviors that help to create a safe learning environment for everyone.

Circle Questions: Review the norms and the purpose of the talking piece. Select a talking piece of your choice that you think will have meaning to your students. This circle will be a sequential go around circle.

o Tell us what your favorite season is - Winter, Spring, Summer, or Fall... and why you chose that season.

o I feel safe when …

o What change would you like to see in your school and what can you do to promote that change?

o What do you like about this classroom space and how can we make this space a positive learning space for everyone?

Environmental Factors: Give consideration to each individual you are working with in your classroom during this time and his or her needs.

Technology/Additional Resources with Links: There are none needed for this lesson.

Accommodations/Translation Needed: Decide if you need a translator so that can be arranged in advance of your circle meeting(s).

Notes: You will need a talking piece for this lesson.

ADAPTED FROM IIRP UPDATED 04/2024

R Reading School District **R**

Restorative Practice Circle Lesson Plan #3

Circle Topic: Understanding School Rules

Type of Circle: _Proactive_ Responsive

Goal of Circle: To help students reflect and understand the reasoning behind "non-negotiable" school rules and to decide together how to comply with those rules in a positive way.

Circle Questions: Review the norms and the purpose of the talking piece. Select a talking piece of your choice that you think will have meaning to your students. This circle will be a sequential go around circle.

o Describe your dream vacation and tell who you would take with you.

o What do you think is the reason behind the "no cell phone" rule during Armor Block on Tuesdays and Thursdays?

o What do you see as a benefit of having this rule? What do you see as a burden of having this rule?

o For you, what is the hardest challenge about following this rule? What would help you comply with this rule in Armor Block and regular classes too?

Environmental Factors: Give consideration to each individual you are working with in your classroom during this time and his or her needs.

Technology/Additional Resources with Links: There are none needed for this lesson.

Accommodations/Translation Needed: Decide if you need a translator so that can be arranged in advance of your circle meeting(s).

Notes: You will need a talking piece for this lesson.

ADAPTED FROM IIRP UPDATED 04/2024

R   Reading School District   **R**

_____

Restorative Practice Circle Lesson Plan #4

Circle Topic: Relationship Building Circle

Type of Circle: _Proactive_   Responsive

Goal of Circle: To help circle members know each other better and to build trust among the students in the classroom.

Circle Questions: Review the need for the norms and the purpose of the talking piece. Select a talking piece of your choice that you think will have meaning to your students. This circle will be a sequential go around circle.

   o I like to collect…. Or I would like to collect…

   o What is something you value about your family that has helped shape who you are today?

   o I feel supported when…

   o Trusting others is hard because…

   o When I depend on others I feel…

Environmental Factors: Give consideration to each individual you are working with in your classroom during this time and his or her needs.

Technology/Additional Resources with Links: There are none needed for this lesson.

Accommodations/Translation Needed: Decide if you need a translator so that can be arranged in advance of your circle meeting(s).

Notes: You will need a talking piece for this lesson.

ADAPTED FROM IIRP UPDATED 04/2024

Reading School District

Restorative Practice Circle Lesson Plan #5

Circle Topic: What does success mean?

Type of Circle: _Proactive_   Responsive

Goal of Circle: To introduce and practice using the talking piece and to establish class norms with the students for circle meetings in the classroom.

Circle Questions: Review the need for the norms and the purpose of the talking piece. Select a talking piece of your choice that you think will have meaning to your students. This circle will be a sequential go around circle.

- o Tell us about a time in your life where you felt you were successful.

- o What was most important about that success to you?

- o In your experience, are success and happiness the same experience?

- o In your experience has success ever caused you to feel unhappy?

Environmental Factors: Give consideration to each individual you are working with in your classroom during this time and his or her needs.

Technology/Additional Resources with Links: There are none needed for this lesson.

Accommodations/Translation Needed: Decide if you need a translator so that can be arranged in advance of your circle meeting(s).

Notes: You will need a talking piece for this lesson.   ADAPTED FROM IIRP UPDATED 04/2024

Reading School District

Restorative Practice Circle Lesson Plan #6

Circle Topic: Picturing My Future Circle

Type of Circle: _Proactive_ Responsive

Goal of Circle: To encourage awareness of possibilities in the future and to build connection through sharing dreams and aspirations.

Circle Questions: Review the need for the norms and the purpose of the talking piece. Select a talking piece of your choice that you think will have meaning to your students. This circle will be a sequential go around circle.

o Think about and share some information about the person that you would like to be in five or ten years.

o Do you feel that person inside of you now?

o What part of you is already like that person?

o What part of you do you need to develop to become that person?

Environmental Factors: Give consideration to each individual you are working with in your classroom during this time and his or her needs.

Technology/Additional Resources with Links: There are none needed for this lesson.

Accommodations/Translation Needed: Decide if you need a translator so that can be arranged in advance of your circle meeting(s).

Notes: You will need a talking piece for this lesson.

ADAPTED FROM IIRP UPDATED 04/2024

Reading School District

Restorative Practice Circle Lesson Plan #7

Circle Topic: Friendship, Community Building, Planning for the Future

Type of Circle: _Proactive_   Responsive

Goal of Circle: To encourage thoughtful reflection about friendship and to increase understanding and connection in the classroom with students by sharing perspectives on relationship building with others.

Circle Questions: Review the need for the norms and the purpose of the talking piece. Select a talking piece of your choice that you think will have meaning to your students. This circle will be a sequential go around circle.

  o Share your favorite movie or song.

  o What are the values you look for in a friend?

  o What is hardest about building relationships (making friends) for you?

  o How does building relationships with others matter in your future as you look beyond high school ?

Environmental Factors: Give consideration to each individual you are working with in your classroom during this time and his or her needs.

Technology/Additional Resources with Links: There are none needed for this lesson.

Accommodations/Translation Needed: Decide if you need a translator so that can be arranged in advance of your circle meeting(s).

Notes: You will need a talking piece for this lesson.

ADAPTED FROM IIRP UPDATED 04/2024

Reading School District

Restorative Practice Circle Lesson Plan #8

Circle Topic: Goal Setting and Motivation

Type of Circle: _Proactive_   Responsive

Goal of Circle: To help students identify their success and struggle(s) around finding motivation for school work and long term goals to include graduation and possibly college. To identify how students find motivation to complete tasks like school work and going to class daily and on time.

Circle Questions: Review the need for the norms and the purpose of the talking piece. Select a talking piece of your choice that you think will have meaning to your students. This circle will be a sequential go around circle.

> o If you could be a superhero, who would you be and why would you want his or her superpower?
>
> o What are the forces or influences that help you get your classwork done when you would rather be doing something else? What are the forces that get in your way?
>
> o Can you identify what you need that would help you be more motivated? Can you identify what you would need from others? What would you need from yourself?
>
> o Name three things that you could do to get the support and help you need to stay motivated in school.

Environmental Factors: Give consideration to each individual you are working with in your classroom during this time and his or her needs.

Technology/Additional Resources with Links: There are none needed for this lesson.

Accommodations/Translation Needed: Decide if you need a translator so that can be arranged in advance of your circle meeting(s).

Notes: You will need a talking piece for this lesson.

ADAPTED FROM IIRP UPDATED 04/2024

Appendix E.

Pre and Post Survey Questions

Sherry Cowburn Survey Questions
Social Environment in the Classroom

- Survey will Be Given to the teachers who will be teaching the circle lesson plans. 3- 5 teachers who have been trained in restorative practice.

- This survey will be administered before the lessons are taught (pre) and after the lessons are taught (post).

The Survey will be a likert design.

The scale will be for each question will be as follows:

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Google Forms will be used to administer the survey. I will include in the form a consent at the beginning of the survey form with a check box. There will not be any names or specific identifiers collected for this survey.

Please mark one answer for each question.

Please mark the number of years that you have been teaching in public education.

☐ 0 - 3 years

☐ 3 - 5 years

☐ 6 - 10 years

☐ 11 - 15 years

☐ more than 15 years

Students demonstrate understanding of classroom norms and rules.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Students demonstrate and model ownership of the classroom norms.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Students are regularly engaged during their classroom learning time.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Students seem happy in your classroom.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Students are cooperative in your classroom.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Students talk openly with you, the teacher, about concerns / problems.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Students trust one another in your classroom.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Students trust you, the teacher, in your classroom.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Interactions among students demonstrate respect for one another in your classroom.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Interactions between you, the teacher and students demonstrate respect.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Students are cooperative during your lessons in the classroom.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Students show empathy toward one another in your classroom.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Your classroom environment provides opportunities for students to have a voice.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

Students feel heard and understood in your classroom.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

There is a formal process in your classroom for students to share with you, the teacher, about

concerns or ideas.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

This is a formal process in your classroom for students to share with one another about

concerns or ideas.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

The students in the classroom care about one another.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Undecided

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

The students care about you, the teacher in your classroom.

☐ Strongly Agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Appendix F.

Pre – Interview Questions

Structured Interview Questions / Qualitative Data Collection / Sherry Cowburn

Intentional Planning for Social-Emotional Learning. A Study of Applied Restorative Practices in the High School Setting.

PRE - QUESTION SET

1. Describe your understanding of restorative practices and your thoughts about the importance of restorative practices in your classroom?

2. What level of importance do restorative practices hold in your classroom?

3. How are restorative practices and the social environment in your classroom related?

4. What impact do you believe bringing a restorative approach to your classroom can have on your students?

5. What does it mean for you to have a commitment to restorative practice in your classroom?

6. What are some concerns you have about working with your students using restorative practices?

7. What challenges do you think you will face using proactive circles in your classroom to teach lessons?

8. How might you describe the use of restorative practices with other individuals who don't see the value in this approach?

9. How would you handle a situation in which someone has a response to a student conflict that is punitive, neglectful, or permissive?

10. How would you respond to a conversation between students and/or staff that was clearly offensive to others?

11. What is your current approach to managing a student who repeatedly disrupts your classroom instructional time?

12. Do you think that the restorative approach can have lasting positive effects in your classroom? Please explain.

Appendix G.

Attendance Tracking Form

Student Attendance for Capstone Study	Monday				Tuesday				Wednesday				Thursday				Friday			
Record your daily attendance for the class period that you are running a circle. You will record this for 10 Weeks. (Circles will be run formally for 8 weeks.) You will only be teaching a circle one time a week, but keeping attendance everyday for the class period in which you are teaching lessons.	Date	Number of Students Present for the class period you are teaching circle lessons	Total Number of Students	Circle Taught today? Y or N	Date	Number of Students Present for the class period you are teaching circle lessons	Total Number of Students	Circle Taught today? Y or N	Date	Number of Students Present for the class period you are teaching circle lessons	Total Number of Students	Circle Taught today? Y or N	Date	Number of Students Present for the class period you are teaching circle lessons	Total Number of Students	Circle Taught today? Y or N	Date	Number of Students Present for the class period you are teaching circle lessons	Total Number of Students	Circle Taught today? Y or N
WEEK 1 - Dates: _____ - _____																				
WEEK 2 - Dates: _____ - _____																				
WEEK 3 - Dates: _____ - _____																				
WEEK 4 - Dates: _____ - _____																				
WEEK 5 - Dates: _____ - _____																				
WEEK 6 - Dates: _____ - _____																				
WEEK 7 - Dates: _____ - _____																				
WEEK 8 - Dates: _____ - _____																				
WEEK 9 - Dates: _____ - _____																				
WEEK 10 - Dates: _____ - _____																				

Appendix H.

Behavior Tracking Form

Behavior Tracking Form

Use Tally Marks to Record Events. You will only record events for the period number that you are using to teach circle lessons. (For example if you choose period 9 - then only track this information daily for period 9 if applicable.) Use a tally mark for each student for each incident. You do not have to record anything on days when there are no incidents. What period are you tracking? _____

Date:	Student(s) Left the Classroom	Student(s) Will Not Stay Seated	Student(s) Had Frequent Disruptions in the Class	Student(s) Does Not / Do Not Comply With Classroom Norms	A Security Officer or Some Type of Assistance had to be Called to Escort the Student(s) Out of the Classroom.	Other	Explanation of Other - No Names Please
1/12/25 (Sample)	//		/			/	Student was in the wrong classroom and would not leave.

Appendix I.

Post Interview Questions

Structured Interview Questions / Qualitative Data Collection / Sherry Cowburn

POST - QUESTION SET

1. Describe how your understanding of restorative practices has changed since implementing eight weeks of lessons. Describe your thoughts about the importance of restorative practices in your classroom?

2. Has the level of importance for restorative practice in your classroom changed after teaching eight weeks of circle lessons? Please explain.

3. How are restorative practice and the social environment in your classroom related?

4. What impact has adding a restorative approach to your classroom had on your students?

5. What does it mean for you to have a commitment to restorative practice in your classroom?

6. What are some concerns you have about working with your students using restorative practices after teaching eight weeks of proactive circle lessons?

7. What challenges do you think you will face in the future, continuing to use proactive circles in your classroom to teach lessons?

8. How might you describe the use of restorative practices with other individuals who don't see the value in this approach?

9. How would you handle a situation in which someone has a response to a student conflict that is punitive, neglectful, or permissive?

10. How would you respond to a conversation between students and/or staff that was clearly offensive to others?

11. After teaching eight weeks of proactive circle lessons, has your approach to managing the student who repeatedly disrupts your classroom instructional time changed?

12. After teaching eight weeks of proactive circle lessons in your classroom, do you think that the restorative approach can have lasting positive effects in your classroom? Please explain.

Appendix J.

Marketing for Teacher Participation

CONFIDENTIALITY WILL BE MAINTAINED THROUGHOUT THIS PROCESS.

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES CONTINUUM

- affective statements
- affective questions
- small impromptu conversations
- circle - The study will focus on this aspect of the continuum.
- formal conference

RESEARCH PARTICIPATION EXPECATIONS:

Complete the Two Day Formal Restorative Practice Training (If you have not already done so.)

Complete a pre and post survey about one of your 9th grade classes (The same one you will teach circle lessons to for 8 weeks.)

Complete an interview with the Researcher at the beginning of the study and at the end of the study. This interview will be recorded by the interviewer. The recording will assist the researcher with transcription. Informed Consent must be signed prior to the interview process.

Participant will conduct 8 Circle Meetings (Lesson plans are completed for you in advance.)

Take Daily Attendance of the class you are teaching circle lessons to for 10 weeks. (anonymous)

Behavior Tracking for 10 weeks of students from the class being studied. (anonymous)

The time commitment for participation includes a Pre and Post Survey, A Pre and Post Formal Interview with the Researcher, class time for 8 circle lessons to be taught over a period of 8 weeks, and attendance / behavior tracking for 10 weeks.
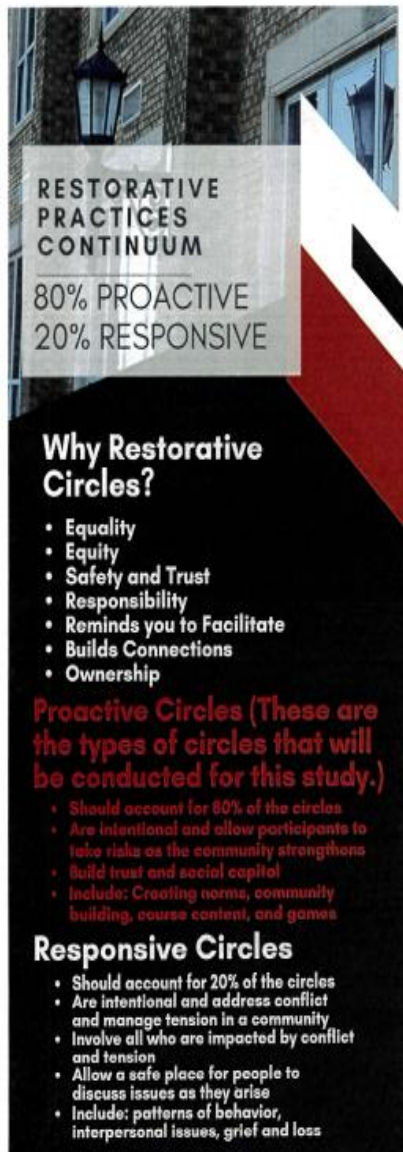
FAIR PROCESS: WHAT IT ACHIEVES...

- Builds Trust
- Knowledge Sharing
- Beyond Duty
- Drives Performance
- Voluntary Cooperation

What's in it for you?

- $25.00 Gift Card

- Restorative Practice training expedited

- The hope is to form a stronger classroom community of learners.

Building Community by:
- Maximizing positive affect
- Minimizing negative affect
- Minimizing and mutualizing the inhibition of affect

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES CONTINUUM

80% PROACTIVE
20% RESPONSIVE

Why Restorative Circles?

- Equality
- Equity
- Safety and Trust
- Responsibility
- Reminds you to Facilitate
- Builds Connections
- Ownership

Proactive Circles (These are the types of circles that will be conducted for this study.)

- Should account for 80% of the circles
- Are intentional and allow participants to take risks as the community strengthens
- Build trust and social capital
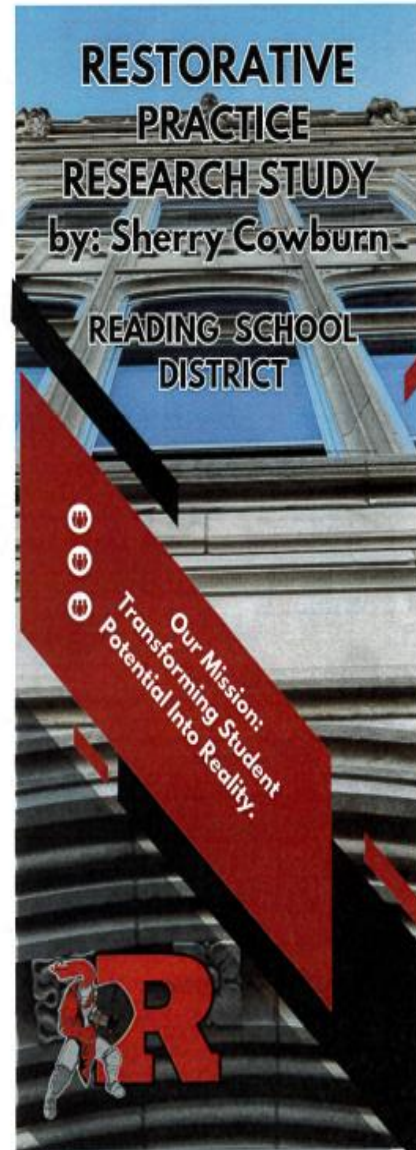- Include: Creating norms, community building, course content, and games

Responsive Circles

- Should account for 20% of the circles
- Are intentional and address conflict and manage tension in a community
- Involve all who are impacted by conflict and tension
- Allow a safe place for people to discuss issues as they arise
- Include: patterns of behavior, interpersonal issues, grief and loss

Circle Lesson Plan Teaching Schedule

Week 1	Norm Setting and Introduction of the Talking Piece
Week 2	Creating a Safe and Positive Classroom Environment
week 3	Understanding School Rules
Week 4	Relationship Building Circle
Week 5	What does success mean?
Week 6	Picturing my Future Circle
Week 7	Friendship, Community Building, Planning for the Future
Week 8	Goal Setting and Motivation

Informed Consent must be signed before participating in this study. You can leave the study at any time.

RESTORATIVE PRACTICE RESEARCH STUDY
by: Sherry Cowburn

READING SCHOOL DISTRICT

Our Mission: Transforming Student Potential Into Reality.