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Students Writing Restorative Justice

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by

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Introduction

Rationale

My passion for the performing arts and commitment to social justice brings me to this work. My research question is: *How can student-written lessons establish a culture of Critical Ethnic Studies and Restorative Practices in a middle and high school?* My project proposal is creating a curriculum in which students will create their own lessons about restorative practices that they will teach to staff and students. This unit will fit within a semester-long course in Critical Ethnic Studies. The units I will overview include: an introductory unit on Identity & Community Building, a model activism project where students teach restorative practices to their homeroom, and a Student Activism unit where students identify a systemic problem and make a plan for action within their own school community. My guiding questions are: *How do we create a cultural shift within a school toward restorative practices? How do we create a structure for students to take leadership in restorative practices? How do we first ensure the safety of those who are most vulnerable and marginalized? What does accountability look like while maintaining relationships?* And finally, *As a performing arts teacher, how can I work with students to create a curriculum rooted in love and justice?*

In this chapter, I will review the personal significance of the performing arts and theater for social change that led me to these questions about the place of restorative practices in public schooling. I will describe my teaching experience as a Theater and Literacy teacher at a small public school, grades 6-12, in an urban setting. I will explore the need for the intentional development of a culture of restorative justice within schools.

Lastly, I will outline my project proposal for curriculum in a Critical Ethnic Studies class in which students will focus on exploring community and identity in the introductory unit, practice activism in action through lessons on restorative practices, and finally engage in an activism unit where they cultivate their own actions towards social change.

Context

A love for justice runs in my family. According to my family's stories, my great-grandmother, Lidia Moraga Ortuzar, was one of the first female magistrates to work in a court in Santiago, Chile, in the 1940's. My father, who immigrated to the US as a child, worked his way through law school to graduate in 1987 from University of San Francisco, just six months after I was born. My family cares deeply about justice and systemic change, though our ideas about how to achieve it have varied greatly.

I am writing this in the winter of 2022, almost two years to the date of when the COVID pandemic reached Minnesota, a year and a half after the uprisings in Minneapolis, five miles from where George Floyd was murdered by the Minneapolis Police Department. I'm writing this in a time when our cities have been through a period of deep isolation and scarcity, and of deep collective grief and rage. It is clear, as shown by both national and international protests, that the justice system is broken, and that we need to break down old models that were rooted in white supremacist ideologies. It is the time to commit to uplifting changes that will make the world a safer and more just place, specifically for people Black, Native American or Indigenous peoples, and for all people of color.

My passion for arts and activism came from my experiences growing up. As a kid, I was a very intense, angry person who had a lot of energy and emotions. I grew up

in a low-income neighborhood in an otherwise very wealthy part of the Bay Area in California. This made me aware of the inequities of the school system, and conscious of how behavior was often a reflection of a student's needs and home life. After-school-theater was a fun way for me to relax after a day of classes. My middle school drama teacher, Ms. Mirtoni, gave me a space where I could play and act and be expressive, and, most importantly, a group of people I belonged with. The freedom to escape and create as a twelve year old was really powerful, and it stuck with me.

As a young adult, I loved the arc of creating a play, and focused on writing, directing, and stage managing. Over time, I became interested in theater that told current stories. I helped form a feminist theatre company, and created and curated five years of feminist comedy shows. During this time, I often worked with high school students by directing after school plays or as a teaching artist. At some point I realized that I wanted to teach classes during the day to help build a strong arts program.

In 2014, I accepted a part time job at a small school in a large urban district, where I ran an after-school theater program and taught one class during the day. I quickly realized that my idealized version of a high school theater class wasn't what most students needed; most people need to feel safe being creative before they are even willing to risk acting in front of peers. I also saw how many students of color were marginalized within the school system and knew I needed to unlearn so much of my own training. I decided to get my teaching license and started looking for training in social justice through the arts.

As I began to visit social justice theatre classes, I found other teachers who led spaces that were energetic, active, and engaging. Students were always moving, talking,

connecting, and authentically sharing about their own experiences. I began to recognize the history of Black Box theatre programs that ran deep in the community. As a student teacher, I was able to learn from one of these programs. Student teaching with Ms. R was like getting into the fast lane; her sense of urgency and vision was like an engine running her program. Her curriculum centered students as creative writers, actors, and activists. She taught me the importance of strong rituals and routines that create a container for students to feel safe. She showed me how to spiral a curriculum so students build on their past knowledge and expand on it with each year. With students as young as nine years old, she taught them how to speak up clearly about issues that matter to them. As a multiracial woman herself, Ms. R encouraged me to explore how I speak about my own identity as a biracial Latine/White woman. This encouragement and experience had an enormous impact on me because in my time as a student and a teacher, I had not found a safe space in school to explicitly name and discuss my own racialized experiences. My time working in Ms. R's classroom taught me that the only way to do work for social change with students is to commit to doing the work yourself.

When I began teaching full time, my schedule required me to toggle between Theater and Literacy classes. While I felt competent in my Theater classes and their direction, I felt lost when it came to Literacy. Without a license in Literacy support, I did not trust my own skills to support struggling readers. Instead, I pulled lessons from past teachers, district coaches, and the internet. At first, nothing seemed joyful in these classes and the students felt frustrated at being in a support class. The longer I stayed, however, the more I developed relationships with the students. The more I tracked students' progress over years, the more I could see how students who struggled with reading often

struggled with the systems of school overall. As my middle school Literacy students became high schoolers, I would see them struggle in classes where they didn't comprehend the reading, and would act out to avoid embarrassment. But the behavior that had been passable as middle schoolers turned into suspensions by high school, or more often than not students failing and quietly dropping out. This understanding led me to focus on how to improve the systems within our school, and more specifically, what behavior management systems we used and how effective, ineffective, or even how harmful they were.

At my current school, one of the primary goals is to teach Social Emotional Learning (SEL). All students participate in a daily class called Crew; a multiage 6th-12th grade homeroom that focuses on Social Emotional Learning. The school values relationships as a central part of teaching and learning, includes family perspectives, and has many systems in place that support a restorative mindset. But I noticed that the collective, school-wide response to behavior management varies greatly. One factor in this is that the Vice Principal position has transitioned five times in the past seven years, including one year where the school just didn't have one at all. Instead of a Vice Principal the school had a behavior specialist position, and a Restore Room staffed with students as peer counselors. However, there were not clear schoolwide expectations of how this system would repair harm. Without clearly instituted policies to address conflicts outside of the classroom, students and staff would return the next day with the issues still lingering. In fall of 2019 I joined the school's leadership team with the hope of creating clear, equitable behavior expectations for the school. But by March of 2020, the universe decided it had other plans.

Like schools around the country, in March of 2020, our district closed all its schools and learning centers in order to stem the rampant infection rates of COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic, we saw the stress of deep isolation and the toll it took on students. Rather than the behavior issues teachers saw in the classroom, online teaching meant we had the issue of struggling to stay connected to students. Even in a district with a one-to-one technology available, even with the ability to send out hotspots and work with the city to negotiate WiFi availability, many students simply disappeared. Some students had moved without us knowing, some struggled too much to attend regular online classes, and many older students chose to work instead. For the students we could connect with, it became clear that learning without being present together took a strain on the student's mental health. All the strains we saw on our students were clear indicators of the strains on our society; the impacts of systemic racism, low wages, unaffordable housing, and a lack of supportive healthcare system left too many people without the resources they needed. In May of 2020, we saw this strain on society reach a breaking point.

On May 25th, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by the Minneapolis Police Department. During the uprisings in Minneapolis in the summer of 2020, we saw a swell of rage held back for too long. The pain of watching yet another black man die in the streets at the hands of police was not bearable. As peaceful protests were met with violent police and military responses, it became clear to many that both here and around the world that our policing systems were broken and needed to be changed. Things I remember vividly that summer included watching the flames of the police station burn from our house, the tanks rolling down our streets, the neighbors coming together to

protect communities of color from white supremacist attacks. I also saw my own neighbors begin to emulate the police mentality, fearful of every stranger passing through in the dark. It left me with the questions, "How do we abolish the mentality of policing within ourselves? How do we abolish the school to prison pipeline within our own schools? How do we refuse the model of policing in our own behavior management systems?"

I found some of the answers to these questions in classrooms and in working students and with artists. In the Spring of 2021, we began to partially return to in-person learning after a year of distance learning. As part of the city library's programming in the school, my Intermediate Acting class was able to work with a local organization that aims to create safe space for students of color, and specifically for youth who have been through the foster care system. They used trauma-informed training to teach young people self-regulation skills, which they then teach to others. The lessons this group taught were a series of hybrid workshops, with workshop leaders and half of my students attending virtually through Google Meets, and half of my students present in the classroom. Together, we worked through trauma-informed practices of self-care and artistic self-expression. The workshop leaders were able to give students space in class to be vulnerable but safe. Their methods of de-escalation and community building are the practices we need to open students up to having the difficult conversations that restorative circles ask of us.

Teachers across the country have shared that the 21-22 school year was one of the most difficult years of teaching yet. With higher levels of trauma than ever, students and staff had more emotional and behavioral needs than ever. That year alone, I saw more

fights, more instances of harassment, and even more confusion about how to respond than ever before. In our own school, we had a new Behavior Specialist who was trained in offering restorative circles. Nonetheless, few staff and students were aware of how the systems of restorative circles work. Even when students were offered a restorative circle, they were unclear on what the restorative process is and avoided it; unprocessed feelings often led to more frustrations and resentments.

The desire to use my arts skills to make systemic change has never been stronger. Schools are at a breaking point, and the practices of restorative justice and the cultural shift that comes with them are the best solutions. As a Literacy teacher, I worked with students who struggle with the systemic problems within a school. I believe that the students who struggle most within a system are often the best equipped to identify the problems in the system and make the changes needed. And while Crew is a powerful space for social emotional work, there can be difficulty implementing lessons across all staff. Lessons created by a few teachers helps lighten others' workload, but also puts other teachers in a difficult position of teaching what they don't know or haven't experienced. I believe that if a cultural shift in restorative practices could come through an active exploration and students must lead the way.

In this capstone project, I wrote lessons based in arts literacy and theater for social change, and will deliver them to students in a Critical Ethinic Studies (CES) class. Students will then use the knowledge they gain in CES to create activism projects to make change in their own community. Students will examine a model activism unit in which they take the lead on restorative practices within the school. Through these lessons, students will write Professional Development (PD) to be shared with the staff

and curriculum on restorative practices to be taught to students in Crew. My hope is that these lessons will meet two goals. First, that I create a classroom environment where all students, especially students of color, feel safe and supported. Second, I hope these lessons will help the school shift away from a punitive system and towards a trauma informed and restorative system of behavior management. Finally, I aim to create a space for students to take leadership roles within the school community to identify the need for systemic change and are empowered to take action to make that change.

Summary

In my Introduction, I reviewed the personal significance of the performing arts and theater for social change that led me to these questions about the place of restorative practices in public schooling. I described my teaching experience as a Theater and Literacy teacher at a small public school, and the training and experiences that shaped my lense. I explored the need for the intentional development of a culture of restorative practices within schools, and the community context of this work. Last, I gave a brief overview of the project units, and the goals I hope to achieve through this work. In the following chapters, I will outline my project and the research supporting it.

In Chapter Two I will outline the current literature on this topic. This will include a review of how to best implement a restorative practices program within the school, ways to support student leadership, and the theory behind the practice of an active, theatre arts-based classroom. In Chapter Three I will outline my project proposal for two units within a Critical Ethnic Studies class, an identity unit and an activism unit. In Chapter Four I will discuss the plans to implement the project and reflect on my learning, including the ways the project developed over time and its next steps

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that

field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of

ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face

reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to

transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (hooks,1994, p.207)

The need for systemic change has never been stronger. Schools are at a breaking point,

and the practices of restorative justice and the cultural shift that comes with them are

powerful solutions. As a Literacy teacher, I have worked with students who struggle with

the systemic problems within a school's behavioral system. I believe that the students

who struggle most within a system are often the best equipped to identify the problems in

the system and make the changes needed. In the project I propose, students will need to

transgress, as hooks suggests, the limits of the current behavior systems and imagine a

school with restorative practices in which they feel valued, respected, and witnessed.

In this section, we will review the research behind creating student written lessons

to implement restorative practices and restorative circles. It will support the research

question: *How can student-written lessons establish a culture of restorative practices in a*

middle and high school? Themes and topics that will be explored include: Restorative

Practices in K-12 schools, Social Emotional Learning, Student Written Lessons, Theater

for Social Change.

Restorative Justice in K-12 Schools

Best Restorative Practices

In this section I review best practices for developing a Restorative Justice program, with particular attention paid to the current guidelines within my district and state. First, it is important to make the distinction between the terms *restorative justice* and *restorative practices*. According to the Institute for Restorative Practices, Restorative Justice is a term used in the legal system, and defined as a response to a crime (Waschel, 2016). A crime or wrongdoing is addressed by a restorative meeting between the victim, offenders, and impacted community to share the impact of the event and discuss how to repair the harm (McCold, 2003). In *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community*, Boyes-Watson and Pranis describe restorative practices as "discipline with respect", in which they define the teacher's role as, "to help them (students) understand why a behavior is wrong and help them choose better behavior in the future" (p. 404). This varies from the term "punitive discipline", where harm has been done, and the solution focuses solely on punishing the offender based on breaking a rule. Instead, restorative practices are preventative, they are the structures and daily habits that build community which help prevent conflict or wrongdoing. According to Riestenberg, "In education, circles and groups provide opportunities for students to share their feelings, build relationships and solve problems, and when there is wrongdoing, to play an active role in addressing the wrong and making things right" (2002). Restorative practices are a form of Social-Emotional Learning that encourages students to connect with themselves and others with emotional intelligence, and relies on these relationships to address harm.

For the purposes of this paper, I will primarily use the term *restorative practices* since this is the preferred term used within my district. However, in her article "The Struggle to Ensure that Restorative Justice is Transformative," Anita Wadhwa notes that many in the educational settings prefer to use the term restorative practices to a detrimental end: "…Focusing only on *practices* such as circles, rather than the *philosophy* of promoting justice, allows leaders to bypass fundamental conversations about power—conversations that are needed to address and end racially disproportionate patterns of discipline, Eurocentric curriculum, and tracking, among other issues" (Wadhwa, 329). Thus, the term *restorative justice* will be used in this paper when referring to the philosophy behind these practices.

The basics of restorative practices are habits and mindsets where each member of the community is valued. The core values listed on the school district's website, *Restorative Practices*, include the following:

- Everyone in the school community is good, wise and powerful.

- We are all connected to one another.

- All of us want to be in good, healthy relationships with others.

- We all have talents and gifts we bring to school.

- It takes time, habits and support to build and maintain positive relationships

The daily habits of restorative practices are often thought of as best practices in teaching, such as creating a welcoming classroom environment and creating class agreements with students. Teachers might invite students to share their prior knowledge on a topic in ways that affirm their identity, or offer students a way to check-in to take the temperature of the

classroom climate (Boyes-Watson and Pranis, 2015). It also relies on developing empathy and active listening, and considering others perspectives. According to the Minnesota Department of Education (2022) *Practices of a Restorative School*, "Empathy is taught, modeled and reinforced, primarily through listening and speaking, using "I" statements that express feeling." This type of active listening and taking accountability for feelings helps students and teachers to communicate effectively, especially when there are moments of harm or upset.

When harm is done, the circle becomes a space for the community to come together to address the harm, with the goal of restoring all parties to the school community. The basic elements of constructing a circle are laid out in Boyes Watson and Pranis (pp.28-33). First, there are the elements of the space itself. It is essential to seat all the participants in a circle, preferably without any tables, so that all participants are equal and open to the process. There may be a *centerpiece* placed in the middle of the circle, items that the participants bring to ground themselves. Next there is a *talking piece,* an item that indicates who is speaking at any given moment. Within the timeline of a circle, the following steps are taken:

Mindfulness moment: a moment to ground and be present

Opening ceremony: a small ritual, such as movement, breathing techniques, or a reading that invites participants to be connected to the group.

Identifying values: participants name what is important to them or their values.

Generating guidelines: participants agree how they will conduct themselves.

Guiding questions: prompts that focus on sharing stories and personal experiences

Agreements: Decisions made by consensus about next steps for participants

Closing ceremonies: A way to end the experience through connection

(Boyes Watson and Pranis, 2015, pp.28-33)

The key elements of restorative practices include acknowledging all participants in a classroom are valuable, engaging students as members of the community, and providing a safe and supportive structure to repair harm in restorative circles (Waschel, 2016). Circle practices are an intentional way of affirming the value of everyone's perspective in a situation, while challenging each member to take accountability for their own actions and feelings. The goal of a circle is to make participants aware of each other's experiences, and allow for harm to be repaired through authentic listening and dialogue (Boyes Watson and Pranis, 2015).

While many schools have attempted and successfully integrated restorative practices into their work, not all programs are able to continue or grow. If restorative practices have been attempted before within a school, what will make them work well now? The following section reviews the literature on ways that restorative programs struggle to take root, and offers findings on ways to set up the restorative process for success in a K-12 setting.

Past Training/ Implementation Methods

This section reviews literature that explores the successes and failures of implementing restorative practices and restorative circles in secondary schools. There are three key elements that can be detrimental to a program's success:

First, a lack of vertical collaboration between students, families, and staff leads key stakeholders left out of the process. Shifting the process of implementation from a

top down approach to a collaborative community based approach is essential for the

success of a restorative program. Second, programs fail because people do not take time

to clarify the structures around the restorative process (Lyubansky, 2021). In the

beginning it is important to identify and allocate the resources of time, space, personnel,

and any resources that will support the restorative work. Last, programs cannot be

successful if there is a failure to root restorative practices in racial justice work (Darling,

2019). Naming why a school is bringing in restorative practices, especially in light of the

history of racial injustice in the school discipline and prison systems, helps everyone

understand why the work is necessary and how they are part of the solution. Most

importantly, none of these factors offer success on their own. It is truly the "broader

constellation of cultural changes in a school community" of restorative practices that led

to a school considering a restorative program to be successful (Sandwick, Hahn, &

Ayoub, 2019, p.25). This section explores the nuances of case studies, overviews of

several programs, and guiding principles from literature on what makes a restorative

program thrive or suffer.

Vertical Collaboration or "Nothing for Us Without Us"

First, a key philosophical shift in restorative practices is that, "we treat each other

in respectful and ultimately sacred ways, because we see each person as part of the whole

and indispensable to it" (Pranis, Stuart, Wedge, 2003, p. 68). If restorative practices ask

us to consider each human as sacred and a valuable member of the community, then it is

necessary that the implementation of a restorative process welcomes in members of the

community as an indispensable part of the process.

Oftentimes, disciplinary policies in school ask the question, "What rule was broken? Who broke it?" and then address these issues with either punitive or exclusionary discipline. Restorative practices, however, emphasize relationships and repair of harm (Lyubansky, 2021). To do this, the planning phases must shift the process away from a top down approach to a communal approach, so that the process matches the end goal. If school leadership views a restorative circle as a "quick fix" or only addresses one area of the school—students, teachers, or School Resource Officers (SROs)—it runs the risk of not engaging with the core beliefs that make restorative justice function (Morgan, 2021). Truly implementing a restorative program asks school leadership to consider how they have a part to play in the process vs. leaning into founders syndrome, with a need to control the process. As a researcher, this reminds me that I hold only one part in this and it's not the key!

Restorative practices require a shift in process and a shift in power to be successful. In Lyubansky's (2021) article, he cites a lack of *vertical collaboration* between students, families, and staff. The article defines *vertical collaboration* as planning with the people this process is for, engaging students, families, staff, teachers, and administrators in imagining what the better version looks like. Essentially, the community helps to shape the program. Identifying who holds positional power within the group (such as race, gender, class, hierarchical power) is an important step because it challenges those with power to listen, and those without positional power to take up space. A collaborative process to determine new norms will need to take place, including both those with structural power (district & building administrators, some teachers) and those with informal power (students, parents, most teachers, staff).

Based on this research, I will propose a student-centered process, which then calls in families, Restorative Justice trainers in the community, staff, teachers, and administration for support. Placing students at the center of a slow shift towards incorporating restorative practices prioritizes the people the system will be made for, and gives power to those who often hold the least power within the system. Another benefit of a community driven process is that it avoids a common failure of the "departing founder". "When only one person is holding up the system, it's understandable that it would get destabilized when this person leaves" (Lubsky, 2021, p.43). Instead, by building a team who guides the decision making process, the system is not dependent on one person to sustain itself.

One key element in the development phase is not only including those who support a restorative approach, but also those who are skeptical of the program. While teachers can be some of a restorative programs greatest critics, Gilzene (2021) found that including staff in the process can lead to positive outcomes:

> There have been studies that show positive restorative justice outcomes are associated with comprehensive PD (Kane et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2011), which further emphasizes the importance of training. For this Mayworm et al. (2016), offers a solution; incorporating teacher consultation to enhance restorative justice PD in schools. Here, the authors propose a model where some teachers and in-school experts, either restorative justice facilitators or school psychologists, collaborate to deliver PD on restorative justice in a way that is responsive to teacher needs and concerns. (p. 57)

By bringing in people who are critical of restorative practices, everyone is better able to identify the needs and the weakness of the process. To clarify, *skeptics* may be a better term than *critics* in this case, because people who do not fundamentally believe that the current system is harmful will not see a need to change it. I explore this more fully in the third point about grounding the process in antiracist practices.

Allocating Resources or "How?"

Next, it is important to clarify the structures that will make a restorative process possible. How will a restorative program use space, time, personnel, and training resources? How will this be sustainable? What resources within the school will need to shift? How will participants let go of the old expectations? If there is not enough support (including teacher time, training, feedback, coaching, of staff, students, and family) a program will fail (Darling, 2019). Other times, a program can be launched successfully, but is not sustainable due to short term or under resourced funding initiatives. Any group launching a restorative program needs to give careful consideration to the *how*.

Restorative infrastructure includes elements of policies, personnel, space, time (Lyubansky, 2021). *Policies* include the philosophy of the program as they materialize in the student handbook or school rules. A group conversation around guidelines with a focus on rewriting the school's guidelines to align with restorative practices lays a foundation for clear expectations. *Space* refers to a dedicated room for circles to take place. In Gilzene's (2021) case study, it was found that students often avoided the restorative space because it was housed in the same area as the school's police presence (SROs), which made students feel unsafe. Thus, space for restorative work should be separate, private, and a place that students identify as safe. *Time* is perhaps the most

precious resource within the school system, and the most controversial resource in creating a restorative process. A restorative practices planning group should ask questions such as: When will these circles take place? What other classes or activities would students miss in order to ensure they happen? How will teachers and families take time off of other activities in order to participate? When will restorative facilitators be available? By allocating time for restorative circles to take place, participants will have clear expectations of how the process will impact their lives. *Personnel* include anyone who can help to facilitate a restorative process. This could include teachers, coaches, hall monitors, students, behavior specialists, or admin. Whoever will be part of a restorative process will need facilitation skills, training, practice, coaching and support. Lyubansky (2021) points out that,

> It is important for those who are creating the restorative system to answer these questions rather than relying on an external authority. This is because when issues arise (and they will) we are much more likely to make the necessary changes when we feel ownership of what we are doing. (p. 42)

Essentially, the system is planned by the people who will use it, so they are invested in maintaining the new system through difficult periods of growth. I believe that by mapping a spiral curriculum of training that involves growth over years and measures success in small increments, a program has a greater chance of survival.

Actively Antiracist or "Why?"

The last and most important element that leads to a failed implementation of a restorative program is not clearly rooting the process in racial justice. A group that implements a restorative process must name the systemic issues of racial injustice they

seek to correct. According to Darling in her 2019 article,"the findings showed that without acknowledging the dominant punitive culture in schools and identifying restorative justice practices as an alternative culture to interrupt the criminalization and exclusion of students, restorative trainings are not actively working towards systemic change" (p.5).

The norm of police in schools (School Resource Officers) or policies of suspension and expulsion came into practice most strongly in the 1980's in response to the "War on Drugs" and the 1990's in response to school shootings (Gilzene, 2021). These policies failed to take into account the racial bias of those in power, including police, SRO's, staff, teachers, and admin. Studies have shown that with the presence of policing in schools and punitive policies, black students face higher rates of suspensions and expulsions, and are more likely to be incarcerated than their white peers. As Figure 1 suggests, Black students were suspended at three times the rate of their White peers.

Figure 1

Percentage of students in public schools receiving out-of-school suspensions by race/ethnicity, most current data available from the 2013-14 school year.
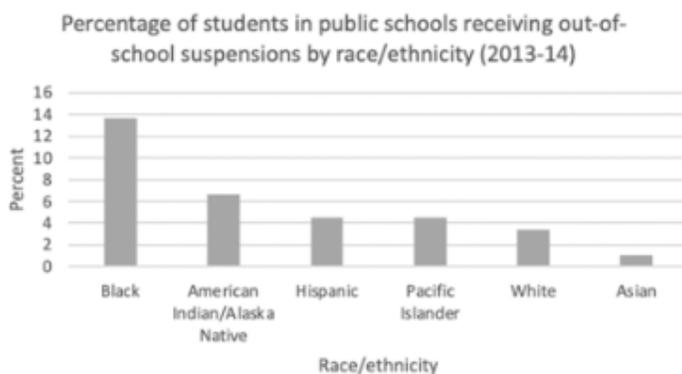
Notes. Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2019).

Out of school suspensions both contribute to loss of learning time, which results in more

academic failure, and researchers have found that out-of-school suspension doubles the probability of arrest (Morgan, 2021, p.2). Thus, the exclusionary forms of discipline often leave students of color, particularly Black students, in a more dangerous situation than the harm it is trying to prevent.

When we begin with addressing student concerns and centering student experiences, all stakeholders are better able to participate in the process. Darling (2019) finds that, "When the need for Restorative Justice Practices is contextualized by social justice issues impacting students, educators have a better chance of sustaining the practice. They can see themselves as part of a restorative social justice solution that will help interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline for their students" (p.144). Teachers are more successful when they are able to identify why and how current disciplinary systems impact student experiences. The process is more effective when all involved in the restorative process consider, "How does this fit into the larger struggle against systemic racism?" and "How do these issues impact my community/ students/ myself directly?"

Finally, willingness to self-reflect on our individual biases and role in supporting systemic racism is essential in order to bring about a restorative program. Gilenze draws the conclusion that, "...school leaders must be prepared to critically interrogate their own school's practices within a broader context of systemic racism" (Demathews et al, 2017, p.56). Without engaging the staff, students, and families in discussion around the relationship between race and discipline on a school wide level, programs that launch into restorative work do not have a clear guiding purpose. The willingness to do the reflective work necessary for restorative practices only comes from a clearly stated problem, and the call to action that everyone has the power to be part of the solution.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this section of the literature review is that if a restorative program is started from a top-down approach without clearly identifying the goal of racial justice or considering the details of implementation, it becomes ineffective. Three key takeaways to make a successful restorative program include:

- Building a team of students, staff, families, restorative practitioners, and admin who work together to guide the decision making process when implementing a restorative program.

- Mapping a spiral curriculum of training that involves growth over years and measures success in small increments, and carefully considers how resources of time, space, policy, and personnel will be used in a restorative program.

- Identifying and investigating the racial biases present within a current school's system, and creating space for all involved in the process to examine their own role in upholding racial injustice so they may dismantle it.

Social Emotional Learning

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is defined as, "...Programming (that) fosters students' social-emotional development through establishing safe, caring learning environments involving peer and family initiatives, improved classroom management and teaching practices, and whole-school community-building activities." (Durlak,Weissberg, Dymnicki, et al. 2011, p. 405). It is learning that focuses on a student's emotional intelligence and interpersonal relationships. SEL is often explicit

instruction on social elements that are left unspoken. It also teaches students how to build relationships and community connections within a classroom, and that these connections are an integral part of learning.

In Social Emotional Learning, "learning academic skills does not occur outside of learning social and emotional skills" (Jones and Kahn, 2017). As a part of the Expeditionary Learning school network, the structure and philosophy of our SEL lessons come from the idea of Crew. Crew is a version of homeroom in which students meet daily and engage in SEL lessons (Berger, Vilen, & Woodfin, 2000). Crew meetings take place in a circle, and are taught how to learn about elements of character, and to value the relationships. This would be the setting in which explicit lessons around restorative circles would be taught.

The challenge of any social emotional learning program is that it will positions elements of White culture as the standard, thus excluding the knowledge, values and beliefs of students from any other racial background; thus there is a deep need to root any SEL work in anti-racist practices (Mayes, Pianta, Oglesby, Zyromskl, 2022, pp.179-180).

Student Written Lessons

Students who struggle most within a system are often the best equipped to identify the problems in the system and then transgress the limits of the classroom and work towards systemic change needed (hooks, 1994). Studies find that when students are at the center of creating a restorative system, it is more effective because it directly reflects the needs of those students (Darling, 2019).

The school I teach in is part of Expeditionary Learning, a network of schools that promotes project based learning. One of its core texts is *Leaders of Their Own Learning*,

which challenges educators to put the process of evaluating work back into the hands of students (Berger, Rugen,Woodfin, 2014). How *do we* encourage students to become leaders of their own learning? A cornerstone of the school's philosophy is how we promote student leadership and meaningful, real world learning. One of my guiding questions for my curriculum capstone is, *How do we create a structure for students to take leadership in restorative practices?*

Curriculum in these units are based on Emdin's model of the Cogen, a method in which he meets regularly with students to gain feedback on curriculum. The Cogen prepares students to take on the role of co-teacher of the content. Student written lessons are created through a cogenerative dialogue between teacher and student to review content for relevancy, and then a teacher collaboration with the student to co-teach lessons (Emdin, 2016). This method allows students to bring their own cultural lense to restorative practices. It will also create a model where students, teachers, and staff collaborate to introduce restorative practices to each Crew.

Methods like the Gradual Release Models provide a framework for how to plan curriculum that leads to student leadership (Plaut, 2009). Part of the lessons that I will develop are also based on Denton & Kriete's Responsive Classroom Model found in *The First Six Weeks of School* (2000), which emphasizes establishing rituals and routines that lead to student independence in the learning environment. Because of the school's connection with the Expeditionary Learning network, there are models available for how to include restorative practices and student leadership into a crew setting (Berger, Vilen, and Woodfin, 2020). This model for student leadership includes templates for examining conflict resolution skills, peer mentoring, and students taking on a teaching role within

the school. By examining video examples of students in a conflict circle, students will be able to see how they are able to take on leadership models in a similar style.

The research shows that restorative programs that center the needs of students, particularly students who have gone through the school's behavior programs, have a higher rate of success (Darling, 2019). One of the key ways to provide students with leadership is to collaborate with a teacher to create curriculum that they deliver to other students. Emdin's Cogen model provides an example of how to provide students with the structure to give feedback to make curriculum culturally relevant and engaging to them. It also clarifies how students can become leaders of their own learning by planning and delivering lessons to other students in a co-teacher role. (Emdin, 2016). Students in an Expeditionary Learning school can rely on the model of the Crew lesson, and the work of Berger, Vilen, and Woodfin to provide examples of how to incorporate restorative practices into Crew. The research in this section provides much of the support needed for my research question, *How can student-written lessons establish a culture of restorative practices in a middle and high school?* Schools have used student-created lessons to teach restorative practices before, and there are a variety of structures to support students taking ownership of their work. The final element that I will explore is, *As a performing arts teacher, how can I work with students to create a curriculum rooted in love and justice?*

Theatre Arts for Social Change as Model

Theatre is an effective tool and model for engaging in restorative practices. Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* brought forth the concept of Forum Theatre, which asks the question, how can you act out an injustice and then talk through the ways to make it

right? (Boal, 1985). His model of using performance as a tool to empower people to create their own definition of justice has become a standard for correctional and school settings as a way to explore restorative justice (Burton and O'Toole, 2005; Turner, 2007). Theatre of the Oppressed has been used in correctional settings before, particularly as a way to provide young people an opportunity to make amends. The program, Making Amends, "affords groups of local young offenders the opportunity to play back their collective stories and experiences in a theatrical fiction that is interrupted by the offenders making their own personal statements of reparation for the offenses for which they were convicted" (Tuner, 2007, p. 179). By allowing young offenders to re-play the moment of their offense and explore alternate options, make apologies, and consider how to make reparations, the program employs the skills of theatre of the oppressed to cultivate the skills needed for restorative justice. In Burton's research, he found that students in a peer-mentoring program who used Forum theatre as a way to engage younger students in discussion around issues like bullying to be highly effective (Burton, 2011). Older students would learn about conflict management and bullying, use Forum Theatre techniques to create scenes about these topics, and then work as peer-teachers in classrooms with younger students to explore bullying through these participatory scenes (p.49) Both peer mentors and the younger students who participated in this program reported positive outcomes in questionnaires data and interviews (p. 49).

Both of these examples highlight how the dramatic imagination is useful in allowing young people to envision a more just and restorative reality. The backbone of Theatre of the Oppressed is the participants ability to be empowered to think critically in a restorative framework. When young people explore difficult topics in the safe space of

an improvised exploration, they feel they are able to re-address these issues in a real life setting (Burton, 2011, p.51). In the next section, I explore programs that have used Boal's techniques as a way to create original theatre around social issues. I will examine how the model for these ensembles is a viable model for a group of students who help build a restorative program in a secondary school setting.

Performing arts practices provide a variety of tools that support the social emotional learning necessary for restorative practitioners: it encourages daily use of the circle, games to build trust, cites the body as the source of knowledge (essential for trauma informed work), and it is about building community in order to address difficult topics (Madell, J. & Wolf, J., 2003; Rhod, M., 1998). The knowledge I will be able to bring as a theatre practitioner and educator will make this work possible. Mandell and Wolf describe the structure of creating original performance around social issues as a form that supports student learning. This structure for building a creative ensemble moves through five stages of learning:

1. "Using the receptive mind

2. Becoming a productive member of an ensemble

3. Creating original work

4. Using the rehearsal process

5. Performing what has been created" (2003, p. 1).

The process includes together as a group, exploring a topic through creative writing and movement, rehearsals to refine the work, and performance or sharing with an audience. This process allows students to become receptive to new information, build trust to connect with each other, and explore difficult subjects within a safe space.

Similarly, Rohd (1998) views his process of creation to flow from warmups (similar to the receptive mind) into trust work. Trust work can include games like Find Your Mother Like a Little Penguin, where you memorize a partner's sound, and then must find them with your eyes closed amongst the group (p.37). There are also activities like Storytelling, in which participants simply share a story with the other person. While early storytelling topics are aimed at building trust and discovering similarities, later versions of this game open the door to explore more difficult topics that the group may be writing about (pp.44-45).While early topics are aimed at building trust and discovering similarities, later versions of this game open the door to explore more difficult topics that the group may be writing about. This mirrors the restorative circle process where participants share their values to find common ground, and then answer more specific guiding questions to share their own stories and perspectives on the events that brought them together (Boyes-Watson and Pranis, 2015, pp.31-32) The tools that theatre ensembles use to build trust provide an active, engaging model to build the skills needed for students to learn and then take ownership of restorative practices.

Finally, methods like the Arts Literacy model Landay and Wooton in *A Reason to Read*, which take students through the creative process of analyzing a mentor text and creating original performance content, are a strong model for how to structure a course where students write and create original lessons. Arts Literacy is a term used to describe the knowledge and understanding needed in order to create original content in any artistic medium: "The framework identifies four fundamental 'creative practices' for the arts: imagination, investigation, construction, reflection" (Robelen, 2013, p.1) Figure two below represents their model of the performance cycle, in which students build

community, focus on comprehension of a text, and then go through the process of creating and presenting their original work.

Figure 2 - *The Performance Cycle*

Note. The Arts Literacy Performance Cycle (Landay and Wooton, 2012).

This performance cycle, based in both the creative cycle of original performance and the process of literary analysis, is a clear structure for a course in which students learn about restorative practices and then create and present their own lessons on a similar topic.

In this section, I reviewed the connection between theatre and restorative practices. Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* created the model for using performance in a restorative context (1985). By allowing the oppressed person to re-examine an injustice and role-play the scenario back, he demonstrated how people can both imagine and embody restorative justice. Since then, other practitioners have used this practice to invite offenders to reconsider their own actions, and imagine ways to make amends (Turner, 2007). Within a school and community theatre setting, teachers have used Boal's concepts to create an ensemble-based theatre that teaches students to create, rehearse, and present original work around social issues (Madell and Wolf, 2003; Rhod, 1998). Their work provides a model of group work, trust building, and preparing work for a public audience that will provide the structure for a group of students preparing to introduce

restorative practices within a school. Last, the work of Landay and Wooton (2012) in the Performance Cycle provides the key structural ingredient of how to digest complex texts (as students examine past literature on restorative work) and introduces the element of reflection at each stage. These elements of theatre and performance provide an emotionally grounded platform for the work of young restorative practitioners, and a foundation that will help build the trust and confidence to build a successful restorative program.

Summary

In Chapter Two, the research focused on models of restorative justice training for staff and students. The theory reviewed in Chapter Two shows that restorative practices are often similar to best teaching practices, and that the specific steps of a restorative circle would need to be explored in depth. Some of the main reasons restorative programs fail include: a lack of vertical collaboration between students, staff, and families; not enough time given to the details and logistics of how a restorative program will use resources; and the failure to root restorative practices in racial justice work or name the reasons why the school is in need of restorative work. Key terms like Social Emotional Learning were defined, and various structures to support student written lessons were explored. Last, I explained how theatre can provide a model to support the group work needed to create a safe enough environment for students to take on leadership roles within a restorative program. In Chapter Three I will describe the curriculum project in detail. And finally, in Chapter Four, I will discuss the outcomes of implementing the project and reflect on my learning, as well as the collective experience of the student and staff participants.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Overview

My project is creating two units of curriculum where students develop the skills and habits needed to become leaders for social change within the school. My lessons will focus on how to bring students together as a group, how to build trust and safe space, and how to discuss issues around race, identity, and positional power that influence the work of a Critical Ethnic Studies class. Students will then create their own lessons and workshops, including an option about restorative circles and restorative practices, which they will then teach in Crew, our school's Advisory or Homeroom.

My research question is: *How can student-written lessons establish a culture of Critical Ethnic Studies and restorative practices in a middle and high school?* Chapter Three is an overview of my curriculum project, and examines the foundational theories that ground this action research. The Framework section is structured with a series of guiding questions: *How do we create a structure for students to take leadership, specifically in restorative practices? How do we ensure the safety of those who are most vulnerable and marginalized first? What does accountability look like while maintaining relationships?* Finally, *As a performing arts teacher, how can I work with students to create a curriculum rooted in love and justice?*

The Participants and Audience sections will lay out the demographics of the setting where this project will take place, and the intended audience. I will briefly discuss the forms of assessment I will use to collect data on this process. At the end, I will summarize my project and preview Chapter Four. The blend of performing arts and

student-centered leadership in this project lays a strong foundation for the beginning of a Critical Ethinic Studies course, and a Restorative Program. The goal of this project is ultimately to center the joy and safety of students of color and marginalized students within our school community. This chapter clarifies the details of how this will be possible.

Project Description

For my capstone project, I wrote a curriculum that prepares students to take on leadership roles in implementing activism projects, including introducing restorative circles in a 6-12 school. The lessons are based in Arts Literacy and Theater for Social Change. They focus on building community, creating a safe space, and educating students about restorative practices and Circles. The needs assessment for the students will be verbal feedback, journal entries, and surveys. During this time, students identify their own needs and the needs of the school at large. They will look at situations that a restorative circle could address, and work with a team of community members (staff, families, and admin) to consider how to present those topics to a Crew.

After these first six weeks of curriculum, students will write Professional Development (PD) & lessons on restorative practices to be taught to students in Crew. Crew is my school's term for a daily Advisory class with a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) focus. Students will then create Crew lessons that focus on how to build community and safe space, and will model or act out scenarios of restorative circles. Students will design these lessons themselves, based on example lessons and with the review of their crew advisor. Special attention will be given to how to process feelings through trauma-informed techniques. The goal of this part of the project is for student

created lessons to provide a safe space for questions about how a Restorative Circle

works. This project will introduce students to their summative activism project.

Framework

Lessons in this curriculum were developed with the *Understanding by Design*

framework (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Beginning with state standards, I explain the

ways students' knowledge will transfer outside the classroom. I explore understandings

and essential questions for the two major units, and then describe the assessments that

will be used. The formatting used is a version I formatted based on McTighe's unit plan

formats. For the daily lesson plans, the primary structure used was the

Ignite/Chunk/Chew/Review format used in *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*

(Hammond, 2015). Hammond notes that, "As a culturally responsive teacher, you should

be planning instruction so that students move through the brain's three stages of

information processing—input, elaboration, and application"(128). She describes these

"macro-level instructional strategies" as a frame to ensure students are processing new

learning through their own cultural framework.

In the following section, I use the questions I posed at the beginning of the text to explore

the framework of the project itself:

Question 1: *How do we create a structure for students to take leadership in*

restorative practices? The school I teach in is part of Expeditionary Learning, a network

of schools that promotes project based learning. One of its core texts is *Leaders of Their*

Own Learning, and how we promote student leadership and meaningful learning is a

cornerstone of the school's philosophy. One of the guiding questions for my curriculum

capstone is, *How do we create a structure for students to take leadership in restorative*

practices? I will base my student curriculum on Emdin's model of the Cogen, a method in which he meets regularly with students to gain feedback on curriculum. The Cogen prepares students to take on the role of co-teacher of the content. Student written lessons are created through a cogenerative dialogue between teacher and student to review content for relevancy, and then a teacher collaboration with the student to co-teach lessons (Emdin, 2016). This method allows students to bring their own cultural lense to restorative practices, and later their activism projects. It will also create a model where students, teachers, and staff collaborate to introduce restorative practices to each Crew.

Question 2: *How do we first ensure the safety of those who are most vulnerable and marginalized? What does accountability look like while maintaining relationships?* Restorative practices require a shift in process and a shift in power to be successful. In Lyubansky's article "How to Keep Your Restorative Justice Program from Failing", he cites a lack of *vertical collaboration* between students, families, and staff. The article defines *vertical collaboration* as planning with the people this process is for, engaging students, families, staff, teachers, and administrators in imagining what the better version looks like (2021, p.41). Essentially, the community helps to shape the program for itself, rather implementing a plan created by administration or restorative practitioners alone. Identifying who holds positional power within the group (identity markers such as race, gender, class, and hierarchical power) is an important step because it challenges those with power to listen, and those without positional power to take up space. Texts such as *This Book is Anti-Racist* (Jewell & Durand, 2020) supports this work for students, while texts such as *My Grandmothers Hands (*Menakem, 2017). can provide the framework for parents or staff to do their own work in naming their identity, which is necessary for the

work. A collaborative process to determine new norms will need to take place, both with those with structural power (district & building admin, some teachers) and those with informal power (students, parents, most teachers, staff).

Based on this research, the project curriculum charts out a student-centered process, which then calls in families, restorative practices trainers in the community, staff, teachers, and admin for support. Placing students at the center of a slow shift towards incorporating restorative practices prioritizes the people the system will be made for, and gives power to those who often hold the least power within the system. Any group that implements a restorative process must name the systemic issues of racial injustice they seek to correct. According to Darling in *Social Justice in Restorative Justice Practices Trainings in California K-12 Public Schools*, "the findings showed that without acknowledging the dominant punitive culture in schools and identify restorative justice practices as an alternative culture to interrupt the criminalization and exclusion of students, restorative trainings are not actively working towards systemic change." (Darling, 2019, p.5) The students who I believe will be most helpful in this process are students who have been impacted by the punitive disciplinary system, students who are able to identify issues around racial injustice, and students who have the desire to make change. One of the key tenets of participation in beginning a restorative program for any students, staff, or parents and guardians will be the ability to name and investigate their own desire for addressing issues around racial injustice in the school system. This would be necessary for any students interested in continuing this work as a part of their activism projects.

Question Three: Last, a final guiding question for the curriculum capstone is: *As a performing arts teacher, how can I work with students to create a curriculum rooted in love and justice?* Theatre is an effective tool and model for restorative practices, which has been studied by several practitioners. Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* brought forth the concept of Forum Theatre, which asks the question, how can you act out an injustice and then talk through the ways to make it right? (Boal, 1985). His model of using performance as a tool to empower people to create their own definition of justice has become a standard for correctional and school settings as a way to explore restorative justice (Burton, B. & O'Toole, J., 2005; Turner, J., 2007). Performing arts practices provide a variety of tools that support the social emotional learning necessary for restorative practitioners: it encourages daily use of the circle, games to build trust, cites the body as the source of knowledge, and it is about building community in order to address difficult topics (Madell, J. & Wolf, J., 2003; Rhod, M., 1998). The knowledge I will be able to bring as a theatre practitioner and educator will make this work possible.

Setting and Participants

Setting

My school is a small school within a large urban district. We have around 450 students in grades 6-12. Our school is part of the Expeditionary Learning network, which focuses on project-based learning and Crew, a daily advisory period with a Social-Emotional focus. We are also based in Open school philosophies, that students should be able to lead their own learning.

According to our district's data center, the racial makeup of our school is 58% White, 16% Hispanic/Latine, 8% Asian, 8% Black or African American,1% North

American Indigenous or Alaskan Native, and 10% students who are two or more races.

Compared to the district overall, 22% White, 14% Hispanic/Latine, 30% Asian, 25%

Black/African American, 8% Two or More Races, 1% North American Indigenous or

Alaskan Native. Our school has 18% of students with Special Education status, versus the

16% District wide. Our student body has 29% of students on the Free Reduced Lunch

program vs. 61% District wide. For our Multi-Language Learners (MLL) statistics, 81%

of students speak English as their home language vs 59% district wide. Our school has

458 students out of the 34,185 students in the district.

Based on these numbers, our school is comparatively wealthy (based on free

reduced lunch numbers) and White (58% vs 22%) compared to the majority of district

schools. Within that reality, students of color make up only 42% of the student

population, but account for the majority of the disciplinary cases. Currently, our school

behavior policies most often impact students of color who are already in the minority at

our school. The school has many restorative practices in place, such as meeting in circles,

valuing relationships, and making space for social emotional learning and community as

a core value. However, these community values are not currently reflected in our

behavior policies, which largely follow the standard district guidelines. While we recently

gained a behavior specialist who is trained in restorative practices, we would need a

school wide understanding of restorative practices to implement a cultural shift to using

Restorative Circles. Because we are an Expeditionary School, we can rely on the work of

others in the network to model how student leadership can help integrate restorative

practices through Crew (Berger, Vilen, & Woodfin, 2020).

Participants

The audience for the curriculum is a class of high school students taking a Critical Ethnic Studies class. The class size will be about 38-42 students, grades 9-10; in the activism section of the class, we will look at how we can address racial and social injustice through implementing restorative practices within our school. Students will have the option to explore this further in their own activism project. One of the possible outcomes of this is to encourage student leadership around restorative practices. To do that, I would encourage a diverse range of students, including students who represent the diversity of race, gender, abilities, and economic status at our school. Students would need to desire to co-create a process that will work to undo racial injustice in the school's disciplinary system.

This will include students who:

- Have gone through the school's disciplinary process themselves

- Are able and willing to openly and respectfully discuss topics of racial injustice, identity, and historical context of injustice

- Are interested in taking on a leadership role in the school

- Want to mentor other students in a peer mediator role

- Are empathetic and show they are able to listen to others

- Who will work with staff and families to make change

- Students who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color will be prioritized

- Students who identify as part of the SPED program will be prioritized

The audience for the lessons the students will create is the entire school community through our Advisory class called Crew. The goal is each Crew will be able

to learn what a restorative circle is, participate in a model example, and ask questions before they would participate in one. For this project, the audience will be a focus group of three different Crews, and the school staff. This will allow students to get feedback on what makes this process clear, accessible, and safe for everyone in our school community.

Timeline

The timeline for this project will begin in June of 2022 and ultimately conclude in December of 2023, though the scope of this paper will only go up through the Summer of 2022. During the Summer I wrote a curriculum that puts students in a leadership role in a Critical Ethnic Studies class, with a project focused on implementing restorative practices within a 6-12 school. In the fall of 2022, I will deliver the curriculum to a class of students grades 9-12. During the first half of the year, I will work to develop an advisory board of staff, admin, community, and families to support students in implementing these policies. I will also connect with restorative practices practitioners within my school district and the community.

In September the curriculum will cover how to build community and trust, establish guidelines, and the basic tenets of restorative practices. Special attention will be paid to building a safe space to discuss identity, positional power, and racial and social justice within a school setting. I will assess student learning through verbal feedback, weekly journals, and anonymous surveys. In October, students will identify a problem in school they would like to address through activism and begin their own project cycle. In November students will develop workshops of their projects for the whole class to participate in. Students who choose to explore Restorative Practices will begin to create their own lessons, specifically on the use of restorative circles.

In December, students will present their activism workshops to their own class. By January of 2023, they will test these lessons out on three focus groups of students and lead one professional development for the staff. We will assess these focus groups both through verbal and written feedback in survey form. In the second semester of the year, students will continue to implement lessons during Crew (Advisory) throughout the school year, as well as recruit and mentor new students into leadership roles for the following year.

Assessment

During the delivery of the curriculum I develop for the first six weeks, the assessment will focus on the students personal development and understanding of the content on restorative practices. During this time I will focus on two forms of assessment. Students will use reflective journaling to consider their own personal background and what ideas and concepts they are bringing to this work. This will help me understand student's identities, backgrounds, and what is most important to focus on. There will also be surveys or "exit tickets" to review their response to the in class work, so I can be a responsive teacher and address their needs throughout the process. As they shift into becoming the peer-teachers, their drafts of lesson plans, improvised scenes, and group reflections will become the assessments of their work.

Once we shift into presenting student's work to each other and to focus groups within the school, the assessment method will shift. Each session will end with time for verbal feedback, and a series of guided questions to determine the participant's experiences. There will also be a follow up survey sent the day after the class, to give

participants time to process and to provide written feedback as well. The students will take this information, and use it to assess their own lessons and make adjustments.

Summary

In Chapter Three I described the project in detail. The curriculum covers the first six weeks of school, and uses theatre practices to teach students how to build community, identify restorative practices, and engage in issues of identity and self reflection. In the following months, students will create and implement their own lessons around restorative practices, and then choose their own topic for an activism project. Finally, students will share these lessons out with focus groups and staff, and evaluate feedback to adjust the lessons they will teach to the entire student body. In Chapter Four, I will discuss the outcomes of implementing the project and reflect on my learning.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Overview

For my project, I created two units of curriculum for an Critical Ethnic Studies class that focused on creating safe space, supporting student activism, and planted the seeds of a Restorative Justice program at a 6-12 school. My research question was: *How can student-written lessons establish a culture of Critical Ethnic Studies and restorative practices in a middle and high school?* In this Chapter, I will reflect on my project. I will discuss the process of creating the project, and the limitations I encountered when sharing it with others. There will be a review of the literature from Chapter 2, and a review of where it supported my findings or diverged from them. I'll give an overview of the implications for my project, and the limitations I discovered. I'll preview next steps and policy implications, and finish with an overall summary of the project.

This project began as a way to explore the intersection of restorative practices and the arts. I knew I wanted to use the roleplay and self-regulation skills we use in theatre to help students and staff learn to calm down and breathe their way through conflict. Initially, I was hoping to lead a small group of students in learning restorative practices to share out with the school. As I got clear on what I wanted, the right frame for the work showed up, even if it wasn't what I was expecting. While I was in the early planning stage of this project, I was offered the opportunity to teach Critical Ethnic Studies the following school year. This expanded the lens of this work from a small group of students to the entire 9th and 10th grade. I was able to frame the ideas of restorative justice within the context of Critical Ethnic Studies. This led into focusing on two units:

an introductory unit on arts and identity, and a closing unit on student activism. This gave

the work more meaning and relevance, and it also pushed me to consider how to use my

arts skills to build community in a class where we will be diving into difficult topics and

need to create safe space.

By creating a unit where students focus on their own activist work, I was

reminded that one of my main goals is to empower students to make change. While I

hope to explore the place of restorative practices in our school this coming school year,

now I view this project more as a jumping off place for students to take the lead in

identifying the school's needs. I am less attached to the idea that they will teach lessons

to Crews about de-escalation tactics and restorative circles, though will still use this as a

model of how I envision taking action within our own community. If students have

different ideas about how to improve their school community, then the focus will shift.

The most important thing I learned from this project is to involve the community and to

let students lead.

My literature review focused on ways to develop a successful restorative program

in a school community, based largely on the work of Lyubansky (2021), Darling (2019),

and Gilzene (2021). The key takeaways included building a team to guide decision

making, mapping a spiral curriculum for growth of the program over years, considering

how resources of time, space, and people will be used, and always grounding the work in

identifying the racial bias within the school system so it can be named and dismantled.

While this section is important, the focus of my project became centered around writing

the curriculum itself rather than the implementation. However, it did shape the way I

consider building the CES course: I accounted for leaving room at the beginning to build

community and practice naming identities and identifying injustices. I sought out teachings about how to better bring in community members, other artists, family members, and staff into the classroom. I tapped into the network of communities already engaged in creating content for the CES courses and the history of Ethnic Studies. Last, I have been much more intentional in considering how the classes will need resources in terms of space in the classroom, budget to support community guest speakers, and what supports students will need to deeply engage in the history of oppression and resistance of communities of color. This background work isn't as apparent in the curriculum, but shapes the context it will be delivered in. And, as I look at how restorative processes can be embedded in this work, this section of the literature review gives me the framework I need to step into the conversation of restorative justice within the schools.

Another divergence that led to growth was in the section on Student Written Lessons and Social Emotional Learning. By opening up from only student written lessons to student activism projects, it showed me how students could explore their interests through the class rather than only as part of a cogen or a small group in dialogue about lessons. While I still plan to use Emdin's Cogen method to get feedback on my lessons, I am excited to integrate more of the student-teaching into the structure of the class itself.

The section that informed my work most directly was Theatre for Social Change. Because of my own familiarity with the trust building work done in these settings, that became the most important frame for the opening six weeks. The community building sections of Madell and Wolf (2003), Rhod (1998, and Landay and Wooton (2012) all came together to help structure the Identity Project section. This work of building trust, teaching students how to listen to each other's stories, and how to breathe and regulate

through difficult conversations is, I believe, some of the most essential work we can do as humans. The role playing section on restorative practices became a much smaller part, but an essential lesson as a model in the activism section. I am excited to expand the role of the arts in the Critical Ethnic Studies space by looking into how different art forms can help inform the work as well, both by connecting with community members, but also by supporting students in sharing their own strengths and skills.

Limitations that came up during the project really just became opportunities. Rather than writing only to build a restorative practices program, I opened up to a Critical Ethnic Studies frame for a class. Initially, I planned to execute the project and reflect back on it in the fall of 2022, but instead discovered I could complete the class during the summer. This gave me the time to write a curriculum, which honestly rarely happens during the school year beyond "what are we doing next week?" I did discover there were personnel changes at my school that impacted the way I considered building a restorative program, but this also reminded me that a program can't be built around one person. The time to research I was afforded this summer also continually reminded me that I am just stepping into a larger history of change within the school system, and to reach out to other schools, teachers, and community members already doing this work. To take time and let the process unfold rather than expect that I can chart a path for it, ideas I'm always pulling from *Emergent Strategies* (Brown, 2017*)*.

This project is a curriculum that is only half completed, in the sense that it relies on the input of the community to make it whole. My next steps are to put the project into practice. Over the coming weeks, I will be able to engage more fully with the district's CES curriculum offerings, community partners, and student leaders to flesh out what the

content and structure of the course looks like. What I have been able to develop is an arts and identity-focused first few weeks, and a structure that incorporates breath, movement, and creativity into a Critical Ethnic Studies framework. Within the scope of this project I was not able to connect with others around restorative practices that are already in place within the district. My next steps will include connecting with the district community advisory board, teachers and schools that are already in process of using restorative practices, and to engage members of my own school community to bring this into our school. Having the structure of the class and the activism project as a way to hold myself accountable and engage students in this work is exciting. Finally, the student activism projects themselves hold the power to make substantial change within the school. The work I've done to create a structure to the daily lessons and the course itself will offer the support needed to help students realize and take action to make the change they want to see.

The policy implications of this project are wide. The most concrete being the recommendations for how to roll out a restorative practice plan at a school, and giving funding to offer the personnel, the community and family partnerships, and the student work needed to make it a reality. The most important piece I would hope to put into policy in schools is to hire more staff who are paid better, always prioritizing hiring and supporting teachers and staff of color. Funding can also look like providing funding for food when we host community and family partners and offering students credit for their work on restorative programs. It can look like offering paid internships for college students and trained community members to offer support to restorative programs. It looks like shifting from using punitive measures like suspensions, dismissals, or having

police or security officers as a behavior management strategies. It looks like creating classrooms that first center students' humanity, including the need to breathe, to move, to feel uncomfortable emotions, and to take time to rest and reflect throughout the day. Most importantly, it looks like continuing a deep interrogation into how to create safe spaces for students, staff, and families of color within our schools. If education is truly meant to be liberatory, then we must put our time, resources, and energy into listening to and learning from communities of color. For me, that begins in my classroom, but extends into the larger communities' ability to breathe, to listen, and see each other's humanity as sacred.

Summary

In this section, I reviewed the growth of my project from a little seed dreamed up in winter to a fully grown curriculum ready to harvest in the fall of 2022. I reviewed how my project about restorative justice and restorative practices grew into a Critical Ethnic Studies curriculum. The focus on incorporating arts, movement, student activism, and community engagement were the biggest takeaways from this process. The Literature Review focused on the process of bringing a restorative practices program into a school, but the result will be equally useful for how to incorporate a Critical Ethnic Studies program into the district. I considered the next steps of implementing the curriculum and continuing to develop it through interacting with other teachers, district planners, students, families, artists, and community members. The policy implications include creating more funding for more staff, always, but also considering offering funding to support people in engaging with the school. Last, I emphasized that the goal of this project is ultimately to decrease the role of punitive measures in a school setting, increase

the time and space we give to listening and holding space for each other's humanity, and centering the voices and needs of communities of color.

Personally, I am relieved to be putting the solitary and computer-based part of this research to bed. This project reminded me how much more I learn in community and in dialogue with others. Throughout the pandemic and Uprisings of 2020, I saw how much the community needs this body-based, people-based approach to school. So I am elated to get the work up on its feet, and allow it to grow through interacting with students, families, other teachers, and the world. To tie together the threads of art, justice, and community, I'll leave you with part of a poem:

Could We Please Give the Police Department to the Grandmothers

by Artist and Activist Junauda Petrus

Could we please give the police departments to the grandmothers?

Give them the salaries and the pensions and the city vehicles, but make them a fleet of vintage corvettes, jaguars and cadillacs, with white leather interior. Diamond in the back, sunroof top and digging the scene with the gangsta lean.

Let the cars be badass!

You would hear the old school jams like Patti Labelle, Stevie Wonder, Anita Baker and Al Green. You would hear Sweet Honey in the Rock harmonizing on "We who believe in freedom will not rest" bumping out the speakers. And they got the booming system.

If you up to mischief, they will pick you up swiftly in their sweet ride and look at you until you catch shame and look down at your lap. She asks you if you are hungry and you say "yes" and of course you are. She got a crown of dreadlocks and on the dashboard you see brown faces like yours, shea buttered and loved up

And there are no precincts.

Just love temples, that got spaces to meditate and eat delicious food. mangoes, blueberries, nectarines, cornbread, peas and rice, fried plantain, fufu, yams, greens, okra, pecan pie, salad and lemonade.

Things that make your mouth water and soul arrive.

All the hungry bellies know warmth, all the children expect love. The grandmas help you with homework, practice yoga with you and teach you how to make jamabalaya and coconut cake. From scratch.

When your sleepy she will start humming and rub your back while you drift off. A song that she used to have the record of when she was your age. She remembers how it felt like to be you and be young and not know the world that good. Grandma is a sacred child herself, who just circled the sun enough times into the ripeness of her cronehood.

She wants your life to be sweeter.

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