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## How Can Restorative Justice Practices Be Utilized To Create A Positive Classroom Climate In A K-2 Setting?

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HOW CAN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PRACTICES BE UTILIZED TO CREATE A  
POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE IN A K-2 SETTING?

By: Ella Brown

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

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Primary Advisor: Shelley Orr

Content Reviewer: Mary Skillings

Peer Reviewer: Lili Weisman

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## Chapter One

### Chapter Overview

In every classroom, there is a unique array of students. Students tend to get grouped and labeled; the quiet ones, the high flyers, the struggling readers, the troublemakers. These “troublemakers” in my previous classrooms forced me to re-think effective classroom management and supported me on a journey to teach rather than punish. My studies and personal teaching journey brought me to this research question: *How can Restorative Justice practices be utilized to create a positive classroom climate in a K-2 setting?* In this first chapter, I will outline my personal journey with Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) as well as my own professional experiences that inspired me to do this research. Additionally, I will explain the rationale behind my project and how I hope it will be used in the future.

### Personal Experiences with Restorative Justice in Education

From a young age, I knew I wanted to be a teacher. No other profession interested me as much as teaching did. As I started my undergraduate program at Hamline University, I was quick to register for my education courses. At Hamline, each of the education majors must choose a co-major. It took me a while to decide what I wanted to pair with my elementary education major. I took sociology courses, enjoyed my few psychology courses, and took one art history course. It was not until I took Introduction to Social Justice that I knew I had found a perfect match.

Learning about social justice issues transformed how I thought about the education system and myself as a teacher. I started to think more deeply about the reasons behind classroom behavior and student achievement. Every text I read and paper I wrote

in my social justice courses, I connected to education and my teaching philosophy. My social justice education enabled me to view the world with a broader lens and deepen my understanding of the complexities that surround teaching.

During my last semester at Hamline, I was enrolled in my senior capstone for my Social Justice major. I wanted my topic to intersect with education and my teaching. My professor at the time recommended the book: *Better Than Carrots or Sticks* by Dominique Smith, Douglas Fisher, and Nancy Frey (2015). This book guides educators in creating a positive classroom climate by empowering students to hold themselves and others accountable for their behavior and actions. The authors of this book encourage educators to push back on the traditional forms of discipline and shift into a restorative mindset. After reading this book I was inspired to do my social justice capstone on how Restorative Justice practices could prevent bullying.

At the end of my four years at Hamline, I completed my social justice capstone project as well as a wonderful student teaching placement in a first-grade classroom. I felt well versed in restorative justice practices and was eager for my teaching career to begin. Soon after I graduated I was hired as a first-grade teacher at a school that was beginning to implement restorative justice practices. I was thrilled. Going into the first day of school, that following September, I felt confident that I was ready for whatever came my way.

Unfortunately, I was wrong. My first day of teaching was a disaster. My lessons flopped, my students were all over the place, I was lost, confused, and defeated. It took everything I had in me to show up for work the following day.

## **Professional Experiences with Restorative Justice in Education**

My first year of teaching was a humbling experience. I had two little boys in my first-grade classroom who forced me to come to terms with the reality that I had a lot to learn about classroom management and relationship building. Luckily, the school I was at used restorative justice practices to build relationships, handle problematic behavior, and facilitate conflict resolution. I had resources at my fingertips and support to begin my journey to transform my classroom community using Restorative Justice practices.

I knew from my education that relationship building in a classroom was a must. Strong relationships foster trust, understanding, and enjoyment for learning and school. During my first year of teaching my school began a school-wide initiative to implement morning Circles in every classroom. The purpose of these Circles was to build relationships and solve problems. The morning Circles created a warm morning routine in my classroom. It became a place where students could express how they felt, share something personal, and play community-building games. Within our morning Circles, my students started to understand that my classroom was a safe place and I was an adult they trusted.

My enthusiastic bunch of first graders had their fair share of disagreements, physical fights, and defiant behavior. There were constant problems in my classroom and it was clear that I needed to shift my approach on how to handle them. Throughout my reflection, and support from my administration, I realized that my students were not learning *why* their behavior was not ok, there was no dialogue about it. According to Smith et al. (2015), students need to be taught how to respond properly to different life events. Teachers are prepared to teach about math and reading, but when it comes to



behavior, we expect students just to know how to act and behave in a classroom (Smith et al., 2015). Even with my background and research in RJE, I was guilty of that thought process, as I know many teachers are as well. I expected perfection and when I did not get it, my students were punished. While reflecting on my management style, as well as that of other teachers, I found that most teachers' approach to classroom management was punitive. I observed students sitting out for recess, being sent to other classrooms, or spending time in the office. Students were not being taught how to react differently to situations and had no understanding of why their behavior was undesirable.

Slowly, I started to shift my approach and thinking. After training on restorative language provided by my school, I learned about the importance of restorative chats. Restorative chats or dialogues are quick conversations between students and teachers when a conflict arises. These chats aim at helping the child understand why a behavior or action is not acceptable. After some trial and error and plenty of practice, I started to gain confidence in holding space for these chats to happen. For example, instead of having students sit out from recess for throwing snow, I had a restorative dialogue with them. These conversations helped students understand that throwing snow near someone's face could be dangerous because ice could go into someone's eye. By sitting out from recess, without a conversation, my young students may have never realized why throwing snow was not allowed and then continued to do it. Soon, I started using this form of dialogue for bigger issues in my classroom including defiance, physical aggression, and bullying. I watched my students start to know how these restorative chats worked and sometimes even started the dialogue without me. By the end of the school year none of my students were sitting out from recess and the issues in my classroom dramatically decreased.

Near the end of the school year, I had started using Circles to support my class in conflict resolution. I remember there being a week where my students were not being respectful in the lunchroom towards other teachers and students. In our morning circle the next day I posed the question: *“How do we want to feel in the lunchroom?”* My class ‘talking piece’ was passed around the circle and each of my 1st graders had the chance to answer. This question opened up a dialogue about safety, kindness, and responsibility. The next day when I picked my students up from lunch there was not a single problem that needed to be addressed. We decided as a class that lunch felt better and safer than it had before.

### **Purpose of Capstone Project**

My road to implementing Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) practices into my classroom was a bumpy one. I learned by trial and error, through personal reflection, and from my own mistakes. My idea for my project was inspired by this bumpy road and the desire to provide other teachers with the resources that I wish I had all in one place.

Not too long ago I was teaching in my first-grade classroom and the new music teacher reached out to me and expressed some frustration with the lack of participation from my class. Right away, I asked if she wanted me to facilitate a restorative problem-solving circle with the handful of students and herself. Her eyes got big and she exclaimed, “Oh no, I have no idea where to even begin with that!” Her expression of panic and quick dismissal of the idea, made me wish that there was a simple way I could walk her through some of the restorative practices.

There are concrete actions teachers can take to begin to implement RJE. For my project, I wanted to create a cohesive, straightforward resource that supports teachers in

their journey to use restorative justice practices to create a positive classroom climate. This resource has four components that build on each other and it is in the form of a website so teachers have the freedom to access it whenever it is needed. On the website teachers first learn about the history of restorative justice practices in schools. Then, they have access to information on how to start morning Circles to support community building. Next, teachers are guided through what restorative language is and how to facilitate restorative chats. Lastly, teachers have the opportunity to engage with resources about conflict resolution. These modules are available for teachers to use at their own pace and can be spread out throughout the school year. During my personal experience implementing RJE, I found that I needed time to feel comfortable with one component of RJE before I implemented something new. My modules give teachers only the information they need when they need it. This project is concise, easy to use, self-guided, and will have opportunities for self-reflection. I hope that more teachers will be willing to begin implementing RJE with my straightforward resource. With more teachers implementing RJE, schools will start to transform into more positive communities of learners.

### **Conclusion**

This first chapter outlines my personal and professional experiences with RJE. It gives insight into my reasons behind creating my project and my hopes for how it will be used in the future. In Chapter Two, I will review literature about the history of RJE, circle implementation, restorative language, and restorative conflict resolution. My third chapter will go more in-depth with my project and its application. Lastly, Chapter Four will be a reflection of my research and project.

## Chapter Two

### Introduction

This capstone aims to answer the question: *How can Restorative Justice practices be utilized to create a positive classroom climate in a K-2 setting?* To answer this question, relevant literature was collected, reviewed, and analyzed. This literature review honors the past work surrounding Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) while providing evidence to support the implementation of RJE in K-2 classrooms. This literature review will be composed of four main topics.

First, a brief history of RJE will be outlined. Voices from Native American peoples will be heard and literature from the first advocates for RJE will be highlighted. This topic will also include a description of the paradigm shift between traditional forms of discipline and restorative practices.

The second topic will be on meeting and learning in Circles. This section will give evidence to support the implementation of Circles in a K-2 setting and show how Circles are an integral part of RJE. This section will also give some background knowledge of the cultural significance of Circles and how they can be used in schools to facilitate conflict resolution.

The third topic covered in Chapter Two is restorative language. This section will dive into affective language, agency statements, and restorative dialogues. Furthermore, this section will give examples of how deliberate choice in words can help teachers move away from shame and blame and get to the root of the issues in classrooms and schools.

The last topic of this chapter will be conflict resolution. This section will tie together the information and literature from the previous sections and show how all

topics work to support schools in restorative conflict resolution. Shifting away from the traditional forms of discipline, implementing Circles, using restorative language, and facilitating conflict resolution, will create a more positive classroom climate in a K-2 setting.

### **History of Restorative Justice practices in Education**

As teachers begin to implement Restorative Justice practices in Education (RJE) they need to know the history behind the beliefs and practices. To truly understand the *why*, one must start at the beginning. Evans and Vaandering (2016) found that for generations, indigenous communities around the world have viewed conflict through the lens of a harmed community rather than a harmed individual. For example, Navajo peoples have long used peacekeeping Circles to solve problems within communities. Furthermore, indigenous peoples perceive harm as a symptom of disconnection amongst the community as a whole (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Zehr (2015) adds that most cultures throughout the world highlight the importance of community. A saying familiar to many is, “a harm to one is a harm to all.” The idea of a web is often used to describe a community where all people are connected. When harm is caused within a community there is evidence that there is something out of balance within the web that connects each member (Zehr, 2015).

The roots of Restorative Justice (RJ) and RJE come from the work and beliefs of Native peoples around the world. However, when people hear the term “Restorative Justice,” many immediately think about the criminal justice system and restitution. According to Zehr (2015), Restorative Justice practices were started within the criminal justice system to help resolve conflicts between offenders and victims of burglary and

property crimes. Within the criminal justice system, these restorative practices often focus solely on peacemaking between an offender and a victim (Zehr, 2015). Evans and Vaandering (2016) agree that the Restorative Justice in Education movement (RJE) stems from the criminal justice system. Evans and Vaandering continue by stating that schools that first started to implement RJE used similar strategies to address conflict and behavior issues. Within these first schools, restorative justice practices took on a more holistic approach than in the criminal justice system. It became clear that repairing harms in schools needed to involve more than just the individuals directly involved (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

A school is a web: A web of learners, teachers, administrations, and parents. All connected. RJE focuses on the interconnectedness of a school. Evans and Vaandering (2016) define Restorative Justice in Education as:

Facilitating learning communities that nurture the capacity of people to engage with one another and their environment in a manner that supports and respects the inherent dignity and worth of all. Respect, dignity, and mutual concern are values that uphold this belief and should be practiced (Evans & Vaandering 2016, p. 15).

Within the book: *The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education (2016)*, Katherine Evans and Dorothy Vaandering give a visual representation of their definition of RJE (see Figure 1, below). Zehr, (2015) shares his definition of Restorative Justice by describing it as a compass. He writes, “restorative justice is not a map. The principles of restorative justice can be seen as a compass pointing in a direction. At a minimum restorative justice is an invitation for dialogue and exploration” (Zehr, 2015 p. 13). Zehr’s and Evans and Vaandering’s definitions and beliefs surrounding restorative justice complement each

other well. Using Zehr’s idea of a compass shows teachers that there is not a direct set of rules and guidelines to follow. Implementing RJE fully is not checking off boxes. Instead, it is about supporting a learning community with love and respect for students at the center.

Figure 1: Restorative Justice In Education



*Note. From: The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education by: Katherine Evans and Dorothy Vaandering, 2016, p. 5*

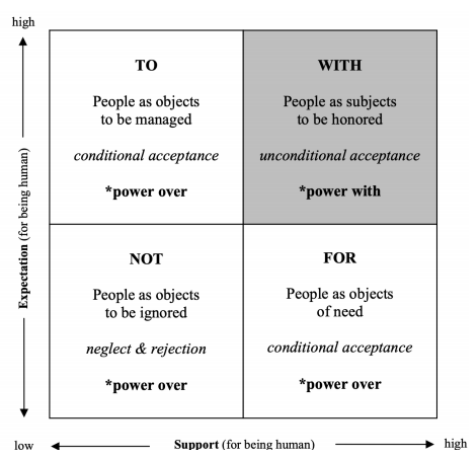
### ***Paradigm Shift***

As teachers begin their journeys implementing RJE into their classrooms they must understand that the success of implementing RJE comes from a shift in mindset, a paradigm shift. Thorsborne and Blood (2013) state that implementing RJE is about changing the hearts and minds of people. Within schools, there needs to be a focus on cultivating and repairing relationships with love at the center. The success of restorative practices in schools relies on the positive relationships that students and teachers have with each other (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). We can refer to the quality of these relationships as social capital. Thorsborne and Blood define social capital as, “the web of

positive social relationships in the maintenance of civil society” (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013, p. 336). Maintaining and cultivating positive relationships between students and teachers can be complex.

Schools have been designed to be hierarchical. Power imbalances between teachers and students are experienced often. Evans and Vaandering (2015) add that when people feel as if they are forced to submit to another person’s power, they often push back or retaliate. Power directly impacts relationships. Honoring students’ inherent worth sends a message that power can be shared. Shifting away from the belief that teachers need to have all of the power is a new mindset that takes constant reflection. Approaching students with this mindset, teachers have the opportunity to engage *with* students as they problem-solve, restore harm, and learn (Evans & Vaandering, 2015). A relationship matrix from Katherine Evans and Dorothy Vaandering’s work can be used to depict how teachers and students are in relationship with one another (Figure 2). Teachers should strive to be in the ‘*with*’ quadrant where there is unconditional acceptance at all times.

Figure 2. Relationship Matrix



*Note. From: The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education by: Katherine Evans and Dorothy Vaandering, 2016, p. 63*



The paradigm shift happening within schools encompasses moving away from traditional forms of discipline to a more restorative approach. Smith et al. (2015) explain that students are going to misbehave. Conflicts in classrooms will arise as students learn and grow together. What matters is how schools and teachers respond to this misbehavior. Within a restorative approach, students have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and mend harmed relationships with support and love from teachers and administrators (Smith et al., 2015). Figure 3 illustrates how schools are shifting away from the traditional approach to discipline and moving into a more restorative model with love and humanity at the center.

Figure 3. Traditional versus Restorative Approach to Discipline

Traditional versus Restorative Approach to Discipline

Traditional Approach	Restorative Approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rules are violated</li> <li>● Resolution is based on confirming guilt</li> <li>● Ownership is defined as punishment</li> <li>● Resolution is guided towards the offender; victim is ignored</li> <li>● Outcome is lessened by rules and purpose</li> <li>● Offender is not able to repair the relationship or offer remorse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students and people are violated</li> <li>● Justice acknowledges needs and obligations</li> <li>● Ownership is defined as understanding the effects of the situation and repairing the harm</li> <li>● Everyone involved has direct roles in the justice process</li> <li>● Offenders are responsible for their choices, they have to repair harm and work toward a positive outcome</li> <li>● Opportunity is made available to express remorse and or make amends</li> </ul>

*Note.* Adapted from *Better Than Carrots or Sticks*, by D. Smith et al., 2015

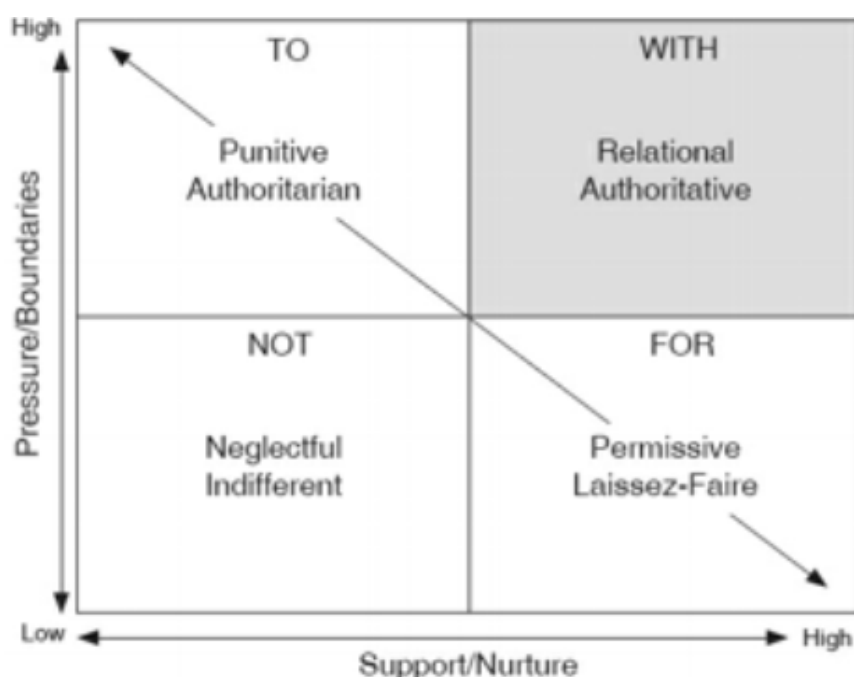
Morrison et al. (2005) add to the Smith et al. (2015) interpretation of this paradigm shift by claiming that restorative discipline values individuals and allows them time to reflect on how their harmful behavior affected themselves and others. The responsibility then

falls on the community members affected, to listen, validate, and work together to repair the harm that was caused (Morrison et al., 2005). Smith et al. (2015) state that traditionally, schools handle discipline individually. Individual students who cause harm are suspended and sent home, given in-school suspension, or sent to the corner for a time out. They are removed from their community (classroom) and usually placed in isolation. These children are rarely welcomed back into the classroom or given a chance to repair the harm they caused (Smith et al., 2015). This traditional approach to discipline often disproportionately impacts students of color in the classroom. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), teachers are more likely to label black students as “troublemakers” and often punish Black and Brown students more harshly than their white peers for similar behaviors. The U.S Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014) shows that students of color are three times more likely to be suspended than white students. Smith et al. (2015) claim that the only thing suspensions are teaching students is that they do not belong. Suspensions and isolation prevent learning from occurring and deny students their human right to feel safe and secure in school (Smith et al., 2015).

When teachers and administrators are first learning about this paradigm shift there are common misconceptions. Many may think that responding to discipline in a restorative manner is being too soft on students or letting students get away with misbehavior without appropriate consequences. Thorsborne and Blood (2013) explain that it is important for schools to have a simple and shared framework for responding to undesirable behavior. A social discipline window, similar to the previous relationship matrix (Figure 2), gives teachers a guide to restorative discipline (Thorsborne & Blood,

2013). Just as Evans and Vaandering (2016) describe the importance of being in power *with* students, the social discipline window shows that teachers in the ‘*with*’ quadrant, approach discipline collaboratively while still holding students accountable for their actions. Figure 4, from (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013) shows a matrix where schools and teachers still need high expectations and boundaries as well as high levels of support and love. Teachers need to know that implementing RJE does not mean letting students get away with things. Approaching discipline restoratively allows students to take ownership of their actions and restore the harms they caused.

Figure 4. Social Discipline Window



*Note. From: Implementing Restorative Practices in Schools by Margaret Thorsborne and Peta Blood, 2013, p. 495*

Mallet (2016) connected with Thorsborne and Blood’s argument for schools to create a shared framework by advocating for schools to change their student code of conduct.

Mallet (2016) writes how it is important for schools’ codes of conduct to focus on

rehabilitation and not zero tolerance policies when it comes to discipline and punishments. Mallet continues by advocating that schools should not use out of school punishments for minor behaviors or disruptions (Mallet, 2016). Teachers, administrators, and parents need to be on the same page when it comes to responding to undesirable behavior.

### ***Conclusion***

To effectively implement RJE into classrooms and schools, teachers and administrators must take the time to learn about the history of RJE and truly reflect on their own beliefs surrounding classroom management, discipline, and behavior. To create dynamic and healthy learning environments grounded in Restorative Practices, the development and maintenance of strong relationships are essential. To fully implement RJE teachers will respond to undesirable behavior with love and compassion. Shalaby (2015) writes about embodying love at the forefront of every teacher and student interaction.

Even in the face of a young person constantly calling you out, cursing you out, or throwing a chair, you be love in a response that disciplines rather than punishes.

You be love by modeling healing over harm. You be love by restoring community instead of excluding from community. (Shalaby, 2015, p. 172)

Relationships first, grounded in love--that is the essence of RJE. In our classrooms, we have the opportunity to foster a community where healing, hope, and humanity become the center of our teachings.

## Circle

Meeting in Circles has become an integral part of RJE. Circles foster relationships, trust, and healing. This section will highlight a brief history of Circle keeping. It will also dive into the steps one takes to implement Circles effectively. This section will provide valuable information for teachers hoping to use Circles as a way to build relationships and solve problems.

Meeting, learning, and solving problems in a Circle is a practice being implemented throughout the modern world. According to Pranis (2005), neighborhoods, justice systems, schools, companies, and social services have started to use the Circle process to bring people together and restore relationships. Pranis continues, by saying gathering in a Circle to discuss issues and make agreements is a common occurrence for indigenous peoples in North American today and in the past. Within indigenous Circle keeping, there is a belief that all are connected and there should be shared leadership and power amongst everyone (Pranis, 2005). Riestenberg (2012) adds that the shape of a Circle is important. Riestenberg writes that the Circle shows equality, where all people can see and hear each other and there is no 'head of the room.' Meeting and learning in Circles works well within RJE because of shared beliefs, such as everyone is connected, power is shared, and harm needs to be restored within the community (Riestenberg, 2012). Every authentic Restorative Circle follows a structured process and contains key elements. When teachers choose to use Circles within the classroom these must be valued and observed.

### ***Key elements of Circles***

Using Circle processes in a classroom is all about connection. Pranis (2005) explains that five key elements must be present in every Circle. These elements work together to create a safe and welcoming place for students to share, disagree, and connect. The five elements are ceremony/ritual, guidelines, a talking piece, a circle keeper, and decision making by consensus (Pranis, 2005). This section will briefly describe each element.

**Ceremony/Ritual.** Opening and closing ceremonies are prominent aspects of a Circle, marking a time set apart. An opening ceremony helps students shift their minds and bodies to be ready for the Circle to begin. A closing ceremony allows students to know when the Circle is complete. Boynes-Watson and Pranis (2020) share how opening ceremonies are simple ways to gather together and mark the beginning of a Circle. This could be shared breathing, class meditation, ringing of a bell, inspirational readings, or a class greeting. Closing ceremonies mark the end of the circle. Boynes-Watson and Pranis continue, the ending of a circle should carry a sense of joy and hope for the future. Closing ceremonies can also be simple such as the ringing of a bell, shared reading, or breathing. Both the closing and opening ceremonies should reflect the participants in the circle in regards to culture, age, and experience (Boynes-Watson & Pranis, 2020). For example, younger students may benefit from sharing a routine song to open their circle. Or, each student could practice greeting each other using names. Closing ceremonies could include a short game or goodbye song.

**Guidelines.** Circles need to be a place where all participants feel safe, honored and welcomed. Riestenberg (2012) agrees with Pranis (2005) and explains that to create

harmony, circle guidelines or agreements should be created and reviewed at every circle. These guidelines should be agreed upon by all in the circle and should meet the needs of a specific group (Riestenberg, 2012). Pranis (2005) adds that there is flexibility with these guidelines and classrooms have the opportunity to come up with their own. Common guidelines often include, listen and speak respectfully honor confidentiality, and that one can pass (Pranis, 2005). In many K-2 classrooms, it could be beneficial to have students come up with their own guidelines. Often, students are more likely to abide by these guidelines when they feel connected to them. It is essential that the students understand each of the guidelines, so taking time to discuss them together is important. Picking a few can help younger children remember them.

**Talking Piece.** The talking piece is an integral part of Circle. It guides communication and gives a visual representation for whose turn it is to speak and have space (Riestenberg, 2012). According to Pranis, as the talking piece is passed around the Circle inviting each person a chance to share, it is simultaneously giving others the chance to listen. Everyone has the right to ‘pass’ and instead of speaking, sharing silence. The talking piece is a critical element of Circle because it assures everyone has a chance to express their truth. Boynes-Watson and Pranis (2020) agree that the talking piece should hold significance to the group. This significance will help all participants respect the piece and the speaker (Boynes-Watson and Pranis, 2020).

**Circle Keeper.** The keeper of a Circle is someone who is facilitating the Circle process. This keeper helps Circle participants agree to guidelines and works to create a safe environment for all (Boynes-Watson and Pranis, 2020). Usually, in a classroom setting, this Circle keeper is the teacher. Being a circle keeper and the teacher is a

complex role because of power dynamics. Riestenberg (2012) speaks on this complexity by sharing that teachers often want control over their classrooms. They want to be in charge of what happens and when it happens. Within Circle, the participants should be the ones that control the conversation and timing. Riestenberg urges teachers to lay the groundwork for circle keeping with modeling and practice. Soon, teachers can slowly allow the students to take charge of their Circle and learning (Riestenberg, 2012).

**Decision making.** Not all Circles end in a common agreement or decision. However, some problem-solving Circles do. Pranis (2005) writes that at the core of decision-making is the understanding that all participants in the circle have needs and those needs should be valued and cared for. “A group consensus gives power to everyone” (Pranis, 2005, p. 38). Boynes-Watson and Pranis (2020) add that all participants are equally responsible for upholding the agreement or decision (Boynes-Watson and Pranis, 2020). Many students may need reminders on what the decision was. Writing or drawing the shared consensus can help younger students visualize what needs to be done.

### ***The Circle Process***

The Circle process includes four equal parts based on the philosophy of the Medicine Wheel, used by some Native peoples. Carolyn Boyes-Watson (2005) shares how within Native American cultures a balanced four-quadrant Circle holds many meanings. For example, there are four seasons in a year, four earth elements, and the four dimensions of human beings (Carolyn Boyes-Watson, 2005). Boynes-Watson and Pranis (2020) add that the medicine wheel is a circle with four balanced quadrants. Each part of the Circle reflects what people need as they come together in a Circle. Pranis (2005)



states that the four elements of the Circle process are: getting acquainted, building understanding and trust, addressing vision/issues, and developing plans by consensus. Each of the four elements must be honored equally to stay in balance.

Circles work well with RJE because they support problem-solving and conflict resolution. Pranis (2005) dives deeper into problem-solving Circles and outlines four stages that each circle should have.

**Stage 1.** Determining suitability by asking oneself if this is the time and place to resolve the conflict at hand. Other items to consider are, timing, participant engagement, and safety.

**Stage 2.** Preparing for the Circle. During preparation, the Circle keeper/facilitator needs to determine who will be joining the Circle. They must ask themselves, what is the context of the disagreement or conflict? To prepare for Circle one must be knowledgeable on the Circle practice and process.

**Stage 3.** Convening parties. This stage is about welcoming participants, agreeing on common guidelines, sharing experiences, discussing resolutions, and developing agreements.

**Stage 4.** Follow up. This last stage assesses the progress of the agreements. If parts of the agreement fail, one must identify what must happen next and inform those involved. Agreements may need to be re-thought or clarified. Success should be celebrated amongst all. (Pranis, 2005 pp. 44-45)

### ***Conclusion***

Circles are a critical component of RJE. When teachers can implement Circles with fidelity in their classrooms students feel a sense of belonging, hope, and love.

Baldwin and Kelly (1998) share, “since the capacity for healing is so great, we must assume the capacity for wounding is equally great. There is no one who comes into the circle without wounding of some sort its part of being human” ( Baldwin & Kelly, 1998, p. 182). Implementing Circles within schools gives children the opportunity to learn to problem solve, make amends, and heal. Through this process, they are given the opportunity to repair harm and build their community. Circles belong in the classroom.

### **Restorative language**

The language used in schools influences how students view themselves and how others view them. The language used in classrooms is critical for social and emotional development as well as conflict resolution (Smith et al., 2015). Teachers have the power in their classrooms to use their voices for good. Smith continues, when teachers fall back on traditional forms of discipline in the classroom they are communicating verbally and nonverbally that there is a status amongst students. This clear hierarchy of power can create an atmosphere of competitiveness, shame, and blame (Smith et al., 2015).

### ***Affective Statements***

At the heart of RJE is the innate human need to feel worthy and heard. Costello et al. (2009) explain how affective statements get to the root of those needs by allowing students and teachers to express their feelings. Affective statements allow for students who have harmed others to understand how their actions or words affected another person (Costello et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2015) give an example of an affective statement in action.

We know not to say, “You're a bad person” to a student, but “You make me so angry when you do that” isn't much better; students can hear the barely veiled

shaming. By contrast, a statement such as “I felt angry when you left the classroom without permission because it embarrassed me when you're caught roaming the halls” shifts the focus to the behavior without generalizing it as a permanent character trait. (Smith et al., 2015, p. 88)

In regards to the example from Smith et al (2015), one could take this affective statement one step further by acknowledging the fear that the teacher felt when the student was not there. Another affective statement could sound like, “I felt nervous when you left the room without letting me know. I want to make sure you are safe because I care about you. Please ask to leave next time so I know where you are.” Smith et al. (2015) give an easy formula for teachers to use when implementing affective statements. “I felt [emotion] when [behavior or event] because [reason for emotion]” (Smith et al., 2015, p. 88).

### ***Restorative dialogues***

Restorative dialogues or chats are informal conferences between teachers, students, and administrators that happen continuously throughout the school day. Smith et al. (2015) explain how even when teachers try their hardest to create an environment where conflict is at a minimum, disagreements, frustrations, and minor conflicts still arise each day (Smith et al. 2015). Restorative chats work to resolve minor issues before they turn into major ones. These dialogues open up a conversation for students to acknowledge their feelings and work to resolve a problem in a short amount of time. Evans & Vaandering (2016) give ideas for open-ended questions that promote genuine discussion and give opportunities for students to share their perspectives without feeling like they are going to get punished. These five key questions include:

- “What happened/is happening?”

- What was/am I feeling/thinking?
- What is the hardest/best thing for me?
- Who is impacted by this? How?
- What do I need [to do] to move forward?" (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p. 76).

Evans and Vaandering go on to explain how taking out ‘why’ in a dialogue is important. Asking a child “why” they did something often promotes defensiveness and shuts down communication even before it starts. Asking “what happened” approaches a problem with curiosity rather than shame (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Both Evans and Vaandering (2016) and Amstutz and Mullet (2015) agree that both the victim and offenders' voices need to be heard in a restorative dialogue. When facilitating a restorative dialogue teachers need to be mindful of both parties and their needs. Asking oneself these questions can ensure both the offender and the victim are being heard.

- Has the victim shared with the offender how they were affected?
- Has the offender had the opportunity to share their side of the story?
- Has the victim been able to express what they need moving forward?
- Has the offender been able to share what they believe a resolution could look like? (Vaandering & Amstutz and Mullet, 2015).

These restorative dialogues are meant to be informal, preventative, and quick. When major conflicts arise teachers and administrators must have a plan and time set aside to have more formal conversations and problem-solving Circles. Within the *Restorative Practice Handbook for Teachers, Disciplinarians, and Administrators*, Costella et al. (2009) provide a continuum for how schools should approach restorative

dialogues. This continuum is shown below in Figure 5. As shown, teachers should informally be using affective statements and questions continuously throughout the school day. If a conflict should arise impromptu conferences or restorative dialogues can take place. Problem-solving Circles and formal conferences can be used if there is a conflict that needs more time to solve, if it involves the teacher, or if it seems like a major conflict (Costella et al., 2009, p. 188).

Figure 5. Restorative Practices Continuum



*Note. From: Restorative Practice Handbook for Teachers, Disciplinarians, and Administrators, Costella et al. 2009 p. 188*

### **Conclusion**

Creating a positive climate in a classroom means working towards making everyone feel welcomed and heard. Using restorative language in schools intentionally allows for students to express their needs and feelings as both a victim or an offender. Zehr (2015) explains how at the heart of Restorative Justice are guiding questions. Those questions create a dialogue that highlights who has been hurt, what the needs are of those involved, and how things are going to be set right (Zehr 2015). Too often in schools, the student who has harmed another is excluded from these conversations. This exclusion does not allow that student to learn about how their actions impacted others and because of this will usually cause the same harm again.

## **Conflict Resolution**

Justice by definition is reactive. However, implementing RJE in schools takes restorative practices one step further by making them preventative as well (Smith et. al, 2015). Shifting from a traditional mindset to a restorative one values each member in a school as an integral part of a nurturing community. When there is harm caused by someone, the relationship with the community must be restored, not just the relationship with the victim (Zehr, 2015). Harm and conflict are spoken about often in regards to RJE. Evans and Vaandering (2016) take the time to define harm as “anything that undermines a person’s dignity or minimizes their worth. Harm doesn't have to be intentional” (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p. 81). Conflict is best defined as a “relational interaction” such as people disagreeing (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p. 81). This section will tie the research from the previous sections together by showing how the paradigm shift, circle implementation, and restorative dialogues all work together to restore harm and resolve conflicts in a restorative manner in schools.

### ***Relationships First***

Having strong relationships amongst students and staff in a school is a precursor for effective classroom management and successful conflict resolution. Smith et al. (2015) explain this perfectly by sharing how it is harder for a student to misbehave when they know their teacher loves and cares for them (Smith et al., 2015). Relationship building at the beginning of a school year prevents conflicts from arising in the classroom and the school. Building relationships in a K-2 classroom can come in many forms. Pointer et al. (2020) write about the importance of building trust and relationships in a classroom and share how playing games is a fun and interactive way to do so. Games that

promote laughter, teamwork, and engagement are known to promote a sense of belonging amongst students and can help lay the foundation of trust needed at the beginning of a school year (Pointer et al., 2020).

Shifting from a traditional mindset to a restorative one as outlined in Topic 2, provides a framework for teachers and administrators to approach conflict and harm in a restorative way. When teachers are approaching conflict *with* students, they are providing support by helping students understand why their behavior is undesirable. Smith et al. (2015) remind us that teachers need to teach rather than punish students. Just as students come to school need to learn about math and reading, they also need to learn about social and emotional development as well as how to act in school (Smith et al., 2015). Simply put, teachers need to approach conflict resolution as a learning opportunity.

### ***Circles and Conflict Resolution***

Effective Circle implementation is an important aspect of restorative conflict resolution. Within topic two, Pranis (2005) outlined the four stages that every problem-solving circle should have: determining suitability, preparing for Circle, convening parties, and following up. The more these stages are practiced with students the easier it will be to implement problem-solving Circles throughout the school year. From Costello et al. (2009) work we know that a continuum (in Figure 5) can be used to navigate when a problem-solving circle should happen. Smith et al. (2015) share that formal Circles are often led by a trained circle facilitator. Formal Circles should include teachers as participants rather than Circle keepers. Smith et al. (2015) continue by discussing that when teachers are part of a conflict it can sometimes be seen as threatening if they are leading the formal Circles. Students need to feel heard and have

the confidence to express themselves fully. Sometimes this doesn't happen if the teacher is in a position of power in the circle (Smith et al., 2015). Circles should be used as a means to come up with a shared consensus after a conflict arises.

### ***Restorative language and conflict resolution***

Restorative conflict resolution could not happen without purposeful language. Children in our schools look to teachers and administrators for help as they work to solve problems and get along with their peers. Riestenberg (2012) shares that children who have been hurt or who hurt others need calm adults with a plan to intervene and facilitate restorative dialogues (Riestenberg, 2012). Restorative dialogues work well within schools that are implementing RJE because these chats are preventative and allow students to reflect on ways they caused harm or how harm affected them. Restorative dialogues are a way of bringing the web of the community back together after harm has been caused.

### **Conclusion**

Restorative Justice practices such as Circles, restorative chats, and purposeful conflict resolution, can be utilized to create a positive classroom climate in a K-2 setting. This chapter outlined each of these practices by reviewing pertinent literature, sharing voices, and synthesizing related thoughts. Within schools across the world, teachers have the responsibility to promote a loving and positive classroom climate for all students. As Shalaby (2015) eloquently writes,

In no other profession do people have the opportunity to literally create a parallel world- a world that is safer, fairer, and freer. The four walls of your classroom can be the world we want, hope for, dream of, rather than the world we have now.  
(Shalaby, 2015, p. 180)



Implementing Restorative Justice Practices into classrooms is a step towards creating a world where children are allowed to be exactly who they are. The purpose of this paper and my capstone project is to help teachers begin that journey.

The next chapter will give a detailed look into my capstone project. This project aims at helping teachers get started at implementing restorative practices in their classrooms by giving them an online resource that can be used and referenced at any time. This website guides teachers through the process of implementing restorative justice in the same order this paper was formatted. First, teachers reflect on their own mindsets surrounding discipline, classroom management, and exclusionary practices. The paradigm shift from traditional forms of discipline to restorative will be defined, as well as the social discipline window (Figure 4), and relationship matrix (figure 3). Next, teachers are guided through the first steps of how to start Circle keeping. Teachers will have access to videos, guidelines, and tips to implement Circles effectively. Then, teachers have the opportunity to learn about restorative dialogues and the importance of using affective statements. Lastly, teachers are given resources, guides, and readings about restorative conflict resolution. As a teacher, I know the feeling of having too much on my plate. I want this training to be self-led and streamlined. This website allows teachers to have the most pertinent information right where they need it when they need it.

## Chapter Three

### Introduction

The purpose of this project is to give primary educators the resources they need to be able to implement Restorative Justice practices into their classrooms. To provide teachers with this information and resources I created a comprehensive website. This project is driven by the research question: *How can Restorative Justice practices be utilized to create a positive classroom climate in a K-2 setting.*

Within this chapter I will first provide readers with research that supports the use of websites as professional development. Then, I will share a description of my project and what the website entails. Next, I will shine a light on the intended audiences of this project as well as the setting in which it is implemented. Lastly, I will give a timeline for this project's completion and give a brief overview of Chapter Four.

### Framework

As a teacher myself, I know firsthand how hard it can be to implement new practices into a classroom. Teacher's plates are more full than ever due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of this writing, teachers are teaching fully online, in-person, or a hybrid model. When asked to try something new or participate in another professional development teachers can feel overwhelmed and overworked. When reflecting on this occurrence and my project I decided I wanted to create a resource that could be used entirely at a teacher's own pace. A website seemed like a perfect option. Effectively implementing Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) takes a complete paradigm shift. Moving away from traditional forms of discipline to more restorative approaches will not happen overnight. Teachers need to take the time to reflect personally and professionally

on what RJE means to them and genuinely embrace the paradigm shift before implementing restorative practices. As Thorsborne and Blood, (2013) explain, implementing RJE is about changing the hearts and minds of people. It starts with the adults in the school community first and foremost (Thorsborne and Blood, 2013).

The website I created is teacher-centered and streamlined. It could be used as professional development or as additional support and resource for teachers looking to learn more about how to use restorative practices to create a positive learning environment. Borko et al. (2010) speak on the importance of having professional development be teacher-centered. Borko et al. (2010) write that professional development (PD) should focus on inquiry-based, long-term approaches. Teachers need to feel heard and included within PD and have the opportunity to directly connect what they are learning to their environments (Borko et al., 2010). The use of a website allows teachers to engage with my resources and content in their way and at their own pace. My website provides viewers with a variety of learning experiences. Such as videos and visuals for visual learners, as well as literature and graphics for those who learn best by reading and conceptualizing information independently.

When reflecting on my own experience implementing RJE into my classroom, I realized I took an entire school year to slowly put different practices into place. Borko et al. (2010) write about the importance of learning at one's own pace and that teachers should be prepared to continue to learn and modify their craft throughout a lifetime. The authors go on to explain how one must be prepared to continue to use professional development to re-think instructional models and practices to benefit students and their learning (Borko, 2010). During my journey to implement different restorative practices, I

decided to take on certain components of RJE one at a time. For example, I learned about the paradigm shift from traditional forms of discipline to restorative practices before I began to implement Circles. Once I felt comfortable with my circle practices within my classroom I started to reflect more on my restorative language. Lastly, I engaged in restorative conflict resolution with my students. The website that I created follows that same order and teachers will have the freedom to take their learning at their own pace. Draxler and Haddad (2002) speak on the freedom websites and technology give to people furthering their education. The authors explain how professional development or training can not always be done in person at a workplace, especially now during the COVID-19 pandemic. Draxler and Haddad (2002) go on to say that with an ever-changing education system and with the rise in technology usage; people must be ready to embrace learning at a distance. My website allows teachers to continue to learn about RJE from anywhere at any time.

### **Project Description**

I used Google Sites to create my website. Google sites gave me the ability to add videos, additional links, and visuals into the website seamlessly. Within my website, there are eight sections to explore. This part of Chapter 3 will give details on each of the sections to my website.

#### ***Home Page***

When you click the link of my website the first page that is shown is a home page. This page gives viewers an overview of the website, explains the different ways it can be used and gives some tips and tricks for navigating the information and website

effectively. This home page also gives viewers information about the purpose of the website as well as a brief quote and description of RJE.

### ***History of RJE***

Once teachers have left the Home page of the website they are directed to the first section of the site. This first section shines a light on the History of RJE and describes the paradigm shift from traditional forms of discipline to restorative. Viewers have access to different readings and videos about indigenous peoples' contributions to the growth of RJE. This section includes graphics outlining the paradigm shift from traditional to restorative approaches, important definitions, and real-life examples of how teachers and administrators have shifted their approaches to discipline. Users of this website are given recommendations on how to proceed with the information given. For example, journal prompts are included to help teachers reflect on their current discipline practices within their classrooms. There is a quiz at the end of the section to help teachers summarize the information given and find areas where they need to investigate further. It will be clear that viewers of the site should take as much time as they need before they move on to the next section.

### ***Circles***

Building strong and lasting relationships in classrooms is the foundation of RJE. Implementing Circles within a classroom is a wonderful way to build and maintain relationships between students and teachers. This section of the website gives an overview of the history of Circles. Native and Aboriginal voices from North America, Australia, and New Zealand will be highlighted. Circles in primary classrooms look different than in older grades. It will be important for K-2 teachers to have examples of

young students engaging in the Circle process. Teachers have opportunities to watch videos of the Circle process and are given a list of resources to use to start circle keeping within their rooms. This section will focus on informal, community-building Circles. At the end of this section website users take another quiz and participate in journal prompts to reflect on their learnings and takeaways. Teachers are prompted to move on to the next section once they feel prepared.

### ***Restorative Language***

Using restorative language in classrooms is an important aspect of RJE. Reflecting on the usage of language and being mindful of what is spoken to children takes time and constant effort. This section provides viewers with research that supports restorative language and explains how teachers can begin using it right away. This section gives real-life examples of restorative language being used and gives teachers some tips for making quick changes to their language usage. This section defines affective statements, identity statements, and restorative language. Near the end of this section, there are once again journal prompts and a quiz for teachers to reflect on their new knowledge.

### ***Conflict resolution***

This section ties all of the other sections together and provides teachers with resources and information on how they can use what they have learned to solve conflicts within their classrooms. Readings, videos, examples of problem-solving Circles and tips are provided for teachers as they begin to engage with restorative conflict resolution in their classrooms. There are opportunities for teachers to journal about their experiences, reflect on past experiences, and take quizzes on best practices and next steps.

### ***Next Steps***

After teachers have made their way through the information on conflict resolution they are brought to a page that summarizes the learnings and provides teachers with what to do next. The most important aspect of this page is to let all viewers know that the journey to creating a positive learning environment using RJE is a long one. Just because they made it through this website does not mean that their personal reflection, learning, and exploration have concluded. Implementing RJE into classrooms is a choice that teachers need to make each day. This section will give additional resources for teachers as well as some ways they can continue to reflect on the restorative practices they have implemented.

### ***Contact***

This last page will be a contact page. I want the teachers using my website to be able to give me feedback and ask questions about the content I am providing. This page has an email they can reach out to.

### ***Audience***

The intended audience for this project is K-2 teachers. The resources I utilize and use within the website will be geared towards younger students because of my personal experiences working with 1st graders. I believe that restorative practices should start with our youngest learners so they can have strong foundational skills when it comes to problem-solving and relationship building. Through my research and experiences, I have noticed that a lot of resources about restorative conflict resolution and Circle building involve older students. Some aspects of RJE need to be modified when working with younger grades. For example, certain phrases and guidelines within the Circle process are

too advanced for students under the age of eight. Also, to effectively participate in a restorative dialogue with a five-year-old one must modify word choices and phrases. I am hoping that my website will help K-2 teachers feel more confident engaging with restorative practices because the site is made for them. With that being said, there is no reason why other K-12 teachers couldn't use the website as well. It just may not fit their needs and classrooms as nicely.

### **Setting**

My website is utilized by a charter school in the beginning stages of implementing RJE. There are a total of six new teachers who use my website to learn more about RJE and are implementing practices in their classrooms. The school is located in Minnesota in a predominantly white community. This school is a Title One school due to a high percentage of students living under the poverty line. My website has helped continue the school's journey to implement RJE by giving teachers resources to learn from in one common area. I am hopeful that my project will continue to be a resource that teachers and administrators can utilize when new staff join and when they need to review different sections. My site was ready to be used by school staff in August 2021.

### **Conclusion**

The website I created gives K-2 teachers an abundance of resources to be able to effectively implement Restorative Justice practices into their classrooms. By using restorative practices teachers will find that they have stronger relationships with students, fewer behavior problems in the classroom, and a more positive learning environment for all. Implementing RJE is a personal journey. Through my own experience, I found it beneficial to take my time and work to get confident with each restorative practice in my



classroom before I added another. A website is a perfect way to allow teachers to get information at their own pace and from a distance. This website is used in one charter school that is at the beginning stages of becoming a fully restorative school. My website has assisted K-2 teachers in their journeys to implement restorative practices into their classrooms.

Chapter four will be the conclusion of my capstone project. I will reflect on what I have learned, my struggles and success, as well as my hopes for the future. I will also give a detailed look into the results after the completion of my project.

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## Chapter 4

### Introduction

“Teachers are asked to do the impossible,” my professor told my undergraduate class a few years ago. I remember writing those words down as I took notes during her lecture. During the writing of this paper, the COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to uproot lives and a sense of normal. Those words my professor spoke are now more true than ever as teachers continue to teach content, communicate with parents, and build relationships with their students despite all of the hurdles put in front of them. As I worked to come up with a research question for my capstone project I reflected on all of those hurdles and myself as a first-year teacher. As a first-year teacher in 2019, I was completely in over my head. I wasn't too overwhelmed with the content or setting up my classroom, or even lesson planning. I was overwhelmed with classroom management. I knew I needed to make some sort of shift in my classroom or I would be burnt out after my first year. Thus began my journey to implement restorative practices into my classroom.

My personal experiences implementing restorative practices into my primary classroom and it being successful, made me think about the need for more teachers to learn and have the resources to implement Restorative Practices into their classrooms. My personal experiences and desire to learn more led me to the question, *How can restorative justice practices be utilized to create a positive classroom climate in a K-2 setting?*

Throughout this final chapter of my paper, I will discuss the growth and learning I have done professionally throughout this capstone journey. I will share the limitations

and implications of my research and project. I will also reflect on the literature review I conducted. Furthermore, I will share my insights on furthering my research and project and explain the results I have had from the completion of my project. Lastly, I will touch on the professional contributions this project has made.

### **Professional Growth and Learning**

Completing a capstone project is no easy task. Over six months I have learned more about myself as a researcher, writer, and teacher than I ever have. Throughout this process, I was pushed out of my comfort zone by engaging with other professionals in my field, researching using different methods, and writing using different formatting and styles.

#### ***Learning as a Researcher***

When I first started this Capstone project I was unaware of just how much reading I was going to do. I found that a lot of the sources recommended to me by my content reviewer and others at my school were all books. This was surprising to me as someone who in the past has done a majority of research using online databases and digital sources. I embraced this idea of doing a lot of reading and asked around to borrow some books that were recommended to me. The first two books I read were *The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education*, by Katherine Evans and Dorothy Vaandering (2016), and *The Little Book of Circle Process*, by Kay Pranis (2005). Both texts were incredible. I was hooked on learning more about Restorative Practices and confident with my research question and project idea.

Throughout my research process, I continued to check out books from the library, purchased some through my Kindle, and borrowed books from friends and co-workers. I

did use some digital sources but not many. As the piles of books and sources grew I decided that I needed a plan to organize my thoughts and my research. I knew if I simply just read through all of my books I would forget things and not be able to connect certain literature and research. During the research methods course, we were to create a concept map to start to get ideas on how we want to format our writing and research. This was my first experience with a concept map and I realized that the process helped me visualize how my ideas connected. The main topics I decided to focus on were directly related to my process of implementing Restorative Justice in Education (RJE). I started with learning about RJE history, then shifted to implementing Circles, after that, I reflected on restorative language and conflict resolution. My concept map and research followed that same path. I started to organize my books by those topics and I dove into my first area of research, the history of RJE. As I read I would take notes, mark pages, and add to the outline of my paper. Throughout my research process, I continued to read books and articles based on the topic I was writing about. As I read more books I started to realize that many authors mentioned each other within their work. I started to jot down the authors who referenced each other in their work. This helped connect different author's theories, ideas, and research.

Throughout this research project, I read more books than I have in years. I learned that there is still important material in books that some may have overlooked if they only gathered sources digitally. I dove deep into learning from the authors and researchers who have been with Restorative Justice since the practices made their way into western systems. Those prominent voices included Howard Zehr, Kay Pranis, Nancy Reistenburg,

and Margaret Thorsborne. Their similar visions and thoughts surrounding RJE were the foundation of my research.

### *Learning as a Writer*

Writing has never come that easy to me. I often feel overwhelmed with the start of writing a paper because I have no idea how to summarize all of the ideas and thoughts I have swirling around in my head. I procrastinated a bit when it came to starting to write each chapter of this paper. What I found to be the best way to overcome this writer's block was to simply get words onto my paper. Any words or ideas I had I just started to write out. Slowly throughout my writing process, my brain made connections between my thoughts and other authors or researchers. I found that getting my writing on paper first made it easier for me to add other voices or ideas into my writing while continuing to keep my voice consistent throughout the paper.

Another area of growth for me as a writer was when I began to cite sources using APA formatting. I have never used APA citing before and I was, at first, nervous I was going to do something wrong. There are so many rules and guidelines to keep in mind and I found myself constantly second-guessing myself. What helped me learn more about APA formatting was when I was able to make an appointment with the writing center at Hamline University. In the past, I had been hesitant to have my papers read and critiqued by someone else. Sharing my writing and thoughts felt vulnerable, especially when I put so much time and energy into my work. I found the feedback I received from the writing center extremely helpful and affirming. They gave me suggestions on how to improve my citations, wording, and paper layout. I felt relieved and excited leaving that appointment. I learned that it is ok to ask for help and not be an expert in everything I do.

In the past, I would have not called myself a researcher or writer. However, after finishing this capstone project I can proudly say that I am both. It took time, vulnerability, and grit to finish my writing and research for this project. I am excited to continue writing and researching on my own.

### **Literature Review Reflection**

Chapter two of this paper is my literature review. The literature reflection I wrote was a chance for me to summarize my findings throughout my research and highlight prominent voices and advocates for RJE. Doing the research and writing for my literature review was time-consuming. For about three months I was constantly collecting research, reading through sources, and writing. As I transitioned into my capstone class and began creating my website I found my literature review greatly influenced my work.

#### ***History Of RJE***

To truly understand how Restorative Justice practices can transform classrooms I needed to know more about the roots of these practices. Within my literature review, I thought it would be important, to begin with, the History of RJE so I was able to set my readers and myself up with a solid foundation. The two texts that I referred to the most in this section were, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education*, by Katherine Evans and Dorothy Vaandering (2016) and *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, by Howard Zehr (2015). Both of these books allowed me to understand how restorative practices grew within the western world. According to Zehr (2015), Native peoples in North American and New Zealand laid the foundation for the Restorative Justice movement to flourish in Western systems such as schools and prisons (Zehr, 2015). Evans and Vaandering's (2016) work focused more on the history of restorative practices

within schools. Evans and Vaandering explain how their research and work rely on the expertise of early advocates of restorative justice as well as classroom teachers. Evans and Vaandering go on to describe the growth of RJE as that of a plant. This visual helps the readers understand how the roots of restorative justice provide the beauty of the plant one can admire (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Using the image of a plant growing helped me to understand the importance of looking deeper into the roots of restorative practices and reminding myself that growth takes time and patience. There is a picture of a young child watering plants on the first page of my website. I purposefully chose that image to honor the history of RJE.

Once I grasped a better understanding of the History of RJE I worked diligently to summarize my findings into six succinct paragraphs. That was a challenge because of the vast history of RJE. As I wrote the history section I continued to reflect on myself as a teacher and a learner and chose to add certain information that I found to be the most pertinent to teaching in a primary classroom.

As I began creating my project I referred to my literature review constantly. As I have mentioned before, my website is formatted the same way as my literature review. So, the history of RJE was the first informational slide on my website. While creating the history section of my website I had to work to streamline my content even more and pick out the voices and information I found to be the most important. To help with this challenge I decided to add videos to my website. This helped get information across to my viewers using a different model.

### *Relationships first*

The biggest learning I had throughout my research and writing my literature review was the importance of relationship-building in the classroom. Before my first teaching experience, I knew that relationship building was important. I heard it from professors, friends, and co-workers. However, I was never explicitly taught how to build trusting and loving relationships with students while maintaining boundaries and respect. I found it to be easier said than done. The two texts that influenced me the most when it came to the importance of relationship-building were *Troublemakers* by Carla Shalaby and *Better than Carrots or Sticks* by Dominique Smith, Douglas Fisher, and Nancy Frey. Both of these books transformed how I thought about relationship building and teaching in general. Smith et al., (2015) encourage teachers to be intentionally inviting when it comes to building and maintaining relationships. An intentionally inviting teacher treats students with respect, is proactive when it comes to problem-solving, is transparent, and lastly, optimistic. Smith et al., remind teachers that when “students care about the relationships they have with others, they work to keep those relationships healthy and to repair any damage to them” (Smith et al., 2015, p 24).

In her book, *Troublemakers*, Carla Shalaby, an educator and researcher, writes about the paradigm shift teachers must make to provide loving and trusting relationships in school. Shalaby’s work pushes teachers to shift their approach to handling “troublemakers” in classrooms. Shalaby (2017) explains how it is not uncommon to see students younger than five sit out from their classrooms, be excluded from games, or be sent to the office. Shalaby writes, “Isolation, humiliation, and exclusion are commonplace school responses to misbehavior” (Shalaby, 2017, p. xxii). Shalaby continues by



explaining that removal from a shared space shows all students that belonging in the classroom is conditional and that belonging is a privilege (Shalaby, 2017). Restorative practices within the classroom push back on this traditional form of classroom management by relying on positive relationships, peacekeeping, and community building, to build positive classrooms where all students feel as though they belong.

Throughout my website, relationships and community building were mentioned within every section multiple times. I purposely chose images where students were engaging with each other in different ways. Every component of RJE is dependent on the relationships that teachers and students have with one another.

### **Implications and Limitations**

The creation of my website has the potential to impact educational professionals in their journeys to create restorative classrooms. I am hopeful that my website will be used in different schools and allow teachers to learn about RJE for free. With all projects, there are some limitations to take into consideration as my website becomes available to the public. Those limitations have to do with the fact that my resource is only digitally accessible and there is not an additional learning opportunity after the website.

### ***Implications***

I am hopeful that with my website and research more teachers will feel confident to implement restorative practices into their classrooms. As a teacher, I know how time-consuming and overwhelming it can be to implement new routines and procedures into a classroom. I kept that in mind as I created my website. I sorted through countless texts, theories, visuals, and videos, and picked what I believed to be the most effective aspects of RJE.

With my resources, teachers will be able to gain a foundational understanding of what RJE is and what they can do to implement components of it into their classrooms. Furthermore, policy and decision-makers would be able to utilize my research and website to reach a broader audience and push for restorative practices to be in more schools. I hope that with my straightforward website more schools will use restorative practices and more policymakers will encourage it.

Another implication of my website is the opportunity for schools to have a consistent framework when it comes to RJE. If all staff members used my website at the beginning of the year to get familiar with RJE practices, everyone would be on the same page and have a shared understanding of RJE. Throughout my research, it was made clear to me how important it is for the entire staff at a school to have a shared approach and framework for RJE. This website will also be beneficial for new teachers at a school. Schools can provide this website to them as a tool to start implementing RJE and get on the same page as the rest of the staff.

### ***Limitations***

Ideally, training on RJE practices, circle keeping, and restorative conflict resolution would be done in person. Due to COVID-19 that is not an option for many people. The need to remain at home due to COVID-19 is the main reason why I wanted to use a digital platform to share information and resources. In the past, I have been a part of restorative justice training sessions in person. What was so impactful about these training sessions was the opportunity to learn in a Circle. Circle keeping is a critical component of RJE and teachers must take the time to learn about authentic Circle keeping by being part of it. Through the use of my website viewers get a general

overview of Circle keeping and can see snippets of Circles taking place in videos, however, there is not a live authentic component.

Another limitation to my project is not having an additional website or training that teachers can use once they are finished with mine. I created a section of my website called “Next Steps” where viewers have the opportunity to look through recommended texts and videos to continue their learning on RJE. My website just gives teachers the foundational knowledge to begin implementing restorative practices into the classroom. It would be beneficial if there was an opportunity after my website for people to further their education and training in RJE.

Lastly, it was difficult for me to find a way to assess viewers on their understanding of RJE. Before I started to create my website I planned to have quizzes at the end of each main section so participants could reflect on their understanding of the practices discussed. As I started to make my website I realized that the quizzes did not fit in with the outline of my site and I did not want my viewers to feel like they were being graded on how restorative they are. Restorative Justice is a way of being. There is no easy or correct way to assess or grade it.

### **Looking Ahead**

I wrote on my website that learning about RJE is a lifelong process. Just because someone has completed training on RJE or used my website does not mean their learning is over. As I finish this capstone project and begin my third year of teaching in the fall I am looking forward to continuing my learning about RJE practices and implementations.

### ***Furthering this Research***

Looking ahead, I would love to further my research by observing how other teachers in my school utilize my website. Throughout this next school year, there will be new teachers in our primary grades at the school I am working at. It will be beneficial for them to get acquainted with our RJE practices so I shared my website with my school's administration team. The team at my school has approved my website to be used with new and returning teachers as a hub for RJE information. My research will continue as I observe how teachers can understand and implement my content. By checking in with these teachers periodically throughout the school year I will gain an understanding of where there are holes in my research or website. I am hopeful that the website I created will be a working document where I can continuously add different information that teachers express or I observe could be helpful. This process will also give me valuable information on if a website is a sustainable way to deliver information.

Another area where I would like to further my research is within other grade levels. I purposefully chose to focus on primary grades for this research project because I have taught first grade in the past and felt most comfortable with the primary age range. I also noticed how there was a lack of RJE resources specific to younger students which fueled my desire to create a website geared towards younger learners. Even though I focused on grades, K-2, restorative practices should be implemented in all grade levels. With different ages, the implementation may look a little different. To further my research and project I would love to make another website geared towards teachers in grades 3-5.

## **Results**

Implementing RJE into my classroom had dramatic effects on my classroom climate, disruptive behavior, and conflict resolution strategies. In my classroom, I used the same process to begin the implementation. I started with learning about the history of RJE and the paradigm shift from traditional approaches to restorative approaches to discipline, I then began having an informal Circle every morning in my classroom, I reflected on my use of restorative language and near the end of the year, I was holding problem-solving Circles with my students and some staff. I am hopeful that the research I conducted and the website I created will help other educational professionals be successful as well.

## **Professional Contributions**

My project has the potential to benefit the educational field in many ways. First, I think it is helpful to have all components of RJE summarized in one place. My website gives a great overview of different practices and ideas to continue learning about RJE. The research I conducted and my own experiences implementing RJE gives professionals evidence that restorative practices do transform learning communities and help alleviate problematic behaviors. I am hopeful that more teachers will be interested in implementing these practices once they utilize the sources I have placed on my website. With more teachers and schools embodying RJE classroom climates across our nation can become more positive.

## **Summary**

Within this final chapter I reflected on my research question, *How can Restorative Justice practices be utilized to create a positive classroom climate in a K-2 setting?*

Within my reflection, I wrote about how I have grown as both a researcher, a writer, and an educator. I explained the process I used to write my literature review and shared the sources that were the foundation of my research and learning. Next, I described some of the implications and limitations of my project. I explained some of the changes I made to my website and the ways that I hope to further my research. Lastly, I described the professional contributions my project could make in the educational field.

Implementing Restorative Justice practices within a primary classroom may seem like just another thing to add to a to-do list but in reality, it is so much more. My first year teaching was a humbling experience. My students pushed me to realize that the systems I had in place in my classroom were not benefiting them or our learning community as a whole. Through self-reflection, trial and error, and some training on RJE, I was able to begin my journey at transforming my classroom using restorative practices. Through my experiences in my classroom and researching RJE, I know that these practices belong in all classrooms.

Within the past two years, the children of this nation have witnessed a lot. In the summer of 2020, a Black man named George Floyd was murdered in Minnesota by a Minneapolis police officer. An awakening to systemic racism blew through the country. Protests erupted and stories of other injustices towards Black men, women, and children flooded our news. Our children also witnessed the attempted insurrection of our United States capitol on January 6th, 2021. Students' lives continued to change as they had to say goodbye to friends and family and learn from home due to COVID-19. Lastly, our students are witnessing a climate crisis right before their eyes. Flooding is happening across seas as fires burn in the west. The children of this nation have witnessed a lot in

their short lifetimes. Our students deserve to feel safe, welcomed, valued, and above all else, loved. Now more than ever, Restorative Justice Practices belong in the classroom.

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