

The Effects of Restorative Practices on Student Behavior

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables	i
Abstract	ii
I. Introduction	1
Statement of Problem	2
Statement of Research Hypothesis	2
Operational Definitions	2
II. Review of the Literature	4
What are Restorative Practices?	4
What is the Role of Restorative Practices in Schools?	5
Effects of Restorative Practices in Schools	7
Implementation of Restorative Practices	8
Summary	9
III. Methods	10
Design	10
Participants	10
Instrument	11
Procedure	11
IV. Results	13
V. Discussion	14
Implementation of the Results	14
Threats to Validity	15
Connection to Literature	16

Recommendations for Future Research	17
Conclusion	17
References	19

## List of Tables

1. 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Inappropriate Behavior Cases 13

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of restorative practices on student behavior. The measurement tool was behavior passes from the 2016-2017 school year compared to 2017-2018 school year where restorative practices were implemented school-wide. This study used a quasi-experimental design to determine the effects of restorative practices on student behavior. The researcher analyzed the data using a *t* test for paired subjects. According to the results of the study, the number of passes given and in-school interventions was lower in 2017-2018 than in 2016-2017, but the differences were not statistically significant. Therefore, this study shows that the implementation of restorative practices can positively impact students' behavior in the classroom. Research in this area should continue as there is very little information available regarding the effects of restorative practices on student behavior.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Overview

In this study, the relationship between restorative practices and their impact on student behavior was explored. Restorative practices are a framework for building community and for responding to challenging behavior. Restorative thinking is a significant shift from punishment-oriented thinking. Restorative practice can make a substantial contribution to thinking about conflict in school and help promote social justice in education (Mirsky, 2007). Restorative practices aim to build classroom communities that are supported by clear agreements, authentic communication, and specific tools to bring issues and conflicts forward in a helpful way. The aim of restorative practices is to create contexts for learning in which the voice of another may be heard.

Restorative practices are important in the school setting because they include benefits such as increased attendance, reduced expulsions and improved achievement. In a recent two-year evaluation of the implementation of restorative practices in two schools, a decrease in the amount of discipline referrals, as well as suspensions, was found in both (Kline, 2016). The way in which people and problems are spoken about can reflexively generate positive relationships and a positive school climate. It cultivates a culture in which everyone feels like they belong. Restorative practices provide opportunities to learn about the views and priorities of other people. Kline provides a large amount of evidence that implementing restorative practices across the school setting provides positive supports and decreases the amount of suspensions and expulsions in the school (2016). Through restorative practices, students' needs for social and

emotional learning are supported in positive ways. Restorative practices seek to address underlying issues of misbehavior back into the school setting.

Restorative practices can be implemented in the form of restorative circles. Sitting in a circle provides setting a stronger sense of community. One of the main purposes of circle dialogue is building a community. Circle techniques may be used to generate learning goals, provide feedback on lessons, problem-solve in relation to behavioral issues in the classroom, or help to resolve an incident that has affected everyone in the group (Macready, 2009). To be effective, restorative approaches, in the form of circles must be in place across the school setting. There are two types of restorative circles: community building and responsive. Community building circles create a sense of connection with the members in the circle. Responsive circles are around a specific crime or conflict. Responsive circles are used to repair relationships between students, students and staff members, or staff members.

### **Statement of Problem**

The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of restorative practices on student behavior.

### **Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis is that there will be no difference in negative student behavior after the introduction of restorative practices in the form of restorative circles and community building circles.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Behavior passes* are used to track student behavior school-wide. These passes are used by teachers when students exhibit negative crisis behaviors. These behaviors are seen as urgent and need to be addressed right away. These crisis or urgent behaviors include: (a) Leaving area

without permission (b) Physical aggression (c) Repeated unsafe behavior (d) Repeated disrespect to others (e) Threats to others (f) Bias Motivated Language (g) Repeated refusal to follow directions (h) Repeated Classroom Disruption. These passes are sent with students to a Student Support Center where the behavior that was exhibited is discussed with behavior support teachers. These passes are documented into a school database in order to keep track of school-wide, grade level, and student data.

*Restorative Practices* are also a schoolwide expectation that occur in every classroom in the form of community building circles and restorative circles. These approaches are from the Restorative Practices Handbook. Community building circles happen at least twice a week in every classroom in order to build community and a safe environment for students. Restorative circles also occur when a certain student(s) may be having difficulty in getting along with another student(s), and they need to resolve any differences. Restorative circles can also be used when differences arise for a student and teacher, as well as teacher to teacher, and the relationships need to be repaired.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Restorative practice is becoming increasingly adopted in schools as a strategic approach to build community, respond to challenging behavior, and hold students accountable for their actions. Restorative practices can transform schools in order to support the growth of all students. This literature review will discuss in more detail what are restorative practices, what the role of restorative practices are in the school setting, the effects of restorative practices on student behavior, and the implementation of restorative practices.

#### **What are Restorative Practices?**

Educators around the world are implementing restorative practices as a means to build community and management within their classrooms. This whole school approach builds on the important notion of connectedness in a school community (Harrison, 2007). Restorative practice can make a substantial contribution to thinking about conflict in school and help promote social justice in education (Mirsky, 2007). The term “restorative practices” was derived from a significant development in the criminal justice field called “restorative justice.” To be “restorative” means to believe that decisions are best made and conflicts are best resolved by those most directly involved in them. Restorative practices seek to develop good relationships and restore a sense of community.

Research findings support a number of reasons to implement restorative practices into schools. It is hypothesized that the use of restorative practices, as an alternative to exclusionary practices, will support a reduction in the number of referrals and suspensions issued in schools in order to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, the disparities in discipline data across the nation (Kline, 2016). Shah (2012) suggests that educators are turning to restorative practices in hopes of

changing students' bad behaviors, rather than out of school punishment, such as expulsion, which risks disconnecting them from school altogether. Through the restorative approach, students' attendance increases, suspensions and expulsions decrease, stronger relationships develop, and academic performance improves.

Restorative practices in schools include peer mediation, classroom circles to resolve problems, and family group conferencing (Chmelynski, 2005). These all involve a face-to-face interaction in order to address the impact of a student's behavior. Restorative practices begin with the premise that students who misbehave are not aware of the impact of their behavior. Restorative circles are a more formal restorative process. During this time, specific questions are asked when responding to challenging behavior: What happened? What were you thinking about at the time? What have you thought about since? Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way? What do you think you need to do to make things right? There are different types of circles. These are responsive circles, proactive circles, and staff circles. The process of restorative circles is set up to produce a common understanding of what happened, to restore the relationships, and to find ways of making amends for wrongs done. What makes restorative conferences, mediations, chats and circles "restorative" is the underlying principle of respect, the inclusive process, and the objective to develop trust within forms of relationship where those involved can make amends (Drewery, 2016). Moreover, in a variety of settings and for a variety of purposes, the power of circles is being discovered.

### **What is the Role of Restorative Practices in Schools?**

Getting students to speak and find solutions is a significant shift for teachers and administrators. Usually, educators find themselves constantly correcting students' behavior. This can be very tiresome. Unlike an authoritarian, punitive, or overly permissive approach, a

restorative approach enables the students to restore relationships and build community (Lange, 2008). The punitive response, which dominates in today's schools, limits educational authorities to simplistic choices. Restorative responses create opportunities for learning. Typically, restorative practices in schools consists of the use of a common language around harm, so that where misbehavior and conflict occur, the focus is on staff and students seeking to understand what happened, who has been affected and how, what is needed for things to be put right, and what has been learned from the incidence of conflict to reduce the risk of further harm (Bevington, 2015).

School staff working with restorative practices have reported that it is more than a behavior management tool, that there is a deeper and richer philosophy of life that this work expresses. A related study of restorative practices found that the emotions are real, should be recognized and known how to be dealt with, that conflicts happen, and that conflicts present an opportunity for a constructive way forward (Bevington, 2015). Restorative work at the school where the study was conducted appeared to open up alternative and more constructive ways of dealing with emotions with conflict and with life more generally.

The role of the disciplinarian in a school offers unique challenges. The balance between holding children accountable and creating a positive environment for learning is sometimes difficult to achieve. When administrators acknowledge teachers' feelings and give them some say in how things will be dealt with, teachers feel trust and satisfaction. In a recent study, administrators report that through the restorative approach their relationships with teachers improved and became more collaborative, rather than strictly supervisory (Harrison, 2007). A sense of teamwork develops, and people around the school are more likely to resolve problems

collaboratively. Teachers must understand that restorative practices can help them do their jobs more easily and more effectively.

### **Effects of Restorative Practices on Student Behavior**

Research shows that restorative approaches can transform student behavior and build healthy school communities. Public schools suspend millions of students each year, but less than ten percent of suspensions are for serious misbehavior (Black, 2016). Restorative practices involve changing relationships by engaging people. This approach allows for doing things with them, rather than to them or for them, providing both high control and high support at the same time (Chmelynski, 2005). Students are encouraged to both give and ask for support and are responsible for helping address behavior in other students. Allowing students to better understand the impact of their behavior is more likely to influence their future behavior. Each incident of conflict and wrongdoing represents an opportunity for learning. Restorative practices start with the premise that students who misbehave are not aware of the impact of their behavior (Evans & Lester, 2013). In a recent two-year evaluation of the implementation of restorative practices in two schools, a decrease in the amount of discipline referrals, as well as suspensions was found in both (Kline, 2016). Underlying principles that each of these schools embraced included: the importance of fostering social relationships in a school community of mutual agreement; responsibility and accountability for one's own actions and their impact of others; respect for other people, their views and feelings; empathy with the feelings of others affected by one's own actions; fairness; commitments to processes consistent with a restorative approach; active involvement of everyone in school with decisions about their own lives; and a willingness to create opportunities for reflective change in pupils and staff.

Restorative practices establish a more positive relationship between staff and students. A positive classroom climate is the foundation for restorative practices that sit alongside and support teaching and learning (Varnham, 2005). The aim of restorative practices is the development of positive relationships and peaceful resolution of conflict for teachers and students. During the restorative approach, meaningful dialogue is occurring between students, as well as between the teacher and students. Students are becoming more comfortable and open to talk with teachers about any conflicts that are occurring.

### **Implementation of Restorative Practices**

The field of restorative practices offers a framework for implementing schoolwide change while at the same time engaging all the stakeholders. Restorative practices is not a one size fits all system for changing schools. Schools need to develop a vision of what they want to achieve. Macready (2009) asserts that “In developing a restorative school culture, it will be relevant for participants in the school community to move from their known and familiar practice to what is it possible to know and do, in a process of scaffolded learning” (p. 217).

Restorative practices are a school-wide approach. All members of the school must develop a mindset and stand ready to welcome the approach into the school. Regardless of how the administrators or staff of a school describe the reason for change, the school as a whole must perceive a need for change. A school need not be facing a crisis to want positive change (Lange, 2008). At first, students may be awkward or reluctant in their response to restorative interventions and practices, especially when first introduced in a school. School administration may come to the conclusion that there is something about their schools they want to change. Mirsky (2007) urges schools to employ quantitative measures to study the result of restorative practices. Most schools report dramatic reductions in disciplinary incidents and reductions in

administrative detentions, suspensions, and expulsions as a result. Classroom disruptions decline as well. Once a school recognizes a need for change and articulates a vision for the future, the next step is to set a course for implementation of the desired change. In addition to staff, students are introduced to the general concepts of restorative practices. Parents, too, are familiarized with the ideas of restorative practices. The biggest impact on students and parents, as well as teachers and administrators, will come naturally as restorative practices are implemented and refined in a school (Mirsky, 2007). Restorative practices are a transformation movement that promises positive change for schools.

### **Summary**

Restorative practices represent an attempt to reform school discipline and improve relationships in the school setting. More schools all over the world are beginning to push for restorative approaches in their schools. In a restorative school, there is a commitment to collaborative problem solving involving students, teachers, and parents. One of the basic premises of restorative practices is that human beings are happiest, healthiest and most likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of restorative practices on student behavior.

#### **Design**

The study uses a quasi-experimental design to determine the effects of restorative practices on student behavior. This study used data gathered by school behavior records in the form of Student Support Center passes. These passes are for students who share crisis and urgent behaviors in the school setting. These passes are completed by teachers and documented into school-wide data. The independent variable is the implementation of restorative practices. The independent variable is operationalized by the two groups: without implementation of restorative practices (past year) and with the implementation of restorative practices (current year). The dependent variable is the effects on student behavior. This is the first year implementing restorative practices in the school. The researcher will look at behavior data from the past school year 2016-2017 with no implementation of restorative practices and compare behavior data to the current school year 2017-2018 with implementation of restorative practices schoolwide.

#### **Participants**

The participants in this study were third grade students from a kindergarten through eighth grade, public charter school in Glen Burnie, Maryland. The population of the school includes 654 total students in grades K-8. Out of 654 total students, 313 students are female and 341 are male. 206 students are African American, 308 are White, 55 are Multi-Racial, 62 are Hispanic, 21 are Asian, and 2 are American Indian. Out of 654 total students, 80 students receive special education services, 45 students have a 504, and 163 receive free and reduced meals.

There are 70 students in third grade who participated in the study. There are 34 females and 36 males in the third grade. Out of the 70 students, 32 White, 9 Hispanic, 5 Multi-racial, 23 are African American, and 1 Asian. 11 students out of the 70 students have IEPs and 14 students receive Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS). These students are receiving restorative practices in the current school year and were not receiving the implementation of restorative practices in the school year 2016-2017.

### **Instrument**

School behavior data was collected from the Student Support Center in the current school year with the implementation of restorative practices compared to student behavior data from the past school year without implementation of restorative practices. The behavior data was recorded by yellow passes that students receive for urgent/crisis behavior that is sent to the Student Support Center in order for behavior specialists to talk with students about the behavior, and proper consequences are taken into action depending on the behavior. Yellow passes are completed by teachers for one of the following urgent/crisis behaviors: (a) Leaving area without permission (b) Physical aggression (c) Repeated unsafe behavior (d) Repeated disrespect to others (e) Threat to others (f) Bias Motivated Language (g) Repeated refusal to follow directions (h) Repeated Classroom Disruption.

### **Procedure**

In this current school year, it was an expectation that all classrooms implement restorative practices in the form of community building circles at least twice a week. Community building circles cultivate a culture in which everyone feels like they belong. Every member of the classroom (teachers, students, aids, etc.) sits in a circle during this time to create a stronger sense of community. There is a leader of the circle. The leader is in charge presenting a topic on



which the members of the circle answer. There is a talking piece used during this time, which can be anything the leader chooses. The talking piece signifies the person who is talking while the other members of the circle are listening intently to each member speak. During the community building circle, the leader is asking high quality prompts that invite every member to respond. These prompts can be open ended, relevant, simple, etc. Some examples of the prompts that can be asked include: *How would a friend describe you? If you could have a superpower, what would it be and why? What is one of your favorite memories? Describe a time when you were out of your comfort zone. How did you feel and what happened?* Some of the questions can be for building community, while others may address challenges. The circle ends with reflecting on what occurred during this time. Responsive circles are also used to repair harm student to student, student to teacher, or teacher to teacher. There are five basic questions the leader will ask the group that is having difficulty in order to help repair the relationship: (a) *What happened, and what were you thinking at the time of the incident?;* (b) *What have you thought about since?;* (c) *Who has been affected by what happened and how?;* (d) *What about this has been the hardest for you?;* (e) *What do you think needs to be done to make things as right as possible?* These questions are the building blocks for repairing the relationship or addressing challenging behavior. Behavior data from the past school year compared to the current school year was evaluated. Through the evaluation of behavior passes, the researcher will evaluate the effects of restorative practices on student behavior and whether there were fewer students who were sent to the Student Support Center with a yellow pass for showing crisis/urgent behavior.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of restorative practices on student behavior.

The number of times students were given passes to the Student Support Center for demonstrating urgent/crisis behaviors and the number of in-school interventions for 2016-2017 were analyzed with the number in 2017-2018 after the introduction of restorative practices were analyzed using a t test for paired subjects. These behaviors included: (a) Leaving area without permission (b) Physical aggression (c) Repeated unsafe behavior (d) Repeated disrespect to others (e) Threat to others (f) Bias Motivated Language (g) Repeated refusal to follow directions (h) Repeated Classroom Disruption. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Inappropriate Behavior Cases*

Data	School Year	Average	Number	Standard Deviation	t	Significance
Passes	2016-2017	5.9	23	12.11	0.79	0.44
	2017-2018	4.4	23	6.70		
In-school Interventions	2016-2017	.8	23	1.88	1.31	0.21
	2017-2018	.4	23	0.79		

The null hypothesis that there will be no difference in negative student behavior after the introduction of restorative practices in the form of restorative circles and community building circles is supported.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of restorative practices on student behavior. The null hypothesis that there would be no difference in negative student behavior after the introduction of restorative practices in the form of restorative circles and community building circles. The study used a quasi-experimental design to determine the effects of restorative practices on student behavior.

This study used data gathered by school behavior records in the form of Student Support Center passes. These passes are for students who share crisis and urgent behaviors in the school setting. These passes are completed by teachers and documented into school-wide data. The independent variable is the implementation of restorative practices. The independent variable is operationalized by the two groups: without implementation of restorative practices (past year) and with the implementation of restorative practices (current year). The dependent variable is the effects on student behavior. In 2016-2017 the total number of passes reported to the student support center was 152 and in 2017-2018 the total number of passes reported the student support center was 108. The null hypothesis that there will be no difference in negative student behavior after the introduction of restorative practices in the form of restorative circles and community building circles is supported.

#### **Implications of the Results**

According to the results of the study, the number of passes given and in-school interventions was lower in 2017-2018 than in 2016-2017, but the differences were not statistically significant. Therefore, this study shows that the implementation of restorative practices can positively impact students' behavior in the classroom.

Restorative practices create a positive school culture. According to the data, the number of times students were sent to the Student Support Center with a pass for demonstrating urgent crisis behavior decreased in the 2017-2018 school year when restorative practices were implemented schoolwide. Also, the number of in-school interventions also decreased in the 2017-2018 school year. In the school year 2016-2017, the total number of in-school interventions was 13, and in 2017-2018, the total number of in-school interventions was 12. With the implementation of restorative practices schoolwide, it helped create a positive classroom community by implementing community building circles. Also, when students had disagreements with another student or teacher, they were able to respond to conflict and resolve the issues. Overall, restorative practices helped create healthy relationships across the school, helped hold students accountable for their actions, and built community.

### **Threats to Validity**

During this study, there could have been threats to validity that may have impacted the results. For example, a threat to validity was that the population selected for the study was not randomly selected. For example, in the school year 2016-2017, these students were in second grade, and in 2017-2018, data was collected when the same students were in third grade. Another threat to validity is the passes. Many teachers could have sent students to the Student Support Center without a pass. Therefore, the pass was not recorded into the data, making it a threat to validity. Finally, restorative practices could have also been a threat to validity because restorative approaches were supposed to be occurring throughout the school with all staff members. However, teachers could have handled situations differently compared to other teachers when talking with their students or they could have not been holding community building circles as they were supposed to be doing each week in order to build a positive classroom community.

## **Connections to Literature**

When examining the current study in the context of the previous literature, there are many similarities that can be drawn. As Macready (2009) states, “In developing a restorative school culture, it will be relevant for participants in the school community to move from their known and familiar practice to what is it possible to know and do, in a process of scaffolded learning” (p. 217). Within the current study, in the year 2017-2018, restorative practices were introduced school-wide. Within the current study, the number of passes sent to the student support center for demonstrating urgent/crisis behavior, as well as the number of in-school interventions, decreased with the implementation of restorative practices school-wide. All staff members were trained in the implementation of restorative circles and community building circles.

Within this study, the null hypothesis was retained, and even though the number of passes and in-school intervention decreased, the differences were not statistically significant. However, Bevington (2015) argues that restorative practices in schools consist of the use of a common language around harm, so that where misbehavior and conflict occur, the focus is on staff, and students as well, seeking to understand what happened, who has been affected and how, what is needed for things to be put right, and what has been learned from the incidence of conflict to reduce the risk of further harm. Throughout this study, the restorative approach was implemented school-wide, and all students and staff were presented with similar common language. Staff members were able to use common language with students in order to decrease the amount of conflict and helped students to solve their own disagreements through the use of questions and common language. This was also the first year of implementing restorative practices, and with

the implementation of a new program, it takes several years until the new practice is integrated into the system.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

A review of the current study could result in the conclusion that more research should be conducted on (a) how to properly and effectively measure the effect of restorative approaches in schools and (b) which interventions will display a decrease in student behavior. As the research states, more schools all over the world are beginning to push for restorative approaches in their schools. In a restorative school, there is a commitment to collaborative problem solving involving students, teachers, and parents. One of the basic premises of restorative practices is that human beings are happiest, healthiest and most likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them. Therefore, the study should be designed using further research on how to construct an experiment that will be able to effectively measure how restorative practices can impact student behavior both positively.

Moreover, the tool of student passes sent to the Student Support Center when demonstrating urgent/crisis behaviors should be changed. Many schools do not have a Student Support Center nor do they use passes to measure behavior. Researchers need to find a way that will measure the effects of restorative practices and student behavior.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of restorative practices on student behavior. The null hypothesis that there will be no difference in negative student behavior after the introduction of restorative practices in the form of restorative circles and community building

circles is supported. Therefore, it is important to note that additional research must be examined to determine the effects of restorative practices on student behavior.

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