Summer 2020

The Role of Restorative Practices in Building Community, Increasing Student Learning and Reducing Racially Disparate Discipline in Secondary Schools

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THE ROLE OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN BUILDING COMMUNITY, INCREASING
STUDENT LEARNING AND REDUCING RACIALLY DISPARATE DISCIPLINE IN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of
Arts in Education

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

August 2020

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Restorative Justice is a social movement that has the potential to transform many institutions central to our modern western society. Sprouting from its roots in indigenous tribal governments, Restorative Justice offers a new lens through which to view criminal justice, community building and the education system. (Zehr, 2019) School districts across the country are implementing Restorative Justice practices in hopes of improving school climate, reducing racial achievement and discipline gaps and increasing community support for schools. As a science teacher at a diverse, urban secondary school in Saint Paul, Minnesota that has recently implemented Restorative Practices, I have had a unique opportunity to observe the impact of restorative practices on students, teachers, administrators and community members and I understand its potential for reducing the racial discipline gap and mediating the many harms caused by disparate administrative discipline on students of color and their communities.

Through my career experiences, I am in a unique position to produce a useful resource to support educators, administrators, coordinators and students as schools around the country begin to implement restorative justice practices to better build community in the classroom and to address persistent racial discipline gaps that are known to harm students and communities of color. The guiding question driving my work is “How can Restorative Justice Practices be utilized in the secondary classroom to build community, address community harms and reduce disparate racial discipline gaps?”

The resource I have produced is a highly personal and resource rich website for use by educators, administrators and coordinators to support the full implementation of Restorative Practices at Saint Paul Central High School in hopes of maximizing the positive benefits of RP. These benefits include stronger classroom communities, higher student achievement and a
reduction in racially disparate discipline and the harmful outcomes they entail for students and communities. The project was produced during July and August 2020 for presentation and use in the 2020-21 school year. The initial intended audience is the educators, administrators and RP coordinator of Saint Paul Central High School, a large diverse urban high school, although it is my hope that the audience will be expanded to include districts around the country that are implementing Restorative Practices.

The physical layout of the website was greatly informed by Research-Based Web Design and Usability Guidelines from the US Department of Human Health so that the user experience could be streamlined to avoid any technical hurdles to its usefulness. The free website design page from Google (Google Sites) was used to produce the website. Its front page includes links to the different sections of the website at the top and bottom of the page with descriptions and related imagery accompanying the bottom links. This should make navigating the website streamlined and prevent any technical hurdles for users to accessing the website as a whole.

The website is separated into three major subsections including Origins and Applications, Blog Entries and Resources for Educators. The Origins and Applications section details the origins of the Restorative Justice Movement from indigenous governments to the criminal justice system to the current implementation of Restorative Practices in the classroom. This section is intended to orient the user and introduce new teachers and administrators to the history and potential benefits of RP implementation in the classroom. The bulk of the content on the website can be found in the “Blog Entries” section. It includes seven highly personal narratives detailing my experiences implementing RP in my classroom at Saint Paul Central High School. The first two blogs cover my early career and my introduction to RP through a professional development
experience. The next covers the “physics” of RP, including how I manage the classroom space and time while implementing RP. This includes a bit about how I introduce RP to my students, train them to quickly and efficiently set up the room and includes prompts that I use early in the school year. The next three blogs cover the three types of circles I use; community building, harm-repair and content circles. These three blogs include prompts and lesson plans for teachers to use and modify in their own classrooms along with personal anecdotes these experiences had on me and my practice. The final blog looks at how teachers may implement RP during Distance Learning. It offers methods that I picked up for doing circle through live video conferences and using free software so that the benefits are RP may still be enjoyed during COVID-19. The goal of these blogs is to both share my personal experiences with teachers that are beginning to implement RP to support their growth as facilitators while providing them with tangible prompts and ideas. The final section of the website is a list of links to resources and lesson plans for teachers to explore as they implement RP. It also includes a link to this paper and the citations that support this work.

Link to website: https://sites.google.com/stpaul.k12.mn.us/restorative-practices-in-the-c/
Screenshots of the website:
Origins and Applications

A short history of Restorative Practices and their Applications in the Classroom

Blog

Resources for Educators

Links to restorative resources for educator's use in the classroom
Origins and Applications

Where Restorative Practices Came From and How They are Being Used in the Classroom

The United States criminal justice system has produced the largest per capita prison population in the world. Some 2.3 million people are currently incarcerated in US jails, prisons and correctional institutions, giving the United States the highest per capita incarceration rate of any modern country. A further 4 million more Americans are serving probation or on parole. These incredible numbers are the result of 30 plus years of "get-tough" policies based on a philosophy of punishing law breakers as the primary pathway to...
The PD Experience... My 360 Degree Introduction to Circle Blog #2

The PD Experience... My 360 Degree Introduction to Circle

It isn’t glorious. It’s not why any of us entered the profession. It’s not what you picture yourself doing in five years while pursuing your teaching license filled to the brim with grand dreams of changing the world one reason at a time. But the part of being an educator nobody really prepares you for is... the Professional Development experience. In my teaching experience, it has been my worst nightmare. The PD experience has never been a rewarding experience. However, it is now a part of my daily life, and I accept it as such.

Space and Time
The Physics of RP Blog #3

It’s All Relative

The “why” is easy. Teachers use Restorative Practices in the classroom to build a deep sense of community, repair harm to the community, provide instruction and increase
With and Within Community

Building Community With RP 
Blog #4

With and Within Community

Homo sapiens sapiens are almost certainly the most social creature to ever walk, swim, or fly above the planet. Maybe the most social being in the universe. Maybe... We instinctively know that a solitary hominid on the savanna is a dead hominid on the savanna. The truth of our social nature has been imprinted onto our genome, our physiology and our psychology. Our species is a social species.

Repairing Community 
Harm 
Blog #5

I have been doing Restorative Practices and circles in my classroom for 4 full school years. I've done countless community building, lots of getting to know you, and even some teaching of content (which I want to do more of), and yet there is one particular circle that stands out. It really stands out. It was transformative for the class. It shaped the school year in a way I did not expect. It was the first and the only Restorative Practices circle that was initiated by the students.
Where I Am Going
Content Circles
Blog #6

The circle just seems to work. Once you get used to it, it’s almost like we’ve accessed a secret of our biology: that sitting in community, speaking from the heart and listening with respect is hardwired in us. This isn’t to say that they are easy. One must clearly communicate and model the high expectations for circle. They must be deeply internalized and practiced daily.

Distance Learning Circles
Blog #7

The reality of COVID-19 is one that, even after four full months of community spread in our country, still demands adapting to. It has been a paradigm shift for me away from regular hand-shakes, hugs from family members and friends, restaurant outings, and music concerts. We are left with the occasional elbow bump or five-fingered and proper greeting on the phone or computer.
Restorative Resources for Educators

An article by Patterson and Gray Highlighting Science Specific RP Pedagogy and Lesson Plans
Teaching to Transform: (W)Holistic Science Pedagogy

Aisha Farouk and Salim Gray


Eutopia: An Excellent Resource for Educators with RP Lesson plans

Restorative Practices Lesson Plan Guide - Open Society Institute - Baltimore
Website Specific Links:

(Patterson and Gray Article - Linked in Resources Section of Website)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Nk3DUG-fWj8WMbpxJFwnEJr1ZGZi7daP/view?usp=sharing

(Restorative Practices Lesson Plan Guide - Open Society Institute - Baltimore - Linked in Resources Section of Website)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LCmKZSUgqe1oYhBS5BgdhK5N7LPwStk/view?usp=sharing

(Edutopia RP Lesson Plans Resource - Linked in Resources Section of website)

https://www.edutopia.org/blog/restorative-justice-resources-matt-davis

(SPPS Restorative Justice Website - Linked in Resources Section of Website)

https://www.spps.org/restorativepractices

(Institute for Restorative Practices - Linked in Resources Section of Website)

https://www.iirp.edu/

Specific Sources for Website Design and Content:


Seven reasons teachers should blog. (n.d.). Retrieved from

http://www.steve-wheeler.co.uk/2011/07/seven-reasons-teachers-should-blog.html


Daejanggan, 2019.