

The Effects of Restorative Practice Classroom Circles on Student Behavior and Classroom  
Culture

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study was to investigate the effects of daily Restorative Practice classroom circles on the behavior and classroom culture within a fourth-grade classroom. The study's original design was to use frequency data concerning disruptive student behavior, as well as a pre/post student classroom culture survey across a period of two semesters, to investigate a null hypothesis of no medial change between behavior and perceived classroom culture when comparing pre and post implementation of Restorative Practices classroom circles. However, due to government mandated COVID-19 quarantine in March of 2020, the post data measures for the second quarter term of the study were unable to be gathered. Thus, the study found was found to be inconclusive in finding evidence of the effects of Restorative Practice classroom circles on student behavior and classroom culture. However, Restorative Practices has a growing body of research that consistently shows the positive effects of Restorative Practices on student behavior and school culture and will continue to be a growing topic that is researched and implemented within school systems to explore the short- and long-term behavioral and cultural effects on schools throughout the world as it compares to traditional exclusionary discipline approaches.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Overview**

Zero tolerance policies within schools have been the main discipline practice for many years now. The goal of zero tolerance policies is to keep schools safe; however, research has shown that these policies are ineffective in lowering school violence and have in many ways contributed to students feeling ostracized from their school community and peers (Darling & Monk, 2018). As a result, a growing number of schools are implementing programs, such as Restorative Practices, which hold students accountable for their actions, while also promoting a positive school atmosphere and an opportunity to learn and grow from student indiscretions.

#### **Statement of Problem**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of the implementation of restorative practices on perceived classroom culture and student behavior within a fourth-grade classroom.

#### **Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis for this study is students in a fourth-grade classroom who receive daily Restorative Practice classroom circle process instruction will have no statistical difference in the amount of disruptive behaviors and student perception of classroom culture than students who receive traditional exclusionary practices in discipline.

#### **Operational Definitions**

*Disruptive behaviors* for students were defined as any behavior that led to parent contact being made or a disciplinary referral being written by an educator or administrator.

*Classroom culture* is defined as the atmosphere of learning within a classroom. Positive classroom culture involves a safe and conducive environment for students to make goals and learn (Opportunity to Learn Network, 2014).

*Exclusionary practices in discipline* are defined as actions taken to separate or exclude a student(s) who is (are) causing a disruption within the learning environment. Exclusionary discipline practices typically include punitive measures given after the behavior has occurred (Opportunity to Learn Network, 2014).

*Restorative Practices* are defined as processes developed by the International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP) that build a sense of community and positive relationships and can help prevent and address behavior and rule violations (Lee & Wang, 2019). The *circle process* within the Restorative Practices program is defined as the proactive process that can be used to teach social skills and problem-solving skills within the classroom. *Community classroom circles* are defined as the daily meeting process where students safely share and are heard by their classmates. The community classroom circles also include celebrations and sharing of difficult issues between students (Opportunity to Learn Network, 2014).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REIVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This review of literature explores the effects of the implementation of Restorative Practices on perceived culture and student behavior within a classroom or school. Section one describes classroom culture and details the relationships found between positive classroom culture and student behavior. Section two outlines the definition and implementation of restorative practices within the classroom and focuses on the implementation of the circle process. The last section investigates the studied connections between Restorative Practices and classroom culture and behavior.

#### **Classroom Culture and its Relation to Student Behavior**

School culture can be felt quickly and profoundly by students and staff within a school community. School culture can include the tone of communication between administration and staff, the tone of communication between staff and students and parents, and how criticism and disagreement are handled within the school community. Educators' interactions with students have a lasting impact on students' lives and their education. Teachers are a key factor in developing a positive classroom culture (Jensen, 2013). By having positive and supportive interactions, teachers can motivate and inspire students to achieve great things (Ruddy & Ryan, 2015).

Trauma informed research shows that adolescent brains can be affected by years of conditioned behavior and traumatic experiences. Research has shown these traumatic experiences and subsequent behavioral difficulties can be mediated by building strong personal relationships with students (Martin, 2015). By utilizing practices that promote a strong sense of community and partnership, classroom and school culture will also be promoted. Darling and

Monk (2018) support this theory with evidence from Comer's 1988 study, which provided evidence of academic achievement increases in low income students in direct relation to the development of a positive school culture by way of increased educator collaboration.

Jensen (2013) also supports the idea that children who develop more positive relationships are further able to develop appropriate emotional responses in everyday situations. These emotional responses carry over to the classroom and can have serious effects on the culture of the classroom and behavior of the students within it. Jensen also points out that positive culture and mindset of teachers and students within the classroom can have deep impacts on the culture of the class as a whole, and whether the students are confident in their ability to learn. When students feel safe within a positive classroom culture, the stress on the mind and body is lower and students feel they have more control over their learning. When students feel this control, they are often more ready and able to access academic information, and as a result, have often exhibited fewer negative behaviors within the classroom.

### **Defining and Implementing Restorative Practices**

In a nation where school violence continues to make headlines, communities, educators, and families everywhere see the need for schools to focus on the wellbeing of the whole child and students' safety in their learning environment. As these violent events occur, school communities are forced to acknowledge that a rising number of threats now lie within the school itself (Buckmaster, 2016). With school threats on the rise, the educational community is forced to face the growing evidence that the zero tolerance policies, which continuously suspend and expel students, are proving to be ineffective in keeping school communities safe from violence (Darling & Monk, 2018). This has naturally started the educational shift from the implementation of the rigid zero tolerance policies of the past, that foster alienation and inequity,

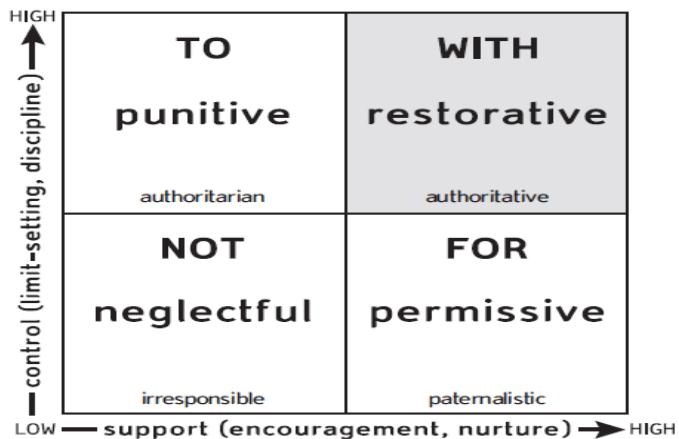
to policies that focus on community building and giving value to student voice (Buckmaster, 2016). One such policy is Restorative Practices. Restorative Practices serve as a framework schools can utilize to understand how to approach relationships within the school and to help prevent and decrease the number of negative behavior incidences, such as bullying and violence, within schools (Mirsky, 2014).

Ted Wachtel (2016), the founder of the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), defines Restorative Practices as “a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making” (p. 1). This includes the formal and informal processes which proactively build a sense of community. The main premise of Restorative Practices is that people are happier, cooperative, and more likely to make positive changes in behavior when those in positions of authority make decisions *with* them instead of *for* them (Wachtel, 2016). The Restorative Practices model promotes communities to deemphasize rule breaking and alienation of others, and instead promote human connection and the development of conscience (Buckmaster, 2016). The processes within this model foster the development of emotional bonds and functions to restore and build relationships within communities (Wachtel, 2016). Preventing and reducing harmful behavior, addressing school needs, and holding students accountable for their actions are also foundational tenets of the Restorative Practices model (Opportunity to Learn Network, 2014).

The Social Discipline Window (Figure 1) is a Restorative Practices concept that shows four basic approaches to discipline as it relates to levels of control and support and indicates where the restorative mindset lies within this continuum. The Restorative Practices model lies within the realm of high support and high control, which encourages taking action *with* people instead of taking action *for* them (Wachtel, 2016).

Figure 1

*Social Discipline Window*



(Wachtel, 2016, p. 3)

The implementation of Restorative Practices can range from informal to formal processes. Processes, such as affective statements and questions, are less structured and require fewer time and individuals to complete. As the processes move towards formal, for example, a group circle or formal conference, more structure, time, and individuals are needed for implementation (Wachtel, 2016). Within the classroom, teachers can use affective statements easily, when needed, to address student behaviors individually or among a small group. The goal is to help students understand that individual behavior affects others and gives students the opportunity to own their actions and change them. Another, more formal, option for schools is to use the Restorative Practice formal conference in conjunction with traditional modes of discipline. Several school districts have allowed students the opportunity to participate in a restorative conference to reduce their punishment and start reintegrating positively back into the school community (Buckmaster, 2016). Restorative Practices can also be preventative or reactive. Modeling and facilitating the use of preventative practices are most effective when done

daily. Restorative approaches are done only when a violation within a relationship has occurred and needs to be repaired (Stewart Kline, 2016).

The Opportunity to Learn Network (2014) describes the restorative circle process as one of the most adaptable practices that can be used proactively or reactively in schools. The circle process can be used to teach social skills, problem solving, and to celebrate students' successes and build confidence within the classroom community. Restorative circles can range from informal to formal and be changed depending on the needs of the students or situation. Circles provide students the opportunity to share feelings, build relationships and address conflicts in a safe and accepting environment (Wachtel, 2016). Circles can be proactive and executed weekly or daily to build trust and understanding and to create shared values and improve behavior (Mirsky, 2014). Circles can be used to collaboratively develop classroom expectations for behavior and a set of communal rules for the classroom (Clawson, Avis, Gerewitz, & Gregory, 2016). During proactive circles, teachers may go over topics or problems witnessed within the classroom or school or may go over larger issues that students will encounter in everyday life. Students sit in a circle where one student speaks at a time. Teachers may use an object to serve as a "talking piece" when it is a student's turn to share (Mirsky, 2014).

Restorative, or responsive, circles can also be used reactively to engage students in the management of conflict between members of the classroom or school (Clawson et al., 2016). Restorative circles are used after a moderately serious incident has occurred and involves the victim, the offender, and a circle facilitator. The goal of the circle is to have the offender accept responsibility for the actions committed and the victim gains reparation for harm done. This slightly more formal process promotes positive conflict resolution and can repair harm done to peer relationships. Common defining features of effective restorative circles include established

agreements on how to participate in the circle and follow through on those agreements, authentic sharing of experiences, the non-judgement of others during sharing, and finally, collaborative problem solving and decision making (Lee & Wang, 2019).

A key factor in the implementation of the restorative model is the school and staff fully committing to a restorative mindset and modeling and utilizing Restorative Practices with fidelity. Clawson et al. (2016) found that educators who struggled to shift from an authoritarian perspective to a more restorative lens struggled when implementing the Restorative Practices model. However, even while there may be staff resistance to this change, evidence of conflict resolution skills and an overall positive change in atmosphere has still been shown in schools which use Restorative Practices (Kane et al., 2008). Positive outcomes and a higher rate of success with Restorative Practices has also been seen in school communities that consistently value relationships and build social emotional learning opportunities into the curriculum (Ruddy & Ryan, 2015). “Having expert restorative facilitators that are able to implement Restorative Justice with fidelity is a pressing issue and need for success” within schools that implement Restorative Practices (Darling & Monk, 2018, p. 82). Kane et al. (2008) found evidence to support school and staff commitment within the Scottish Restorative Practices Project. Research indicated that key features associated with successful implementation of restorative practices included a readiness to change one’s mindset and quality training and leadership.

### **The Effects of Restorative Practices on Classroom Culture and Behavior**

“When schools use Restorative Practices to build relationships and community, students’ attitudes change for the better” (Mirsky, 2014, p. 51). Studies suggest that Restorative Practices are associated with a decrease in overall discipline incidents, school violence, and improved school connectedness and attendance rates (Lee & Wang, 2019). With systematic use of

Restorative Practices within the school community, schools can create school and classroom cultures that consistently promote awareness, empathy, and responsibility (Wachtel, 2016). Darling and Monk (2018) support findings from the Supportive School Discipline Initiative (SSDI) which attests that, with the help of the consistent, positive modeling of Restorative Practices (Ruddy & Ryan, 2015), educational leaders have the capability to shift school culture from a retributive lens to a restorative lens over time. With this shift to a restorative lens, students show more instances of taking ownership for their classroom and school community, which in turn helps promote a positive culture for all (Mirsky, 2014).

Buckmaster (2016) further promotes the success of the Restorative Practices model by detailing studies held in Chicago, Virginia, and Colorado that demonstrated the positive effects of Restorative Practices implementation. Positive effects include showing a reduction in suspension rates, fewer instances of bullying, and fewer disciplinary issues within classrooms. A decrease in negative classroom behaviors and power struggles is also seen within schools which implement Restorative Practices, as it allows students to maintain their dignity, maintain the relationship between the teacher and the student, and share the perspectives of both (Martin, 2015). Evidence also suggests that Restorative Practices is linked to a reduction in disparities in school discipline data (Stewart Kline, 2016).

When school communities shift their focus from a punitive lens to a restorative lens, and put relationships first, a healthy school and classroom culture can form, which can also support the positive behavior and academic success of the students (Ruddy & Ryan, 2015). Through the consistent use of Restorative Practices, relationships between individuals within the school show improvement and students often become more empowered to take an active role in their learning

(Darling & Monk, 2018). This can then reduce the instances of academic and behavioral issues within the classroom.

## **Summary**

The Restorative Practice model has shown positive results and is spreading across the globe, as well as career and educational communities (Wachtel, 2016). The educational community is continuing to witness the negative aftermath of the zero tolerance policies currently in place and are seeking out opportunities to expand the disciplinary scope for students and schools. Schools within the nation and other countries, such as New Zealand, Canada, and Brazil, have begun the shift to Restorative Practices to better serve the needs of student and educational communities (Ruddy & Ryan, 2015). The Opportunity to Learn Network (2014) provides examples of schools in Maryland, Louisiana, and California that currently use Restorative Practices as an alternative to suspensions or in conjunction with traditional disciplinary programs. Stewart Kline (2016) articulates that findings from prior research indicate that punitive discipline measures alone lead to intensification of problem behaviors, and instead recommends a dualistic approach, such as Restorative Practices, which involves the community and inclusion. Educational leaders are starting to explore progressive discipline and behavioral approaches that use a restorative lens to focus on corrective and supportive policies, which can better meet the needs of the whole child and the whole school (Ruddy & Ryan, 2015). With a more progressive discipline policy, such as Restorative Practices, students can be empowered with knowledge and empathy, which equips them with the ability to handle conflict resolution and make the right choices in healthy and appropriate ways (Martin, 2015). The Restorative Practices model has shown to be compatible with other behavior and discipline initiatives within schools, which can allow for easy integration within existing discipline frameworks (Kane et al.,

2008). With the flexibility of the Restorative Practices model and the ability to implement the processes in combination with existing behavior systems, educational communities have the opportunity to begin to implement programs, such as Restorative Practices, with ease, which can better serve the educational community as a whole.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

This study investigated the impact of specific Restorative Practices on the frequency of disruptive behaviors and overall classroom culture. The goal of this study was to determine a difference in the behavior and perceived classroom culture within a fourth-grade classroom through the implementation of daily use of the specific Restorative Practices process of the community classroom circle.

#### **Design**

This study used a quasi-experimental design using a pretest-posttest measure. The participants were 25 students in a fourth-grade classroom, with a mix of ESL (English as a Second Language) and native-English speakers, as well as a mix of general education and special education students. The participants were not random due to class assignment and scheduling availability. The independent variable of the design was the daily implementation of the Restorative Practices circle process as both a proactive and restorative measure within the classroom. The dependent variables within the study were classroom culture in relation to a student's view on the classroom as being an environment where students feel safe and free to be involved, as well as classroom behavior in relation to the number of behavior referrals/parent contact made in reference to disruptive classroom behaviors.

The class began with one semester without community classroom circles within the classroom and the use of traditional exclusionary discipline. Baseline data for classroom culture was collected via a student pretest survey, and baseline data for behavior was collected via the frequency of teacher phone calls home and recorded classroom referrals. During the second semester, the restorative classroom circle process was introduced and carried out once per

morning. The intention of the original study was to collect data again after the second semester ended via a student posttest survey and recorded frequencies of teacher phone calls and recorded classroom referrals, and pre and post measures were to be compared. However, due to the Covid-19 emergency closings of schools, the implementation of the daily Restorative Practices classroom circle process was limited to eight weeks and a limited amount of phone call and referral frequency data were able to be recorded. The posttest survey measure was unable to be given to the participants of the study.

## **Participants**

The participants of the study were 25 fourth-grade students, ranging from nine-ten years old, assigned to two fourth-grade teachers. Participants attend a Title I elementary school, in which 72% of the population qualifies for free or reduced meals. Within the fourth-grade class, 23 students qualified for free or reduced meals. Within the 25 students, there were ten female students and 15 male students. The population had approximately five Caucasian students, ten African American students, five Hispanic, four identified as multiple ethnicities, and one student identified as Asian. Of the 25 students, six students were English Language Learners (ELL) and 19 were native-English speakers. The participant population also included seven special education students and 18 general education students. Due to the students being assigned to teachers without input, the demographics of this population do not reflect those of the district.

## **Instrument**

The first instrument used to collect data was a pretest/posttest student culture survey, to be given pre and post implementation of the Restorative Practices circle process. This survey was personally constructed, and content validity was established by the researcher's graduate

advisor. The survey was read aloud to the class due to 88% of the students reading below grade level. A picture scale was also used to help the students select their answers, without struggling to decode the reading material. Students were read aloud the survey and independently selected their responses. To collect the frequency of disruptive behavior, a tally of phone calls made home concerning negative or disruptive behaviors by the teacher was collected, as well as referrals recorded by administration, for each semester.

### **Procedure**

The original procedure of the study was to occur over a 16-week period in the spring of 2020 for one fourth-grade class. However, due to the Covid-19 emergency closings of schools, the implementation of the Restorative Practices circle process was limited to eight weeks. Before the Restorative Practices circle process was implemented, a more traditional exclusionary practice of school discipline took place, including parental contact and punitive discipline, such as lunch detention, after school detention, and referrals when negative or disruptive behaviors occurred. Students completed morning activities but did not meet or discuss in any group setting. When the independent variable of the daily classroom circle process was applied, the class met every morning for a 20-minute period to conduct a community class circle. Once the Restorative Practice of a class community circle was implemented, the basic classroom expectations remained; however, a shift in focus was made, using the circles, to a more restorative approach with an added focus on building classroom community and culture.

Students were instructed on the “circle culture” and processes that would be used and valued throughout the study (Clifford, 2015). Each circle lasted twenty minutes each morning as a whole group procedure. The teacher acted as the Circle Keeper, who facilitated each discussion. Each class community circle started with a restorative question to guide the

discussion. Each restorative question consisted of an open-ended question that was relevant to students and focused on inquiry, discovery, or social emotional learning. Each student was instructed to write their initial answer on a sticky note and have it with them when the class community circle started. As each student shared their answer, they would put their note in the middle of a circle, as the center of the circle was a focus for student sharing. This initial question was given a ten-minute time frame for discussion. After the initial restorative question, the circle would close with an emotional check-in question for the group. Students were instructed to share verbally or write their feelings and concerns on a sticky note to then share during their turn. The emotional check-in would also last for a period of ten minutes.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

This study investigated the impact of specific Restorative Practices on the frequency of disruptive behaviors and overall classroom culture. The goal of this study was to investigate the behavior and classroom culture within a fourth-grade classroom through the implementation of traditional exclusionary discipline versus the behavior and classroom culture within a fourth-grade classroom after the daily use of the specific Restorative Practices of the community circle process. A null hypothesis of no medial change between behavior and perceived classroom culture when comparing pre and post implementation of Restorative Practices classroom circles was investigated. Behavior and classroom culture data were tracked during the first semester. Data tracking continued during the second semester once Restorative Practices were implemented in January. The original study aimed to implement and track the implementation data of Restorative Practices classroom circles for a total of 16 weeks. However, due to the government mandated COVID-19 quarantine in March, behavior data was only able to be tracked until the shutdown of schools and the post student culture survey measure was unable to be given.

Figure 2 and Figure 3 display the frequency data of referrals taken prior to the implementation of Restorative Practices classroom circles. Due to the government COVID-19 closure of schools, students were not present within the school system to continue receiving the implementation of Restorative Practice classroom circles, which also disallowed for referral data to be collected during the second semester.

Figure 2

*Individual Value Plot of Differences*

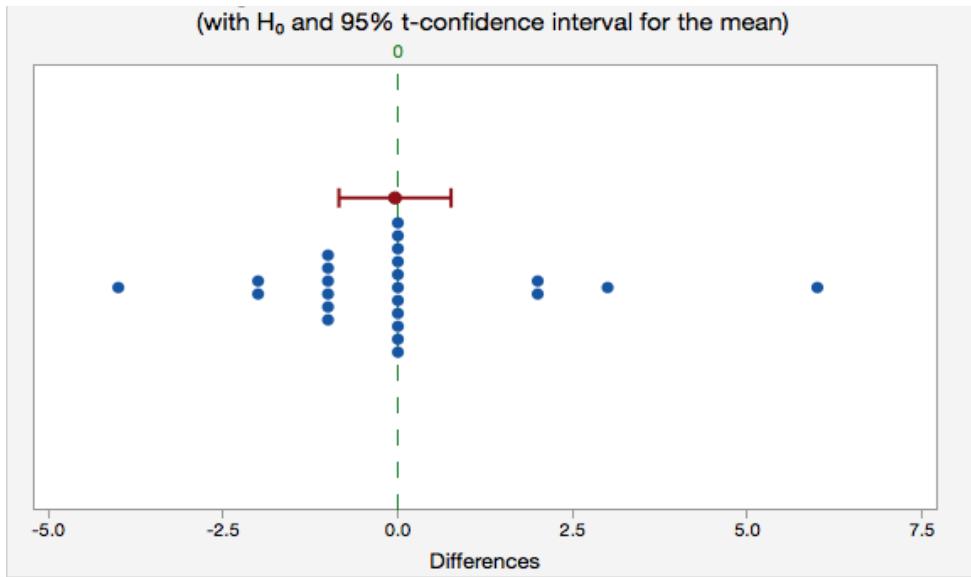


Figure 3

*Individual Value Plot of Pre-Referrals*

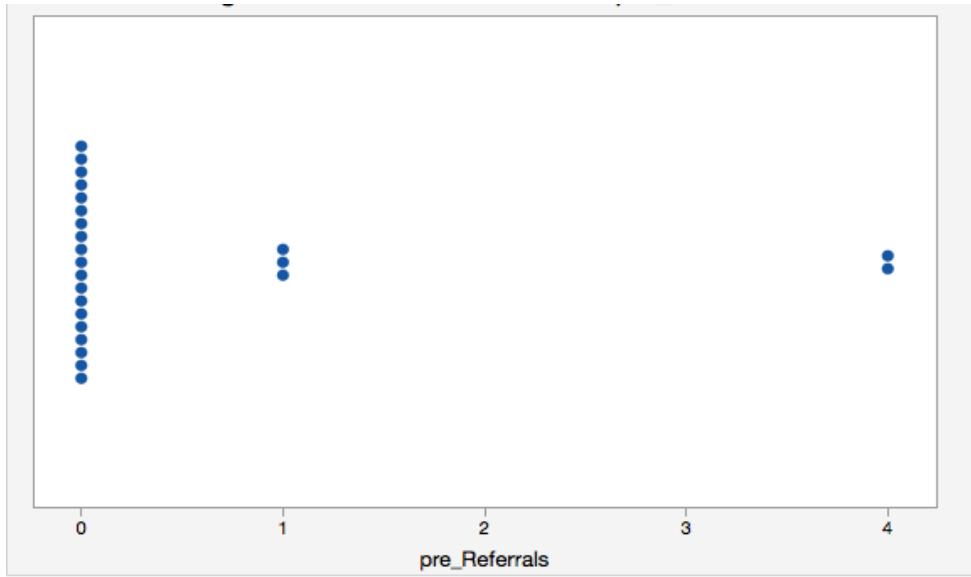


Table 1 shows the mean difference in the means between the frequency data of the first semester phone call data and the shortened frequency data of the second semester. There is insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis at alpha=.05; thus, the mean number of phone calls did not decrease significantly. The mean difference in the sample of 24 students was minuscule; there was hardly any change in the number of phone calls on average.

Table 1

*Pre and Post Phone Calls to Parents About Behavior*

### Descriptive Statistics

Sample	N	Mean	StDev	SE Mean
pre_Phone_Calls	24	0.7083	1.8053	0.3685
post_Phone_Calls	24	0.7500	1.0734	0.2191

### Estimation for Paired Difference

Mean	StDev	SE Mean	95% CI for $\mu_d$
-0.0417	1.8992	0.3877	(-0.8436, 0.7603)

$\mu_d$ : mean of (pre\_Phone\_Calls - post\_Phone\_Calls)

### Test

Null hypothesis  $H_0: \mu_d = 0$

Alternative hypothesis  $H_1: \mu_d \neq 0$

T-Value	P-Value
-0.11	0.9153

Table 2 summarizes the hypothesis tests on the pre student culture survey data. For each of the 15 pretest survey questions, the null hypothesis states that the frequencies of response will be the same for the five scale points, Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA).

Table 2

*Summary of Hypothesis Tests on Pretest Survey*

Question	Observed frequencies					Expected per cell	Chi-Sq	p-value
	SD	D	N	A	SA			
1. Enjoy my class	2	2	<b>12</b>	6	2	4.8	16.00	.003*
2. Comfortable & safe	4	4	8	8	0	6.0	2.67	.446
3. Teachers care about me	3	1	3	5	<b>12</b>	4.8	15.17	.004*
4. Teachers treat us respectfully	3	1	7	3	<b>10</b>	4.8	11.0	.027*
5. Talk to teachers about school	1	2	5	4	<b>12</b>	4.8	15.58	.004*
6. Talk to teachers about home	8	4	5	3	4	4.8	3.08	.544
7. Talk to adults at school	3	0	3	8	10	6.0	6.33	.096
8. Students treat students respectfully	<b>15</b>	4	4	0	1	6.0	19.00	.001*
9. Talk to peers about school	4	2	10	5	3	4.8	8.08	.089
10. Talk to peers about home	9	3	7	3	9	4.8	7.67	.105
11. Talk to other students about school	6	2	6	5	5	4.8	2.25	.690
12. Class talks about feelings	6	2	6	5	5	4.8	1.83	.766
13. Talk to work settle arguments	5	5	<b>10</b>	1	3	4.8	9.33	.053*
14. Share & listen during arguments	1	3	5	7	8	4.8	6.83	.145
15. Teachers help us handle arguments	2	1	2	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	4.8	15.58	.004*

\*statistically significant at alpha=0.05 level, modal scale points boldface

For question one, because the *p*-value for the Chi-Square Goodness of Fit test is less than alpha=0.05, the null hypothesis can be rejected with at most a 5% chance that the rejection is a false positive. The modal category is Neutral. For question two, there is insufficient evidence to reject the null at alpha=0.05; thus, there is no modal tendency for this question. For question 3, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis of equal frequencies; as such, Strongly Agree is the modal tendency for this question. For question four, there is sufficient evidence to

reject the null hypothesis at alpha=.05; this means that Strongly Agree is the modal tendency. For question five, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis at alpha=.05; hence Strongly Agree is the modal tendency. For question six, there is insufficient evidence to reject the null at alpha=0.05; in other words, there is no modal tendency for this question. For question seven, there is insufficient evidence to reject the null at alpha=0.05; therefore, there is no modal tendency for this question. For question eight, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis at alpha=.05; Strongly Disagree is the modal tendency. For question nine, there is insufficient evidence to reject the null at alpha=0.05; there is no modal tendency for this question. (Neutral is the mode for this sample; it would not necessarily reoccur in similar samples in other classrooms.) For question ten, there is insufficient evidence to reject the null at alpha=0.05; there is no modal tendency for this question. For question 11, there is insufficient evidence to reject the null at alpha=0.05; as such, there is no modal tendency for this question. For question 12, there is insufficient evidence to reject the null at alpha=0.05; therefore, there is no modal tendency for this question. For question 13, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null at alpha=0.05; Neutral is the modal tendency for this question. For question 14, there is insufficient evidence to reject the null at alpha=0.05; there is no modal tendency for this question. Lastly, for question 15, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null at alpha=0.05; hence Agree, followed closely by Strongly Agree are the modal tendencies for this question.

In summary, eight of the 15 items had a statistically significant modal tendency. Four of the items (numbers 3, 4, 5, and 15) dealt with relationships with teachers, and the modes were Agree or Strongly Agree. Two items (numbers 1 and 13) dealt with classmate relations, and the modes were neutral (neither agree nor disagree). One item (number 8) dealt with students being respectful to other students, and the mode was Strongly Disagree. There is a quantitative

difference between student-teacher relations (positive) and student-student relations (not positive).

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of Restorative Practices classroom circles on disruptive student behavior and perception of classroom culture. The null hypothesis for this study, that daily Restorative Practices classroom circle process instruction will have no effect on the amount of disruptive behavior and student perception of classroom culture among fourth-grade students could not be completely supported or rejected due to the inability to administer the postsurvey measure and monitor the frequency of disruptive behavior within the school setting for the second semester of the study.

#### **Implications of The Results**

From the pretest student culture survey, students felt positive about their relations with teachers. Students felt neutral or negative about relations among students. Due to the unplanned COVID-19 government closures of schools, there is no posttest student culture survey data to measure any differences between the pre and post survey feelings of students about classroom culture. Also due to the government COVID-19 closure of schools, students were not present within the school system to continue receiving the implementation of Restorative Practices classroom circles, which disallowed for referral data to be collected during the second semester. The behavior data concerning parent phone calls was minimal and was also unable to be fully collected. The minimal amount of frequency phone call data showed hardly any change in the number of phone calls on average between the first semester and truncated second semester, and therefore, the null hypothesis that there was no statistical difference in student behavior and perceived classroom culture pre and post implementation of Restorative Practices classroom circles could not be rejected or sufficiently supported. Without the complete implementation of the treatment and posttests, there is no way to accurately estimate or measure the impact of

Restorative Practices classroom circles on behavior and climate of students in a fourth-grade classroom.

### **Theoretical Consequences**

Due to the COVID-19 government closures of schools, this study was unable to complete the implementation of the treatment and posttests. Therefore, this study is unable to sufficiently demonstrate evidence of the impact of Restorative Practices classroom circles on behavior and classroom culture of students within a fourth-grade classroom. The limited data collected concerning number of parent phone calls concerning disruptive behavior also showed a minimal difference between the number of first semester parent phone calls due to disruptive behavior and the number of second semester phone calls due to disruptive behavior. This implicates that, while Restorative Practices classroom circles have demonstrated effectiveness in collaboratively developing classroom expectations for behavior and a set of communal rules for the classroom, in order to be effective and successful in these goals, there is need for consistent use in the classroom over time to show any clear results (Clawson, Avis, Gerewitz, & Gregory, 2016).

### **Threats to Validity**

Multiple threats to validity occurred within the scope of this study which could have, or did, affect the results of the study. First, participants were not randomly selected due to class assignment and scheduling availability; this also limited the sample size to a smaller number. The independent variable of the study was the daily implementation of the Restorative Practices circle process as both a proactive and restorative measure within the classroom; however, the implementation of the restorative measure was interfered with and prevented due to the COVID-19 government closure of schools. This not only prevented the implementation of the Restorative

Practices classroom circles but also prevented behavior and classroom culture post data measures from being collected and measured.

### **Connections to Previous Studies/Existing Literature**

While this study was inconclusive in its findings concerning the implementation of Restorative Practices classroom circles on behavior and classroom culture, several other studies have been able to find results to support the use of Restorative Practices and classroom circles within school systems. As stated in Chapter II, Kane et al. (2008) found evidence of growth in conflict resolution skills and an overall positive change in atmosphere in schools which use Restorative Practices. Studies suggest that Restorative Practices are associated with a decrease in overall discipline incidents, school violence, and improved school connectedness and attendance rates (Lee & Wang, 2019).

Darling and Monk (2018) support findings from the Supportive School Discipline Initiative (SSDI) which attests that, with the help of the consistent, positive modeling of Restorative Practices (Ruddy & Ryan, 2015), educational leaders have the capability to shift school culture from a retributive lens to a restorative lens over time. With this shift to a restorative lens, students show more instances of taking ownership for their classroom and school community, which in turn, helps promote a positive culture for all (Mirsky, 2014).

Buckmaster (2016) further promotes the use of the Restorative Practices model by detailing studies held in Chicago, Virginia, and Colorado that demonstrated the positive effects of Restorative Practice implementation. Positive effects include a reduction in suspension rates, fewer instances of bullying, and fewer disciplinary issues within classrooms. A decrease in negative classroom behaviors and power struggles has also been seen within schools which implement Restorative Practices, as it allows students to maintain their dignity, maintain the

relationship between the teacher and the student, and share the perspectives of others (Martin, 2015). Evidence also suggests that Restorative Practices are linked to a reduction in disparities in school discipline data (Stewart Kline, 2016).

### **Implications for Future Research**

With the threats to validity of this study and the inability to fully collect data concerning pre and post Restorative Practices classroom circle implementation, further research is needed to sufficiently show evidence of the impact of Restorative Practices classroom circles on behavior and classroom culture of students within a fourth-grade classroom. There is also the implication that any research needed should be consistent in nature and completed when students are able to resume normal school attendance. A larger and more random sample size should also be utilized for validity concerning the effects of Restorative Practices classroom circles on elementary school students. Also, a control group of similar students would help to validate the Restorative Practices classroom circle treatment if there were sizeable gains for the treatment group.

### **Conclusion**

From this study, there was found to be inconclusive evidence of the effects of Restorative Practices classroom circles on student behavior and classroom culture. However, it can also be concluded that a growing body of research is being formed that consistently shows the positive effects of Restorative Practices on disruptive student behavior and culture within schools and classrooms. It can be determined that Restorative Practices will continue to be a growing topic that is researched and implemented within school systems to continue to explore the short- and long-term behavioral and cultural effects on schools throughout the world as it compares to traditional exclusionary discipline approaches.

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