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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PRACTICES AND THEIR IMPACTS IN ELEMENTARY
CLASSROOMS

By

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

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Opening

“Hey, that's my playdough!” one of my kindergarten students yelled at his classmate. She yelled back and said “No! That’s mine because I want it and I had it first!” “No, I had it first! Ms. Miles, tell her that I had it first!” he yelled back. When this happened, I was across the room helping another student, and therefore had no idea which student had it first. I spoke with the two students about the importance of sharing their toys and using kind voices with each other. After speaking to the students, I could tell that there was still tension between them. The bickering quickly started up again and the argument about play dough was referenced. I had lectured them on the importance of sharing and being respectful, but the relationship between the two students was not yet repaired.

Building healthy relationships is one of the most important skills for students to learn in school. Because of this, students must be taught accountability, empathy, and problem solving skills. In situations that involved conflict between students, I realized that my instinct was to find a quick solution to the problem. Even small conflicts can cause hurt feelings and weakened relationships in the classroom. I found that when I tried to solve the issue for my students, I was unintentionally ignoring damage done to the relationship and allowing resentment to fester between them. I knew that I needed to change my approach to handling conflict in the classroom. This led me to my capstone question: *What are the most effective ways to implement restorative justice practices into elementary classrooms in order to create a positive learning community?*

Overview

In this capstone, I analyze how to use restorative justice practices to create a behavior management system that focuses on restitution and healing rather than punishment. This capstone examines the relationship between restorative justice practices and the prevention of disruptions in the classroom. In the first section of chapter one, I discuss my background and experiences as both a student and educator that inspired my interest in this topic. The second part of this chapter goes over the purpose of my project and the significance of my question to the field of education. Lastly, I provide a summary of chapter one and a preview of chapter two.

My Background and Experiences

My interest in restorative justice practices stems from my observations of the discipline practices and conflict resolution techniques used during my time as a student. There were undoubtedly many challenging behaviors in the schools I attended, but these behaviors were often handled in ways that damaged relationships in the classroom and school community. Some of these discipline practices contributed to inequality within the school system.

Discipline slips were one form of punitive discipline at my elementary school that failed to truly resolve issues. Discipline slips were frequently handed out for conflicts that arose in the classroom, disruptive behaviors, and even for silly or trivial reasons. For example, on a daily basis, discipline slips were given to students for failing to tie their shoes. This method of discipline assumed that all children had been taught how to tie their shoes. Three discipline slips warranted a trip to the principal's office, which resulted in missed class time and a loss of learning. The students who frequently received

discipline slips were the same students who were falling behind in their academics due to the loss of time in the classroom. These students were most often students of color or students of low socioeconomic status. This made me question the role that implicit bias plays in the school system. I noticed that some students were able to avoid trouble for making the same mistakes that caused other students to receive discipline slips. This system failed to recognize gaps in student knowledge or the fact that students are still developing socioemotional skills. It also made room for internal bias to play a role in discipline and student outcomes. Rather than helping students to learn and grow, it ended up excluding children from the classroom.

At my elementary school, parents were allowed to request the teacher that they wanted for their children. Although this system may have been well-intentioned, it ended up causing all of the students who were behind academically and lacked resources to end up in the same classroom. Most of the students whose parents did not request their teacher were of lower socioeconomic status. These were the students who received the most discipline slips and were regularly sent out of the classroom. The ability for parents to request teachers had a detrimental effect on the students whose parents did not make a request. Some classes lost far more learning time than others due to this system. Because of the discipline slip system, many of the conflicts at my elementary school were never truly resolved, which led to a system where many students could not work together and have healthy relationships.

The severe bullying issue that I observed at my elementary school was another factor that led to my interest in restorative justice practices in schools. One student at my elementary school was bullied by the majority of students in my class because of her

weight. This bullying went on from the time the student arrived in third grade until we graduated from the school in sixth grade. Over the course of three years, I cannot recall one instance of the problem being addressed to the whole class. At softball practice, some of the girls would say mean things about the student and it would be ignored by the coaches. The student who was bullied did not have parents who were involved at the school. This student was of mixed race and of low socioeconomic status. I believe that implicit bias impacted the way that issues were addressed in the school. If an issue affected a student of higher socioeconomic status, it seemed to be addressed quickly. If the issue affected a student of lower socioeconomic status, then the issue seemed as though it was not a top priority.

Most of the students from my elementary school went on to attend the same high school. The segregation that started as a result of parental requests for teachers and discipline slips was transferred seamlessly into the high school setting. The students who frequently got into trouble during elementary school were in the general education courses. The students who rarely got into trouble were placed in the advanced placement courses. There was a glaringly obvious problem with racial segregation between the advanced placement courses and the general education courses. Nearly all of the students in the advanced placement courses were white. This showed me that the way discipline was handled during the primary grades has real and long term academic consequences.

At my high school, I observed that I was able to get away with more than other students, particularly students of color. Several times, I walked past the security guards when I was late for class. It was required to have a hall pass for leaving class, but sometimes I would forget or simply not have one. I cannot recall a single time that I was

stopped by security. One instance that sticks out in my memory was when I was in the halls without a pass, and another student of color was stopped and the security guard asked to see his pass. This was an eye opening moment for me to realize how white privilege plays such a major role in school discipline.

By the time I graduated high school, there were sixty-seven dropouts in my senior class. Many of the students who dropped out were the same students who often received discipline slips at my elementary school. I began to connect the dots between how discipline is handled in schools and real world disadvantages. I wondered how there could be so many dropouts within a single graduating class. I began to question why there were only four counselors for 1,400 students at my high school and why there was so much segregation within the school system. I reflected on my entire education and began to recognize the depth of inequity within the school system.

After I graduated from high school, I went on to study elementary education. After student teaching ended, I began subbing in a variety of districts to gain teaching experience. When I scrolled through the subbing positions listed on the website, I was pleased to see a month-long position available at my old elementary school. In this position, I would be subbing for a behavioral specialist. My job was to help students in a variety of classrooms cope with their emotions in healthy ways and provide them with individualized attention to prevent disruptions.

For the majority of my time in this position, I worked with a third grade student who had many behavioral struggles. This student was physically and verbally aggressive towards others. He would angrily storm out of the room and roam the halls, throwing other students' belongings across the floor. This student got into many arguments with his

peers and was extremely disruptive during class. On the first day that I worked with the student, he yelled at the teacher and then stormed out of class. I followed him in hopes of talking things through and helping him to process his emotions. As I followed him, he screamed at me “Leave me alone!” and ran down the hall. I had never dealt with a situation like this before. Suddenly, I was no longer a passive observer, but the authority figure in this school where I spent so many years of my life. This was going to be my reality for the next month, so I knew I needed to think carefully about the best path to take moving forward. I found that I would need to allow him to have breaks to cool down and show him through my actions how much I cared.

This third grade student also struggled significantly with his academics, especially in regards to his reading. He had not yet learned his vowel sounds, so each day I was tasked with doing a phonics intervention with him. This intervention involved getting the student to practice spelling different consonant vowel consonant (CVC) words on an Ipad. On the first day of this intervention, he spelled many words on the Ipad and seemed to be engaged in his learning. Each time he wanted to spell a word, he would need to press the letter keys. When he pressed the letter keys, it would say the sound that the letter made out loud. On the second day of instruction, he quickly realized that he could use these letters and the sounds they made as a game to avoid learning. Although I tried my best to stop this behavior, I was having no success.

As much as it pained me to see this student waste precious learning time when he so desperately needed it, I also knew deep down that I would get nowhere if I did not invest some time to get to know him as a person. I closed the Ipad and began to have a conversation with him. I asked him about his favorite subject, his favorite sports, and his

favorite thing to do outside of school. I found out that he loved playing football and that he plays each day when he gets home from school. The next day I brought a football to the school. We went outside and threw the football back and forth, to practice spelling consonant vowel consonant (cvc) words. With each toss of the football, we would say the next letter of the word. He absolutely loved this new way of learning how to spell words and hear vowel sounds. We continued this ritual each day and I could tell that he was making more progress than I could have imagined on the Ipad. He was engaged and he was no longer acting out during the intervention.

This specialized learning time helped significantly with the students' behavior. The student was in the hallway as I walked into work one day. He asked me "Are we going to toss the football again today?" I was pleasantly surprised at his enthusiasm for participating in the intervention. This was such a transition from when he yelled "Leave me alone!" or "Get away from me!" at the start of the week. However, he would still storm out of the classroom when he got angry. Although he continued to have angry outbursts, he no longer told me to leave him alone or yelled at me. He became more open to talking through the problems with me and working towards a solution rather than pushing me away, and it was easier for me to get him to go back to the classroom.

This substitute teaching experience helped to inspire my interest in restorative justice practices. I wondered how I would handle the student's behavior if I were the lead teacher and how I would resolve conflicts between the student and his peers. In my subbing position, I had the ability to give this student one hundred percent of my focus. I was incredibly effective at engaging the student in his learning and I learned how to help him calm down. This was a tremendous learning experience for me, but I knew that I still

had so much to learn about how to handle behavior issues as the lead teacher in a classroom.

The Purpose of my Project

The purpose of this capstone project was to gain a better understanding of how to implement restorative justice practices into elementary school classrooms and communicate that knowledge to educators through several interactive professional development sessions. The goal of this project was to address behavioral problems in an equitable way and meet the needs of each individual student. Students will learn at their highest potential when they feel heard and valued in their school community. The goal of this project was to train teachers on how to respond to conflicts in their classroom before it happens.

Summary

A variety of experiences and observations throughout my educational journey led me to my capstone question: *What are the most effective ways to implement restorative justice practices into elementary classrooms in order to create a positive learning community?* In this chapter, I discussed the ways that discipline was handled throughout my educational journey, and how this inspired my interest in restorative justice. I discussed how my early teaching experiences strengthened my interest in this topic and gave me the passion to learn more about restorative justice methods and communicate those to other teachers.

In chapter two of my capstone, I reviewed literature that supported my capstone question. I examined how restorative justice practices have been used to resolve conflicts and manage behavior at the elementary level. My literature review also looks at other

disciplinary practices, such as zero tolerance policies and their outcomes on student achievement and generational inequality in our society. Chapter two looks at a variety of methods for implementing restorative justice practices into elementary classrooms. Chapter three describes each professional development session I created for this capstone project. It describes each session of my six session professional development series. Chapter three also describes the intended audience for my project, the timeline, setting and how the effectiveness of the professional development series is assessed. Chapter four revisits the literature that was influential to this project. This chapter looks at potential implications of this project, as well as the possible limitations. I also provide a personal reflection on the capstone process.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Having an effective behavior management system is essential for every classroom in order for students to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. However, research has shown that many discipline practices disproportionately target minority students and can produce damaging long term consequences. This project on restorative justice practices was inspired by experiences as both a student and as an educator. The goal of this project was to find an equitable behavior management system that holds students accountable, while also giving them a chance to learn and grow from their mistakes. This chapter explores a variety of literature that pertains to the capstone question: *What are the most effective ways to implement restorative justice practices into elementary classrooms in order to create a positive learning community?*

Overview

This literature review consists of four main sections. The first section focuses on the historical context and background for restorative justice practices in elementary classrooms. This section examines the connection between zero tolerance policies in schools and incarceration, commonly referred to as the school to prison pipeline. It looks at major court cases surrounding zero tolerance policies in schools and their impacts. The historical roots that restorative justice practices have in indigenous communities is also analyzed in this section. Understanding the historical context for a philosophy of discipline is incredibly important for educators. Before teachers learn how to implement a behavior management system, they first need to understand why it is important and the

background and story behind the method. They must have this knowledge in order to learn from past mistakes.

The second section of this literature review looks at the current need for restorative justice practices in elementary classrooms. It examines how restorative justice practices can help to build healthy relationships in the classroom and create an environment where students of all backgrounds are valued and understood. The third section of this chapter focuses on restorative justice interventions that have been used in classrooms and their effects on student behavior and overall well-being. Understanding the impacts of restorative justice interventions is crucial to answering the capstone question. The fourth section of this literature review focuses on professional development sessions that have been implemented on the topic of restorative justice in schools. To finalize this chapter, there is a summary of the literature reviewed as well as a description of chapter three.

Historical Context

School to Prison Pipeline

There is a long history that shows the correlation between school exclusion and crime. Many people who end up in the criminal justice system have experienced exclusion from school in either the form of temporary suspension or permanent expulsion. In fact, “some theorists identify the role of schools as key sites of socialization and supervision, protective factors that are removed with exclusion” (Arnez, & Condry, 2021, p. 88). Arnez and Condry discussed how schools can provide structure and expectations for students, and losing this structure often sends them down a negative

path, which is compounded by other disadvantages they may already face at home such as family problems or socioeconomic disadvantage.

In a study called “Prisoners’ childhood and family backgrounds” conducted by the Ministry of Justice, there was a strong connection found between school exclusion and incarceration. This study focused on 1,435 newly sentenced prisoners between 2005 and 2006 (Williams et al., 2012). It showed how they were impacted by their childhood experiences, including their family and school experiences. This study found that of the participants, “Sixty-three per cent reported having been temporarily excluded from school, and 42% permanently excluded” (Williams et al., 2012, p. 14). The connection between school exclusion and incarceration is apparent. Many of these school exclusions can be traced back to zero tolerance policies which evolved over the course of several decades and had lasting impacts. This section describes the reasoning behind zero tolerance policies and how they impacted students.

Zero Tolerance Policies

Zero tolerance policies are based on deterrence theory, which is the idea that the threat of severe punishment will deter students from causing trouble (Curran, 2016). Zero tolerance policies are founded on the belief that students who cause disruptions in the classroom must be removed. Curran describes how zero tolerance policies fail to recognize the psychological stages of children and adolescents due to their severity and impatience for mistakes. In fact, “adolescents are only just beginning to develop the cognitive control components of the prefrontal cortex and across cortical area connections that are related to the ability to inhibit impulsive behavior” (Curran, 2016, p. 649). Curran explained that because zero tolerance policies fail to see the developmental

stages that students are currently in, they have not been shown to change or improve behavior in students.

Zero tolerance policies in schools were largely motivated by a growing fear of crime in the United States. Zero tolerance policies in elementary and secondary schools were implemented by the federal government as "an expansion of drug control legislation of the 1980's and in response to a string of tragic school shootings in the early 1990's" (Jones, 2013, p. 739). Jones wrote that one of the most influential zero tolerance policies implemented in schools across the United States was The Gun Free Schools Act of 1994. The Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 was created to ensure that any state receiving funding from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act would expel students for one year if they were to bring a firearm to school. Many states began to expand these zero tolerance policies to include bans on "tobacco use, truancy, dress code violations, disruption, alcohol use, inappropriate language, and threats of violence" (Jones, 2013, p. 743). Jones went on to explain how states were given power to determine the ways that zero tolerance policies were implemented. As a result, many began to use them as a punishment for minor offenses.

Zero tolerance policies have significant generational effects. When a parent is taken away from the home due to incarceration, it can weaken the child's social connections and support system (Jacobsen, 2019). Jacobson explained how there are severe financial difficulties that result from the incarceration of a parent. The parent will often have debts to the criminal justice system and face difficulty finding a stable job once they are released. The financial strains put on these families can limit a child's chances of participating in regular social activities. This can lead to a lack of connection

and cause the child to act out in school. It was found that “children whose fathers were incarcerated after their first birthday and before first grade are more likely than other children to be suspended or expelled by age 9” (Jacobsen, 2019, p. 675).

On top of the financial and social hardships that these students face, they also may face bias from educators. The expectations of children may change as a result of parental incarceration. “For example, incarceration may shape expectations others have for the child’s behavior, and the child may act accordingly (Jacobsen, 2019, p. 656). Zero tolerance policies have created a generational cycle for the school to prison pipeline. Students who face zero tolerance policies are more likely to face incarceration in their future. Their children are more likely to be subjected to zero tolerance policies because of generational disadvantages they face.

Court Cases Regarding Zero Tolerance Policies

Because of their damaging and long lasting effects, zero tolerance policies have been challenged many times in court. The case of *Seal v. Morgan* (2000) addressed one of the major issues with zero tolerance policies in schools. This case examined mens rea in relation to the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 (Mongan & Walker, 2012). Mens rea is the acknowledgement of whether someone was aware of wrongdoing in the crime they committed. Mongan and Walker explained how a student was expelled for the possession of a knife in his car. The student was unaware of the presence of the knife. In this case, the court acknowledged that Seal was unaware of the knife in his car. “The court’s opinion in *Seal v. Morgan* (2000) set the precedent for mens rea being a requirement for expulsions because of zero tolerance violations” (Mongan & Walker, 2012, p. 236). This was a groundbreaking case since prior to this case, mens rea was not considered in regard

prior to the use of zero tolerance policies. However, other court cases that happened after this case went against this ruling.

Mongan and Walker (2012) described how in the case of *Bundick v. Bay City* in 2001, the court completely went against the ruling in *Seal v. Morgan* that mens rea must be considered before resorting to zero tolerance policies. This case involved a student named Bundick who had unknowingly brought a weapon onto school grounds in his truck. "In this case, the court simply did not believe that mens rea was a requirement of guilt and felt that the educational environment was at risk despite no students having knowledge of its presence" (Mongan & Walker, 2012, p. 236). There have been conflicting views on whether mens rea matters in regards to breaking a school rule. Therefore, students could face harsh zero tolerance policies regardless of whether they understood the crime they had committed, or intended to commit the crime in the first place. Between court cases, there is inconsistency in terms of whether mens rea will be acknowledged or ignored before zero tolerance policies are enforced.

Another case showing the complicated nature of zero tolerance policies is the case of *Ratner v. Loudoun County Public Schools* (2001). This case involved an eighth grade student named Benjamin Ratner, who went to Blue Ridge Middle School in Loudoun County Virginia (Pelliccioni, 2003). Pelliccioni described how Ratner took a binder that contained a knife from another student who had confided in him that she was suicidal. When the school dean found out about the situation, she called Ratner down to her office, and Ratner was consequently suspended for ten days due to the zero tolerance policies at his school. The court ruled in favor of the school and claimed that they did what was needed to maintain a safe school atmosphere. This case, "concluded that the zero

tolerance policy did not violate Ratner's substantive due process rights” (Pelliccioni, 2003, p. 987). It was found that Ratner’s rights were not violated in this case. This case shows another problematic way that zero tolerance policies impact students in schools. The intention or understanding of the crime was not considered in this case, similarly to the case of *Bundick v Bay City*.

Indigenous Communities’ Use of Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is a behavior management strategy that is centered around building and restoring relationships. The First Nations in Canada and the United States, as well as the Maori of New Zealand, had an enormous impact on where the restorative justice movement is today (Leung, 1999). Leung described how these groups believed that teaching is more important than laws or rules. There was a belief that communities could take proactive measures to prevent most conflicts. “Western models of justice begin with the premise that there will be conflicts, whereas aboriginal notions of justice ‘[start] on the presumption that people in communities wish to live nicely together’” (Leung, 1999, p. 7). This view focused on how to teach people the right behavior rather than simply punishing the wrong type of behavior. Aboriginal teachings about justice also focus on restoring and repairing relationships.

Aboriginal notions of justice focus on “the harm done and the causes of the wrongdoing, rather than the severity or the details of the offense” (Leung, 1999, p. 7). This is severely different from the western model of justice, which focuses on the specifics of the offense and often does not allow positive growth. Leung (1999) described how Aboriginal notions of justice center around the positive change that can result from conflicts by looking at the incident more holistically.

A part of Navajo tradition for solving conflicts involved *nalyeeh*. *Nalyeeh* means compensation or a request to fix a harmed relationship (Leung 1999). The offender was expected to approach the victim of the wrongdoing. If the victim and offender were unable to resolve the conflict on their own, then they would need to reach out to an *aanii*, or peacemaker to help them solve the problem. A peacemaker was someone who had a leadership role in the community. Leung (1999) described how this tradition translates into the Navajo Peacemaker Court in modern times. This peacemaking process involves discussing the issue and coming to a solution that involves healing the relationship between the two parties. Mueller (2018) described how Navajo law relies on relationships and seeks to heal situations. Mueller contrasts this with the “Anglo definition of law [which] insists on visible institutions such as courts and punishments” and does not heal but causes more damage instead (Mueller, 2018, p. 2). Yazzie (2016) stated that providing a symbol of healed relations is another tradition of Navajo peacemaking that helps to restore relationships. In this tradition, the offender brings an offering to the victim. The monetary value of the offering was not important in this tradition. What mattered was whether the object truly symbolized an apology and acknowledged the wrongdoing (Yazzie, 2016).

Summary

This section discussed the historical background for restorative justice practices in schools. It described zero tolerance policies, the school to prison pipeline and court cases surrounding discipline in schools. This section examined indigenous communities’ use of restorative justice practices to resolve conflicts. Understanding the historical context of discipline practices over time and in different cultures is important to understanding our

current education system. This section provides the historical context needed to help answer the question of: *What are the most effective ways to implement restorative justice practices into elementary classrooms in order to create a positive learning community?*

The next section discusses the current need for restorative justice practices in schools.

Current Need

Equity

The current need for restorative justice practices lies in the need for equity in the school system. It is important for teachers to work through issues with students and build relationships rather than pushing them out of the classroom. There must be an awareness of the ways that internal bias can play a role in discipline decisions. Zero tolerance policies have a long history of pushing students that already face many disadvantages out of the classroom. Many of the inequalities that we see in our society plant their roots in elementary school discipline practices.

The U.S. Department of Education expressed their support for restorative justice practices in place of suspensions and expulsions in a Dear Colleague letter written on January 8th, 2014. This letter talked about how “African Americans without disabilities are more than three times as likely as their white peers without disabilities to be expelled or suspended” (Duncan, 2014, p. 1). This letter also pointed out how students with disabilities “represent 12% of students in the country but make up 19% of students suspended in school, 25% of students receiving multiple out of school suspensions, 19% of students expelled” (Duncan, 2014, p. 1). This letter strongly encouraged educators to implement restorative justice practices in their classrooms to combat these disparities.

However, not everyone agrees that there is a current need for restorative justice practices in classrooms. In fact, some argue that restorative justice initiatives are a cause of inequity in the school system because they allow students to get away with more disruptions (Evers & Alger, 2020). Evers and Alger (2020) argued that the shift towards restorative justice practices in classrooms has caused negative effects on Saint Paul Public Schools in particular. They pointed out how in 2011, Saint Paul Public Schools started to severely limit their expulsions and suspensions and turn to a restorative justice approach. These authors argue that more incidents have occurred in Saint Paul Public Schools since these practices have been implemented. Board (2016) discussed a rise in incidents as well. He stated that in 2016, a Como High School teacher was thrown to the ground by two students. He pointed out how this happened only months after a Central High School teacher was thrown to the ground by students, facing serious head injuries (Board, 2016).

Many distinctions can be made between restorative justice practices and traditional practices. The traditional approach to classroom discipline focuses on the violation of rules and has a strong focus on the crime that was committed (Erb & Erb, 2018). This approach, however, does not offer a lot of forgiveness for students who are developing key parts of their brain that impact impulse control and their ability to make the right decisions. Erb and Erb (2018) pointed out how instead of a focus on punishing the offender, this restorative approach focuses on reflection and healing. It is about understanding the impact that the negative action had on all parties that were involved.

Relationships

Restorative justice practices are described as the balance between control and support in the classroom, which has the result of creating very strong relationships. In Wang and Lee's (2018) article, they described how if there is little control and little support within a classroom environment, this essentially leads to neglect. However, if there is high control but low support in the classroom, then this leads to a punitive classroom environment. Low control and high support lead to a situation where there is a permissive environment. Wang and Lee explained how in order for the environment to be restorative in nature, it must contain both high support and high control. Things are intentional and done in order to create the best relationships and for the purpose of people rather than punishment (Wang & Lee, 2019).

Restorative justice practices can help maintain positive relationships within the classroom. The restorative justice approach "values community, nurtures engagement with others, and collaboratively resolves problems" (Erb & Erb, 2018, p. 93). To build strong relationships, there must be empathy and forgiveness for mistakes. "Traditionally, 'at risk' students who experience success-- including academically vulnerable students, immigrant students, and LGBTQ students often describe that one adult in the school who was 'there' for her or him through difficulty" (Knight, 2014, p. 14). Restorative justice practices promote adversity through obstacles. They acknowledge the humanity in students and encourage teachers to respond to conflict in a productive way that restores relationships. Building relationships is very important for making restorative justice interventions effective.

In Milner's article titled "Are the Kids Really Out of Control" he pointed out how students need support and relationships rather than constant punishment and ostracism for breaking rules that they sometimes do not understand (Milner, 2018). Milner wrote about a situation where a third grade teacher proclaimed "we are not moving until I see a straight line" (Milner, 2018, p. 1). Milner explained how the third graders struggled to make a straight line and how it took them about six minutes to get a line that was straight enough for the teacher. The teacher looked extremely frustrated in this situation. This story emphasizes how there is often a focus on control when it comes to behavior management rather than understanding or focusing on development (Milner, 2018). Restorative justice is needed for relationships in the school system so that teachers do not view students as something to be controlled but as people who are learning and growing.

Restorative justice practices are most effective in schools when strong relationships have been nurtured within a school community. One example of this was in the New York Public School System. "Between 2001 and 2011, the number of suspensions in New York City public schools more than doubled---from 29,000 to 70,000" (Sandwick, 2019, p. 5). Sandwick (2019) described how major changes happened in the year 2015 that helped to reduce suspensions across the district for elementary, middle, and high schools. In 2015, the New York City mayor's office and the New York City Department of Education announced their goal to decrease suspensions across the district. They hoped to increase the use of restorative justice practices in schools to create more racial equity in schools. This shift in school discipline had major impacts on the number of suspensions. Sandwick explained how in the 2012-2013 school year, New York City public schools had 69,643 suspensions whereas in the 2016-2017

school year there were 35,234 suspensions. This meant that suspensions went down by 49 percent due to these initiatives. In the NYC public school district, “participants described RJ as requiring extensive trust, vulnerability, and even discomfort” which ultimately leads to building strong relationships (Sandwick, 2019, p 7). Some participants even compared restorative justice practices to working with family members, and how someone would not suspend or ban a family member from the group when a conflict occurs.

Summary

Understanding the current reasons why restorative justice practices are needed in the classroom will help to answer the capstone question: *What are the most effective ways to implement restorative justice practices into elementary classrooms in order to create a positive learning community?* It is important to understand the motivations for introducing restorative justice practices into the classrooms and the effects that they will have on students. In the next section, a variety of restorative justice interventions are analyzed.

Interventions

Making Amends

In the article called “Making Amends: A Restorative Approach to Classroom Behavior,” Erb and Erb (2018) described the behavior management system used for third grade classrooms in a school. This article examined the system that five third grade teachers used in the year 2015. These teachers used a system called the clip system. This system involved a stoplight where their clip would start on green each day, but get moved down towards red if they started to do things such as blurt out in class or cause other

disruptions to the class. If a student broke a rule, they were expected to move the clip either up or down on the board accordingly. This system publicly displayed how well a student was doing from the teacher's perspective. Erb and Erb (2018) described how the five teachers ended up viewing this system as humiliating for their students. "The unmasking before a critical audience and loss of public esteem make one wish to wilt, become invisible rather than reflect on an incident" (Goodman, 2019, p. 64). Goodman (2019) pointed out how students that are shamed will often feel their self worth shrinking. A system that shrinks students' self worth, lacks input and reconciliation with students is not effective. This was one of the major reasons why the third grade teachers felt the need to change their behavior management system.

Erb and Erb (2018) described how the third grade teachers found their previous system to be too punitive, so they came up with a system called "Making Amends" as an alternative method for handling disruptive behaviors within their classrooms. The teachers also recognized that their clip system did not mimic real life methods of problem solving (Erb & Erb, 2018). Their new system involved a folder that included sentence frames to help both the victim and offender find the words to work through conflicts. The teachers devoted time to teaching the students how to connect the harm with the resolution of conflicts. With the system of making amends, students were able to take the binder with sentence frames for conflict resolution and solve their issues themselves. The teachers reported that "whereas students previously reported playground incidents to the teacher after recess, they now request permission to go into the hall with the making amends binder" (Erb & Erb, 2018, p. 99). This allows students to solve their conflicts and repair relationships as well as helps the teacher to stay more neutral in regard to conflict

and have a role as a mediator rather than as a disciplinarian. Students need to have a lot of trust in their teachers and do not want to just see them as the strict disciplinarian.

Responsive Circles

In the study called “The Use of Responsive Circles in Schools: An Exploratory Study” Wang and Lee examined the use of a restorative justice method known as responsive circles to solve conflicts in urban schools (2019). Data was collected from twenty-two different circles that were led by 13 different teachers. The circles analyzed in the study were typically used in order to discuss difficult situations that came up within the classroom setting. These researchers used a qualitative rating system that took into account several different factors to evaluate the effectiveness of these circles. Wang and Lee (2019) described several factors which were used to qualitatively score the circles, including relevancy, adult-student respect and responsiveness, circle agreements, student-circle commitment, student-student respect and responsiveness, student ownership, risk taking, and problem solving. This study analyzed what factors create a productive responsive circle with a high rating, compared to what makes an ineffective circle with a low rating.

One of the highly rated circles took place between a group of seven third-fifth grade students. This circle was highly rated because the students followed the behavior agreements, and the teacher was both supportive and firm in her role as a facilitator. She reminded the students to make eye contact and raise their hands when they want to speak. The teacher frequently thanked the students for sharing and speaking honestly, and she also empathized with their reasons for feeling the way they did in the situation (Wang & Lee, 2019)). Van Woerkom (2018) also supported the idea that responsive circles must

foster a feeling of safety for students to feel comfortable participating. Van Woerkom (2018) discussed how as the facilitator of a responsive circle, it is important to be empathetic and validate student experiences

Wang and Lee (2019) compared the positive model of a responsive circle to a negative, low rated responsive circle that took place in a high school. The teacher set the wrong tone from the beginning of the restorative circle by expressing disbelief when a student claimed to not understand why he was in detention. Students felt like the restorative circle was a punishment rather than something to help them grow or become closer, and as a result, the students were not very committed and got distracted easily by side conversations (Wang & Lee, 2019). When the teacher is supportive of students and makes them feel like the responsive circle is about people and relationships rather than rules and punishment, then the students feel more inclined to share and open up about the issue at hand. Brown (2020) also supported the idea that creating a safe environment for students is essential for responsive circles to be effective. Brown described how circles have the ability to equalize power, especially when the facilitator makes it possible for all students to have a voice and participate. Brown (2020) emphasized that the removal of physical barriers in the circle process can also create a sense of openness and willingness to listen.

Picturebooks

Another restorative justice intervention that can be used to prevent disruptive behaviors is the use of picture books to teach desired skills. “Incorporating stories for students to discuss within their classroom and lived experiences can help students feel connected and supported through literature” (Koltz & Kersten, 2020, p. 639). Koltz and

Kersten (2020) described how picture books can be used to create a basis for roleplaying different social situations to help students learn how to restore relationships. Based on the messages of the picture books, teachers can take time to pause and allow students to engage in discussions about the social elements of the books. This can be a productive restorative justice intervention because it gives students the chance to think about how they would handle the situations that the characters face in the stories.

Barry (2019) supported the idea that picture books can serve as useful restorative justice interventions. He wrote several books to help teach children how to restore relationships. Barry recommended a book called “The Sharing Circle” by Theresa Larsen-Jonassen (2016) which addresses how responsive circles are an effective way to address conflict. Another book suggested by Barry is called “The Mindful Turtle” by Florence Strang (2018) which emphasizes valuing different perspectives. Overall, Barry (2019) believes that picture books can be extremely helpful in teaching children how to accept different perspectives and restore harm that has been done to relationships.

Summary

This section described restorative justice interventions that have been used to prevent and manage conflict in classrooms. Some of these interventions include responsive circles, picture books to start discussions, and sentence starters or other aids to help students communicate through issues. Understanding current restorative justice interventions and their effectiveness will be essential for answering the capstone question: *What are the most effective ways to implement restorative justice practices into elementary classrooms in order to create a positive learning community?* The next

section of this chapter focuses on professional development that has been used to train teachers on the use of restorative justice practices.

Professional Development

Strategies for Professional Development Sessions on Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is focused on people and relationships. “Instead of asking, “What laws have been broken, who did it, and what do they deserve?” restorative justice asks, “Who has been hurt, what are their needs, and whose obligations are these?” (Vaandering, 2014, p. 509-510). This is the core of restorative justice and this is what teachers need to focus on as they go through professional development.

In the article called “Relational Restorative Justice Pedagogy in Educator Professional Development” Vaandering (2014) described a professional development session she implemented in 2012 that involved seventeen different educators in the primary, middle and high school grades in Newfoundland and Labrador Canada. This professional development tried to show the educators how to incorporate restorative justice into their own classrooms by showing them examples. There were three key elements of restorative justice that were present in this professional development session which were: “(1) participants engaging in a circle process, (2) themes of relationships rippling out from the view of human beings as worthy and relational; and (3) a small card with relational reflection questions” (Vaandering, 2014, p. 519). One of the focus points of this professional development was the circle process, which was the main way that discussions took place. Vaandering (2014) explained that before discussions in the circle could take place, the participants first needed to agree on guidelines for the discussion. There was a talking piece, and whoever was holding it had the right to speak at that

moment. They also agreed on having a safe and nonjudgmental zone for these discussions. Professional development on restorative justice needs to show along with tell. It was important for this professional development to get the teachers to try out restorative justice practices for themselves and experience how they feel.

Mayworm et al. (2016) supported the idea that professional development on restorative justice practices needs to involve active learning for teachers. These authors agreed that professional development sessions on restorative justice need to help teachers practice skills and then have those skills followed up with consistently. In other words, for teachers to follow through with restorative justice practices in their classrooms, they cannot just go to a single training and be done. Instead, they must have consistent training in order to make it a part of their routine and actively participate in restorative justice methods (Mayworm et al., 2016).

Summary

This section describes professional development sessions on the use of restorative justice and the key elements that made these teacher training sessions successful. This section describes how professional development sessions that involve active learning and follow-up sessions tend to be the most effective at explaining how to implement restorative justice practices in the classroom. This section shows that to fully understand how to implement and lead restorative justice practices in a classroom, teachers must experience it for themselves.

Summary of Chapter Two

Chapter Two explored the historical significance of zero tolerance policies, as well as the origins of restorative justice practices. This chapter looked at significant court

cases relating to zero tolerance policies and the impacts that these policies have had over the course of generations. This section leads directly into the next section which went into detail on the current need for restorative justice practices in the classroom. Next, chapter two discussed restorative justice interventions that have been implemented in classrooms, as well as professional development that has been used. All of these sections of chapter two help to answer the question: *What are the most effective ways to implement restorative justice practices into elementary classrooms in order to create a positive learning community?*

Preview of Chapter Three

In chapter three, the capstone project is described in detail. Chapter three begins with an introduction and overview of the chapter. Next, there is a project description and rationale section, which includes a description of each of my six professional development sessions. After this section, the intended setting and audience for the project are described. The timeline for the project is then described, which discusses when and how the project was developed. Chapter three then describes what assessments were used in this capstone project. Lastly, there is a summary of chapter three and a preview of chapter four.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

The literature review provided an explanation of the historical context of restorative justice, the current need for these practices, a variety of restorative justice interventions, and current professional development available to teachers on restorative justice. Overall, the literature review provided the context needed to implement this capstone project. The purpose of chapter three is to describe the capstone project in detail. The capstone project is in the form of a professional development for teachers that involves interactive training on how to respond to scenarios within the restorative justice framework. Teachers who work through this staff development will be given the chance to learn about the topics discussed in my literature review, as well as role play different scenarios that will teach them to respond to student behavior in a way that promotes restorative justice. They will be given many opportunities to reflect on their learning and then apply it to their own teaching. The staff development is interactive so that teachers can experience restorative justice practices for themselves. This allows the participants to feel more prepared when situations arise in their own work.

Overview

This project seeks to answer the question: *What are the most effective ways to implement restorative justice practices into elementary classrooms in order to create a positive learning community?* The project description looks at literature that supports my decision to create this type of project. Next, the setting and intended audience for my project are described. The next section describes the timeline for this project. Lastly, it is

described how data will be evaluated to measure the effectiveness of my staff development. Overall, this chapter describes the background for this project and the way it will be implemented.

Project Description and Rationale

This capstone project consists of six professional development sessions that take place over the course of the school year. Each professional development session consists of a slideshow, worksheets, discussion prompts and surveys. The staff actively participates in each session through role playing a variety of situations, having discussions, and reflecting on their learning.

This professional development series has a high emphasis on reflection and discussion. Saric and Steh (2017) discussed the importance of reflection in professional development. These two authors point to John Dewey's theory that reflection is about "rigorously examining an idea, an experience, a problem, with an attitude of open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, curiosity, and responsibility" (Saric & Steh, 2017, p.70). These two authors discussed how reflection is a critical component of enacting change during professional development and how it must be an active process where teachers question their thinking. Reflection is necessary for teachers to be able to examine their own perspectives and keep an open mind to other possibilities. The emphasis on reflection in this professional development series was influenced by Schon's theory of reflection which states that there must be reflection on action and reflection in action to foster change (Kaiser, 2017).

Session one of this professional development project focuses on the historical need for restorative justice practices in elementary schools (Appendix A). It covers the

historical impacts that zero tolerance policies have had on students and families. This session begins with a prior knowledge assessment to see what the teachers already know about zero tolerance policies and their impacts in schools. Information on zero tolerance policies and their impacts is then conveyed through a slideshow to the staff. This slideshow provides context for staff on the reasons that restorative justice practices are so important in schools. There are videos and discussion questions embedded in the slideshow. At the end of the slideshow presentation, there is an end of session assessment and discussion. This allows the staff to reflect on what they have learned from this session. Then, the staff is expected to fill out a goal setting survey based on what they learned, where they write down their goals for the next session.

The second professional development session covers the indigenous origins of restorative justice practices (Appendix B). This session begins with a prior knowledge assessment and reflection. After this assessment, the slideshow is presented. Discussion questions are located in the slideshow for staff to answer. Within the slideshow, there is also the chance for staff to pause and role-play some of the ways that indigenous communities implemented restorative justice practices in their communities to reduce conflict. Through this role-playing, the staff learn how to apply these practices into their classrooms. By giving the staff practice with implementing restorative justice practices, they will be more prepared to apply these methods to their own practice in the future. Mayworm et al. (2016) supported this idea that professional development needs to be interactive so that teachers are not just passively listening to advice. Teachers need to have the chance to actively practice how to respond in different situations and apply their knowledge (Mayworm et al., 2016). Vaandering (2014) also supported this idea that

professional development on restorative justice needs to be interactive. This author described how in her professional development, it really helped for the participants to actively try out strategies for themselves, rather than simply hearing about them from others. In this session, the staff practices using a symbol of healed relations to resolve conflict. At the end of the second session, the staff is expected to take a summative assessment and reflect on what they learned in this session through a discussion. At the end of the session, the staff sets new goals for the implementation of restorative justice practices into their work.

The third session focuses on diving deep into the factors that make a responsive circle effective (Appendix C). This session begins with a prior knowledge assessment on responsive circles. The staff then participates in the interactive slideshow presentation. The staff answers discussion questions throughout the slideshow and practices step by step how to implement an effective and meaningful responsive circle. Vaandering (2014) described how the circle process is essential for staff development on restorative justice, because it allows everyone to have a voice in the discussion and share their perspective. Vaandering (2014) went on to explain how these circles should have rules and guidelines for how they proceed in order for everyone to feel safe and respected in the process. When teachers participate in the circle process, they are practicing a restorative justice strategy. At the end of the session, they fill out a summative assessment and have a discussion on what they learned. Lastly, the staff goes into their reflection.

Session four focuses on teaching the staff how to help students learn how to process and work through conflicts independently (Appendix D). This session focuses on how to give students the tools to express themselves productively and make amends for

things that have gone wrong. The slideshow for this session is interactive and has discussion questions for the staff to reflect, as well as giving them time to role play the making amends system. The session ends with a summative assessment and goal setting as in previous sessions.

Session five focuses on picture books that can be used to teach students how to resolve conflicts through the restorative justice framework (Appendix E). This session provides many useful resources to staff that could easily be implemented in the classroom. This session begins with a prior knowledge assessment and reflection. After this assessment, there is a slideshow presentation that describes a variety of picture books on restorative justice. There are points in the presentation where the staff is asked to pause and read some of these picture books and then discuss them. This session is interactive because the staff is constantly asked to discuss and reflect on what they are learning. In this session, the staff is given the chance to write their own restorative justice picture book as a group. This allows them to apply their knowledge on restorative justice picture books to their own work. This session ends with a summative assessment, discussion and goal setting for the next session.

Session six focuses on the benefits of restorative justice practices in schools and on reflection (Appendix F). This section touches on how restorative justice practices can help build relationships and create equity in the classroom. This is the final session of the professional development series. This session begins with a prior knowledge assessment. It then goes into the slideshow presentation which describes the benefits of restorative justice. This session includes discussion questions and prompts for the teachers to reflect. It ends with a summative assessment and goal setting time.

This professional development series is complementary to Schon's theory, which states that for teachers to learn in a professional development, there must be reflection in action and reflection on action (Kaiser, 2017). Through role playing, teachers are asked to use reflection in action and through the discussion the teachers reflect on their action.

Setting

This professional development series can take place in elementary, middle and high schools across the United States in both rural and urban settings. This staff development is important for any type of school, since there are conflicts at a variety of age levels that can be addressed through the restorative justice framework. Any school staff could benefit from learning how to use the restorative justice framework.

Intended Audience

The intended audience for this project includes elementary, middle, and high school staff such as teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, or anyone else in the school setting that may come into contact with challenging behavior or conflicts involving students. Although my staff development is targeted more toward elementary school staff, middle and high school staff could also benefit from this training. There are certain sessions that focus more on elementary school, such as session five which focuses on picture books that help students understand restorative justice. However, most of the information and training can be applied to a wide range of students in a variety of grade levels and settings.

Timeline

I began writing this capstone and planning this project in the summer of 2021. During the 2021-2022 school year, I continued my review of literature, observation, and

reflection on restorative justice practices in the classroom. In the summer of 2021, I decided that I wanted to do a professional development series. After extensive research on this topic, I found that teachers would benefit the most from interactive training when it comes to the topic of restorative justice. I originally wanted to create a website on this topic, but I found that creating a more interactive, people-oriented training would help the staff to apply restorative justice practices to real life situations. When the staff is given the chance to role-play, discuss, and reflect on situations with others, the learning will be more memorable. Most of this reading and project development took place over the course of my first year as a teacher, and had a significant impact on the way that I approached conflicts in my classroom. Over the spring of 2022, I worked on tying all of my research together to form my professional development series.

Assessment

There is a prior knowledge assessment and reflection before each session of the six session professional development series. The staff is expected to fill this out at the start of each session and then discuss their answers with the full group. At the end of each session, the staff will fill out an end of session assessment. This assessment asks similar questions, but focuses on the new information that the staff learned from the session. At the end of each session, the staff is asked to fill out a goal planning sheet where they focus on how to incorporate their new learning into their own work. They are also asked to further research the topics that were learned about in each session. This capstone project effectively answers the capstone question because it encourages staff to practice and use restorative justice practices in their own classrooms and reflect on the effectiveness of restorative justice practices.. It asks staff to discuss, reflect, and do their

own research on the topic of restorative justice. The assessments included in this project encourage staff to critically reflect on the ways that behavior and discipline are managed at their school.

Summary of Chapter Three

Chapter three provides an overview of my capstone project, which seeks to answer the question: *What are the most effective ways to implement restorative justice practices into elementary classrooms in order to create a positive learning community?*

This professional development implements the practices that make restorative justice strategies effective, such as reflection, discussion, and making amends. Chapter three describes the outline of my project, as well as literature that supports the decision to implement this type of project. This professional development series is important in order for teachers to learn how to respond to behavior through the restorative justice framework. It explains why teachers need interactive training and reflection to learn about restorative justice. This chapter goes on to explain the setting and intended audience, as well as the timeline for this project. Lastly, this chapter describes how data is assessed to explore the effectiveness of these professional development sessions.

Preview of Chapter Four

Chapter four describes what was learned through the capstone process. It revisits the literature review and describes what literature was most influential to this project. Chapter four explains the potential implications of this project as well as its limitations. It describes how this project will benefit the profession as a whole and my plan for how it will be used in the future.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

This capstone analyzed the question: *What are the most effective ways to implement restorative justice practices into elementary classrooms in order to create a positive learning community?* This chapter begins with a review of the literature that had a significant influence on this project. Next, this chapter describes the implications that this project could have within schools and outside of schools. Chapter four goes on to describe the limitations of this project, a personal reflection on the capstone process, and a description of how this research could be extended. This chapter ends with a summary.

This capstone was inspired by my experiences during elementary school and high school, as well as my time as a student teacher, substitute teacher, and third grade teacher. Throughout my time as a student, I came to realize how life-changing and impactful student suspensions, expulsions and other exclusions from class could be, and how these exclusions during elementary school often have lasting impacts throughout these students' lives. Because of this, I desired to help students work through conflicts without causing them to feel isolated or excluded. This capstone project allowed me to discover ways to teach students how to effectively address and resolve conflicts. This project also taught me how to communicate these strategies to educators and school staff. I learned the importance of active participation and plenty of reflection during the professional development process.

Review of Literature That Influenced This Capstone

There were several pieces of literature that greatly influenced this capstone project. One article that greatly impacted this project was called "Relational Restorative Justice in Educator Professional Development" by Vaandering from 2014. This article influenced the teaching style that I used in my professional development sessions. From this article, I learned that there are three key elements to a successful professional development session on restorative justice. These three elements are "(1) Participants engaging in a circle process, (2) themes of relationships rippling out from the view of human beings as worthy and relational, and (3) a small card with relational reflection questions" (Vaandering, 2014, p. 519). Throughout my professional development sessions, I include plenty of time for reflection. The staff is given the chance to reflect verbally through discussion, and also complete written reflections. The staff completes goal setting exercises that allow them to apply their learning to their work. All of the discussions take place in a circle to create an environment that is focused on openness and building relationships. This article influenced my decision to include time for role playing in a variety of situations where restorative justice would be useful.

Another article that had a huge impact on my project was titled "The Intergenerational Stability of Punishment: Paternal Incarceration and Suspension or Expulsion in Elementary Schools" which was written by Jacobsen in 2019. This article talks about the generational effects of zero tolerance policies. This gave me an understanding of how the discipline policies implemented in elementary schools can impact their futures and even how their children are treated. This article taught me the depths of the impacts that punishments have in schools and how it can create a cycle of

inequality that is hard to break. In this article, it is explained how “children whose fathers were incarcerated after their first birthday and before first grade are more likely than other children to be suspended or expelled by age 9 (Jacobsen, 2019, p. 671). This article made me realize the seriousness of the connection between incarceration and zero tolerance policies used in schools.

Implications of this Project

This professional development series is split into six sessions that each offer a unique perspective on how to help teachers implement restorative justice practices into their classrooms. This project could have long term impacts on the ways that teachers and students communicate with each other across elementary, middle, and high schools around the country. This project could have positive impacts on the relationships that are built in schools and it could help to build trust between students and teachers. Students need adults who can help them work through conflicts with patience, compassion, and understanding.

Limitations of this Project

One limitation of this project is that I am only just beginning my teaching career. Therefore, I have had less time to make connections between my career and my research. I worked on this project throughout my first year as a teacher. I found that as I progressed through my first year of teaching, I continued to make more connections between my research and situations that arose in my classroom. When a conflict happened in my classroom, I began to think of more questions I could ask and answer for this project. This is why I believe that my limited teaching experience could be a limitation of this project. I believe that having more teaching experience could have given me more ideas about questions to research.

One of the biggest challenges of this project involved finding concrete information for the literature review. It was difficult to find concrete information on restorative justice interventions and how they had been used in schools. Another challenge involved finding examples of professional development on the topic of restorative justice. The lack of information made the process of completing the literature review a very long and challenging one. Because there was a lack of information on professional development sessions done on restorative justice, this made it challenging to come up with my own professional development series. I also felt that I was dealing with limited literature on the topic of restorative justice interventions in schools. In many of the articles, there was vague or general information on what restorative justice practices were, but there was limited information on the specifics of these practices and their effects. Restorative justice is still a relatively new concept in schools. There was a lot of data on zero tolerance policies but there was little numerical data on the impacts of restorative justice practices. I am curious whether it will be easier to find data on this topic in the future. Currently, it is still challenging to find data describing the impacts of restorative justice.

Reflection on the Capstone Process

Throughout my experiences in school to become an educator, I found that there was little taught about how to manage behavior and work through conflicts in the classroom. My classes went into depth about how to teach all of the academic subjects such as math, reading, writing, social studies, science, etc, but there was limited information about how to help students who are struggling with conflicts with their peers. As I gained more teaching experience during student teaching, I found that I wanted to

learn about how to productively manage disruptive behaviors and help students resolve conflicts. I hope that this project can help fill in the blanks for staff on how to help students use restorative justice methods. When I first began teaching, I remember asking other teachers and staff for advice on behavior management. I received a lot of great advice, but everyone seemed to have their own opinion on how to resolve different issues in the classroom. Sometimes the advice would resonate with me and other times it would go against what I believed was productive. Because of all the differing advice, I decided that I would like to research these things for myself.

This project was developed during a very formative time of my teaching career. When I began this process, I had just finished student teaching in a kindergarten classroom. When this project was completed, I was approaching the end of my first year as a third grade teacher. This project helped prepare me to mediate conflicts in my own classroom and become more reflective on how I manage disruptive behavior. Through the creation of this project, I learned a lot about restorative justice practices and their impacts. The project has the potential to make a difference in the teaching profession because it can help teachers understand how to resolve conflicts and manage disruptions in their classrooms in a way that benefits the relationships in the classroom. This project will provide staff with the resources they need to learn about restorative justice and implement these practices in their classrooms.

Further Research

In the future, I would hope that restorative justice practices become widespread in schools. If this happens, I would like to research the ways that these practices impact the school to prison pipeline and generational inequality. School staff need to have the

training provided to them on how to help students work through challenging things in their lives. They need to be able to reflect and practice how they will respond to students when challenging behaviors come up so that they do not push students out of schools. Over time, if staff is trained on restorative justice and it becomes widespread in schools, I would be interested in researching the impacts of those policies.

Indigenous uses of restorative justice is another topic that I would be interested in researching further. From my review of literature, I found that indigenous views of justice have had such an enormous impact on the restorative justice movement today. I am interested in finding more examples of how restorative justice is used in their communities and schools, and how it differs depending on the indigenous community.

Summary

When restorative justice practices are used in schools, equitable, positive, and safe learning communities are created. Restorative justice practices help to create strong relationships between students and teachers, and they help everyone to productively work through conflicts and make amends. School staff must be taught different methods for using restorative justice in their classrooms, which is why ongoing professional development sessions on this topic are so beneficial. Teachers need this time for discussion and reflection on their current behavior management strategies and changes they could make in the future.

This capstone sought to answer the question: *What are the most effective ways to implement restorative justice practices into elementary classrooms in order to create a positive learning community?* Chapter four helped to answer this question by reviewing the literature that was influential to this project, as well as examining the implications

that this project could have for students, educators and everyone else. This capstone included the limitations of this project, as well as my own personal reflection of the capstone process. I hope that my capstone project can be used in schools across the country to teach school staff about restorative justice and use it to help their own students. Over time, the rewards of the restorative justice framework in schools will extend past school walls. As staff use this professional development series, they will learn how to face their own biases and reflect on their own behavior management plans which will cause long lasting changes to our education system.

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