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Diverse Students' Perceptions of the Proactive Circle Process in a Restorative Practice Intervention

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A research project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Restorative practices have been introduced as a school wide intervention to reduce the cultural disparity in school discipline. The purpose of this intervention is to promote healthy student-teacher relationships. The research on restorative practices as an intervention for minority students has shown to be effective, through school discipline data and teacher report. The current study used individual interviews with high school students to explore their perception of restorative practices, specifically proactive circles, and its effectiveness. Results showed cultural differences in student's understanding or perception of proactive circles. Additionally, participants believed proactive circles helped or improved their communication skills and social relationships in some way. However, students relied on the amount they verbally participated in class as an indicator of improved communication and participants did not indicate if improved social relationships extended outside of the classroom. Finally, participants believed proactive circles to be effective, but had difficulty identifying the underlying purpose.

Diverse Students' Perceptions of the Proactive Circle Process in a Restorative Practice Intervention

The origins of restorative practices can be found in various indigenous cultures, including Native American, First Nation Canadian, African, Asian, Celtic, Hebrew, and Arab. In the United States, restorative practices were adapted in the 1970's with mediation between victims and offenders. Positive outcomes from mediation led several to victim-offender reconciliation programs around North America and Europe. Family Group Conferences were established in 1989 in New Zealand in order to address indigenous children being removed from their homes. In 1999, the International Institute of Restorative Practices was founded. The institute provides an accredited graduate program for those who wish to continue their education in restorative practices and become a teacher of the process (Wachtel, 2017).

Restorative practices are based on principles and processes that emphasize positive relationships as the focus to building community and repairing relationships when harm has occurred. The concept of restorative practices came out of Restorative Justice, which is a program targeted for children, adolescents or your adults who have committed an offence and are facing adjudication in the justice system. Both processes are similar in that they look to identify the victim and how the victimizer has affected the community with his or her actions. Restorative justice is a reactive process that focuses on "restoring" justice after an act has occurred, while restorative practices is structured to be preventative as well as reactive (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016). Restorative practices emphasizes the violation of relationships and obligations rather than legal violations, but as in restorative justice, the victim is prioritized over the offender. Also, it is used to create opportunities for

students to be cautious of how their behavior impacts others. It is used to build responsibility and accountability for student's actions as well as enhance problem solving ability. Restorative practices seeks to improve school safety, assist in building relationships, and foster positive results for students and the community (Kidde & Alfred, 2011).

How Restorative Practices are used in the Schools

In the schools, restorative practices are used in a multi-tiered system, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) (Kidde & Alfred, 2011). This system of support is divided into three tiers: universal, secondary, and tertiary, with tertiary being the highest. Each tier indicates a higher level of needed support. With this multi-tiered system, students are given the opportunity to learn effective communication and problem solving skills. Since this process attempts to be preventative, restorative practices begin in the classroom at the universal level. This may look like a simple check-in/check-out system or teachers may engage students with a circle. When students seek more support, teachers may talk with them one-on-one using affective "I" statements that promote positive communication and not trouble. If a student commits an act against the code of conduct a formal conference may convene.

Circle Process

Circles can be used for many different reasons; talking, understanding, community building, sentencing, etc. In the schools, teachers can use circles at the beginning of the day, end of the day, or just any time someone needs to effectively communicate. This process is structured with an opening, talking piece, facilitator, and closing. The talking piece is used to ensure everyone is respected and heard during their time of sharing in the circle. Rules or

boundaries should be set for when a student is holding the talking piece. The facilitator is responsible for providing a safe and honest space for participants to share and feel welcomed. Their goal is not to move the conversation in any particular direction, but to foster positivity. The circle process is used at the universal level in schools and emphasizes the building of relationships in the classroom (Pranis, 2005).

Informal Conference

Informal conferences are used at the next level in a multi-tiered system and consists of one-on-one communication. If a student is acting out or displaying inappropriate behavior, the teacher may discuss their behavior using affective “I” statements and allow the student to respond doing the same. Questions that may be asked during this one-on-one conference may include: “Who do you think was affected?”, “How do you feel about what happened?”, or “What were you looking for when you chose to act?”. This process allows the teacher to demonstrate their care or concern about the student, and the student the opportunity to effectively communicate to the teacher their thoughts and feelings with the intentions to result in an agreed upon outcome (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015).

Formal Conference

At the third tier, formal conferences take place with a trained facilitator leading the conference. Usually, participants in a formal conference include: the facilitator, the victim, the victimizer, both sets of parents, other persons who may have witnessed the act or been indirectly effected by the act, and other community members, such as a teacher. Formal conferences encompass the same values as circles and informal conferences. The purpose is to communicate the harm that has been done, how it has effected the community and its members. The result is to come up with a solution that the entire group agrees will “restore”

the community and its members back to normal or daily life. Sometimes the conference results in community service for the victimizer, or sometimes concludes with a written apology. Formal conferences seek to repair and prevent harm (Kidde & Alfred, 2011).

Cultural Disparity in School Discipline

In a literature review, Kline (2016) found that African American males were 55% more likely to be referred to the school office than White males. Research has also found that African American students receive more severe punishment and more frequently are punished for less serious offenses than White students (Payne & Welch, 2010). Schools that operate with a zero tolerance policy were made with intentions to establish school safety and remove students with disruptive behavior. In order to do so, schools set specific punishments for each type of disciplinary infractions. This arguably “harsh” policy aligned with the political climate of wanting to rid neighborhoods of drugs and crime. The zero tolerance policy established mandated expulsion for behaviors including fighting and gang related activity, as well as drug use (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Payne and Welch (2010) state that predominately minority schools are more likely to use this type of disciplinary policy. McNeal and Dunbar (2010), examined the perceptions of minority students in 15 different urban Midwest high schools. Participants included 90 students’ ages ranging from 16 to 19, with 85% women and 15% men. The majority of students were African American with 1% of the sample identifying as Hispanic. Students were reported to have above average academic achievement and were also in an enrichment program. Through focus groups and interviews, the researchers presented the students with a brief summary of the meaning of zero tolerance policies. They found a difference in the fundamental philosophy between what zero tolerance policies purpose and overall outcome. The three main themes that were

discovered included “inadequate security, quality of security services, and lack of consistency in policy enforcement”. In other words, McNeal and Dunbar (2010) found that students did not feel safe with zero tolerance policies in place as they were intended. Zero tolerance policies leave little room for flexibility. Instead of teaching children how to solve problems and find solutions, it sends a message that they are the problem.

Restorative Practices in High Schools

Research by Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz (2016) looked at the implementation of restorative practices and student-reported teacher respect across ethnic groups. It also looked to find a difference in the amount of office referrals issued after the implementation of restorative practices. This study was conducted in two large diverse high schools in a small city in New Jersey. It took place during the first year restorative practices had been implemented in both schools. Participants consisted of <1% American Indian students, 3% Asian students, 54% White students, 31% Latino students, and 11% African American students. For this study the researchers used two groups: Latino/African American and Asian/White. Based on self-report surveys, researchers found that the implementation of restorative practices were associated with better teacher-student relationships. Results found that teachers issued less discipline reports to both groups after the implementation of restorative practices. This process allows the opportunity for teachers and students to foster a relationship that goes beyond academics.

Schools' Responses to Restorative Practices

In 2010, Payne and Welch wanted to evaluate racial threat, potential influences on school policy, and school disciplinary practices with students, parents, teachers, and administrators. The study specifically examined the relationship between school discipline

practices, different predictors related to school discipline, and how those predictors were related to punitive or restorative discipline practices. The researchers took a stratified sample from The National Study for Delinquency Prevention in Schools, which included a sample of 294 public secondary schools in the end. The authors administered a principal, student, and teacher questionnaires. The authors created five scales representing different levels of disciplinary responses that ranged from extremely punitive and zero tolerance, to more restorative and restitutive. Variables such as racial threat, student delinquency, crime salience and socio-economic status were controlled for in this study due to prior research that states these factors put students at greater risk for misbehavior. The authors used self-report measures to identify student delinquency and crime salience during the 12 months prior to the survey. Socio-economic status was accounted for by the amount of students receive free and reduced lunch, which is approximately 33% of the sample. Included in the controlled variables are Hispanics and male students due to the disproportionately high percentage of those two groups in this study (Hispanic students made up 10% of the schools in the sample; boys made up 39% of the schools population).

After controlling for multiple variables, Payne and Welch (2010) found that punishment tends to become harsher based on the use of just one disciplinary response. Results indicate that schools located in more disadvantaged communities with higher percentages of Black and Hispanic students have less effective principals and higher levels of misbehavior. At the same time, the authors found that these schools are more likely to seek training in discipline. Schools with majority minority students in disadvantaged areas were more likely to use more punitive discipline measures. However, schools with effective principals are more likely to use both types of disciplinary responses, punitive and restorative. Lastly, the authors found that harsher forms of punishment are not directly

related to a schools level of crime or delinquency, but rather are more likely to use restorative forms of punishment.

In addition to the research by Payne and Welch, a study conducted in Denver Public Schools looked at race as a contribution to students' risk for disciplinary action and the effects of alternative approaches to resolving discipline problems (Anyon, et al., 2014). The data included students enrolled in grades K through 12 during the 2011-2012 academic school year. The sample consisted of 58% Latino, 20% White, 15% Black, 3% Asian, and 3% Multiracial students. In this study, 51% of the students were female and 49% were male, with only 58% of the students identifying as native English speakers. Two percent of the students were identified as homeless during the school year and 67% percent of students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. Other demographics include: 13% of students in the gifted and talented program, 12% of students in special education, and 1% with a serious emotional disability. As for discipline, 12% of students in the district received office referrals for discipline issues. Fifty-three percent of those students were referred to the office more than once. Detrimental behavior, defiance, violations of the code of conduct, bullying, and possession/distribution of drugs were among the various reasons for office referrals during the school year. Almost half of the students (46%) who received office referrals received out of school suspension as a result of their misbehavior. The next highest consequence was referral to law enforcement (only 5%). Less than 1% of students were expelled. With regards to alternative suspension, 37% of students received in school suspension, 7% experienced restorative interventions, and 4% received behavior contracts. The authors used demographic and discipline records in a multilevel logistic regression to evaluate the data.

Similarly to previous research, the authors found that Black and Hispanic students were punished more harshly than their White peers for the same offenses. Interestingly they found that students with behavior problems are significantly less likely to experience more punitive forms of discipline if they have involved in intense interventions (Anyon, et al., 2014). If those intense interventions just happen to be restorative practices, the question is how are they being so effective? Are students taking these qualities taught through restorative practices, such as problem solving, and effective communication, and using them in their personal and social relationships? It's been proven through research the positive outcomes of using restorative practices as an alternate to punitive discipline practices, zero tolerance policies, and even reducing the cultural disparity in school discipline (Stewart Kline, 2016), but are the values of restorative practices being used and effective across cultures outside of discipline?

The present study

Schools are asking their staff and students to come together in the classroom and take time away from lessons to create a dialogue that promotes critical thinking and problem solving as a group or team. This practice creates the opportunity for others to learn about the views and perceptions of their peers and teachers. Macready (2009) states that, “restorative practices give primacy to social relationships”. This study seeks to discover if restorative practices has a positive impact for all students. Four research questions will be addressed and include:

1. Does culture have an impact on student's participation in proactive circles?

2. Does proactive circles have a similar impact across cultures?
3. Do proactive circles enhance students of all cultures peer relationships and interpersonal skills (i.e., communication and problem solving), and
4. What are the students overall perception of the effectiveness of restorative practices (proactive circles)?

Methods

Participants

For this study the examiner interviewed 15 students ranging from grades 9 – 12 at a large high school in central Virginia. This high school serves approximately 2,400 students with 133 faculty members and is the biggest school in its district. The participants were from two of the same teacher's classes. The two classes taught were World History and Personal Finance & Economics. Participants included one Asian student, three Caucasian students, four Hispanic students, and seven African American students. Participants consisted of five boys and ten girls.

The county used in this study is located in central Virginia, bordering the state's capitol. It currently has more than 59,000 students enrolled between 38 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, and 11 high schools. For the school year 2016-2017, The Virginia Department of Education reported that Chesterfield's student body is 52.50% White/Caucasian, 25.65% African America, 13.73% Hispanic, 4.33% two or more races, 3.43% Asian, 0.21% American Indian/Alaskan native, and 0.15% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

Materials

Interview Questions. Each interview consisted of the same 12 open-ended questions. All of the interview questions were presented orally. Interview questions are listed in Appendix A. To record data for this study, responses were audio recorded and written by hand on the interview form.

Procedure

All students to be included in the study remained anonymous to the researcher until parental consent forms were received. The researcher worked with one of the high school's world history and economics teacher to gain parental consent. The teacher had attended a two-day proactive circle training in the county where teachers of all grade levels are taught the purpose of proactive circles and how to facilitate proactive circles in their classrooms. The training consisted of a lot of role play among their colleagues. The teacher used for this study facilitates proactive circles in both her classes every class period. The class scheduled rotates between even and odd calendar days, therefore the participants do not engage in the circles every day, but every other day. Sometimes resulting in two times per week or three times per week. The teacher has been facilitating proactive circles every class period since the beginning of the school year.

The researcher attended two different classes to observe the students participate in a proactive circle and to give a brief description of the study. The researcher then passed out consent forms to all students present. The classroom teacher returned parent consent forms to the researcher. Only students whose parents gave consent were included in this study.

A student assent form was presented to the students whose parents provided consent, and the interview was conducted if assent was given. Participants were taken to a quiet office in the counseling office and told that they would be answering 12 questions about proactive circles, and their responses would be audio recorded and written down and kept confidential. The researcher then conducted one interview with each of the participants, lasting approximately 10 minutes. Interviews were conducted at a convenient time agreed upon by the student's classroom teacher. The queries, "What do you mean?" and "Can you explain?" were used when participants did not give full responses. At the end of the listed set of questions the researcher offered an opportunity for the participants to share any information about proactive circles they did not feel was shared during the interview.

Classroom Observation

In the two classes that were observed, the teacher facilitated the proactive circle at the beginning of each class. The students were asked to get in a circle and put all electronic devices away. The students then went over the circle norms, which included: no cellphones, only talk when you have the talking piece, and if you have a question or follow-up statement you must politely ask. Other norms included, being respectful of others opinions and ideas, keeping the comments said in the circle confidential among the class, and no offensive language. Once the norms were stated, the teacher would start the circle by proposing a question or asking the class if they have a question they want to propose. From there, the talking piece would be passed around and students had the option to respond or pass (the option not to respond).

Results

To analyze the data collected from interviews, common themes and categories of responses or frequently expressed ideas were obtained from the interview form. Similar ideas and responses were grouped together and reported using a cut-and-sort method. The cutting-and-sorting method first involved transcribing the audio files of each interview and combining responses with written responses. This was done to ensure the examiner received the accurate responses and did not miss anything while writing responses verbatim. Then, the researcher cut each response and pasted it to an index card and laid them on a desk. The researcher then sorted the cards into separate cards by ethnicity. From there, the researcher separated cards into separate piles based on common themes and frequently expressed ideas. The researcher decided that one response from a participant could be sorted and counted as multiple themes.

Research Question One

To explore the impact of culture on student's participation in proactive circles, participants were asked questions about their ethnicity, participation and likes/dislikes of the circles. Participants were first asked, 'Are you in active participant in proactive circles?' Out of the 15 participants, 13 (87%) responded that they were active participants in proactive circles. Of the two that indicated they are not active participants, one was Asian and the other was Hispanic.

In attempt to gain an understanding of why students may not participate, students were asked, 'What do you like and/or dislike about proactive circles?' The one Asian student

stated, “I like that, of course, everyone has a turn, everyone has a say. Most people don’t want to talk and that’s absolutely okay and that’s their choice. Sometime I dislike is that some of them don’t take it seriously, which kind of makes me frustrated because some others really take this as their go-to to vent”. Of the Hispanic students, 50% of the students do not dislike anything about the proactive circles. One student said, “There is nothing I don’t like. I like that it’s like a story. Each person has one sad or happy and you can express whatever and whenever and have the confidence to do so”. The other two students dislike 1.) The circle’s take up class time, and 2.) When others talk without the talking piece. Of the Caucasian students, one participant expressed, “I like them but I think they’re childish. It makes me feel like I’m back in Kindergarten”. The other Caucasian participants shared that the circles last too long and the third student stated that they dislike when other students don’t participate. Four out of the seven African American students reported no dislikes. The other three shared the common theme of disliking when other people either do not talk, or talk when they do not have the talking piece. One student said, “I don’t like how like the boys don’t really respond much. Like I would rather everybody like actually like say something. And I like that some people are comfortable enough with us now to say like deep things that’s like going in in their lives like that they probably wouldn’t say if they just met us”.

Research Question Two.

To address if proactive circles have a similar impact across cultures, students were asked about their perceived purpose of proactive circles, what they have learned in these circles, and about their views of their classmates. When asked ‘Why does your class participate in proactive circles?’ Almost half of the participants could identify a purpose

outside of venting and giving advice. Common themes from this question included trust, checking-in to see how students are doing, vent, gain advice, and getting to know classmates better. Of the three Caucasian students, two indicated the circles were to bring the class closer together and help through hard times, while the third Caucasian student reported having “no clue” why the class participated in proactive circles. Of the Hispanic students, three reported the purpose of proactive circles were to get to know each other better, help each other feel better, and give advice if needed. The fourth Hispanic student believed the purpose was to “talk confidentially and speak out”. Four of the seven African American students believed the purpose of proactive circles were to “check-in” with students about their day and life. The other three students believed the purpose was to vent and “get things off your chest”.

When asked, ‘What are some things you have learned in the proactive circles?’ Nearly all of the participants reflected on the information they have learned about their classmates individually. Some participant responses included, “So I’ve learned that people in our circle have very hard lives and I thought I had it hard and like when I learned about that I thought, ‘Wow, how can they get through that stuff by themselves’. So I’ve learned that there are a lot of strong people and that they are confident about themselves. I learned how to be stronger”, “Just seeing people and their stories behind them is completely different than what you would think”, “I learned that I’m not the only person that goes through really deep stuff or not the only one who has relief when I get it off my chest”, and “I learned to respect other’s decisions. In the beginning I use to push people to talk and have now learned to respect them passing to talk”.

When asked, ‘Since participating in proactive circles, has your view of your classmates changed? How?’ Nearly all of the participants reported having changed views of their classmates. On participant reports, “They have... it made me see that they’re just as human as I am and we all have feelings and should care for one another”. Another participant shared, “Yes. I have gotten to know everybody and was initially scared at how they were going to respond in the circles, but now we [the class] have something special that I don’t have with everybody else”.

Research Question Three.

In order to explore if students believed their peer relationships and communications skills improved, participants were directly asked about communication skills, social relationships, and their teacher relationship. When asked, ‘Do you think proactive circles have enhanced your communication skills? How?’ Essentially all of the participants believed the proactive circles have helped their communication skills in some way. “The circles have allowed me to open up more to people. I feel more likely to open up because I trust the people in my class”, “...the circles have helped me gain confidence in talking in general and I have created positive relationships with teachers and administrators”, “Yes. I am usually shy when meeting new people but the circles have made me more outgoing. I speak my opinion more rather than just agreeing with people”, are a few of the participant’s responses regarding enhanced communication skills from the proactive circles.

When asked, ‘Do you think proactive circles have improved your social relationships? How?’ About a quarter of the participants believes the proactive circles have improved their social relationships in some way. The general theme for participants that

believed proactive circles helped their social relationships referred to making friends in the class they never thought they would be friends with. For instance, one participant believed the circles have “been able to help make more friends. We say ‘hi’ to each other in the hallway or sometimes sit with each other at assemblies. The circles have helped make my relationships with peers more fluid”, “...the circle really brought friends together. Some of us didn’t have anything in common but we can still be friends because of the things we like, and the things we dislike, even though they’re different, we’re still friends”.

Participants were asked, ‘Do you think proactive circles have helped improve your relationship with your teacher? How?’ All of the students reported that proactive circles have improved their relationship with their teacher, except one. That particular student reported that their teacher does not share about her personal life. Other students reported their teacher creates an open, trusting environment by allowing students to talk freely and giving advice. The students who feel proactive circles have improved their teacher relationships also reported that the teacher creates a setting that is judgement free. Participant’s responses included, “Yes. She was more accepting if I had a problem with something and accepted me and made me feel special”, “Yes. I don’t really talk to teachers, but now that I know her better I can talk to her more about situations than other teachers”, and “Yes, because I know she is understanding and will help out anyone no matter what based on info shared in the circle, which is surprising since she’s only known us for a few months. She lets us know we can trust her because she trusts us”.

Research Question Four

In order to investigate student’s overall perception of the effectiveness of proactive circles, participants were directly asked, ‘Do you feel proactive circles are effective? How?’

All of the participants report that proactive circles are effective. An African American student reported that proactive circles “bring the class together and is a stress relief”.

Participants reported that the proactive circles were effective because the students are able to vent and discuss topics they may not feel comfortable talking about with other people or in a different setting. Interestingly, participants shared why/how the proactive circles were effective for them personally, but did not seem to grasp the purpose of the proactive circles. For instance, responses included, “Yes, because I can’t go a day without doing a circle because I’m so use to venting to people”, “They’re effective because when people talk about problems, people give solutions to help those who talk”, and “Yes because circles allow you to be more open and voice your opinion”.

When asked, ‘What do you believe to be the purpose of proactive circles?’ Only four participants (27%) made any reference to bringing the class closer together or building a positive connection with their peers and teacher (two African American and two Caucasian). The rest of the participants reported the purpose of proactive circles to be an opportunity for to the teacher to check-in with students and the students a chance to vent or get help/advice from their teacher and classmates. The four participants said, “Proactive circles are meant to bring classmates and teachers closer...”, “Proactive circles are to get an understanding of each other. We all have differences and similarities... it helps build relationships and allows us to have each other’s back. The circles have brought us closer together and has brought the class to one entity”, “The purpose is to let out anything you have and bring people closer together”, and “The purpose is to make you feel like you have a place in the school. You have a connection to such different groups but we all come together”.

Discussion

This study examined student's perspective of proactive circles across cultures. The purpose of proactive circles is to build relationships and practice effective communication in the classroom. Most of the research that discusses the effectiveness of this practices is viewed from the facilitator or teacher's perspective. The interviews conducted in the present study provide information about students' perspective.

Cultural differences were noted with regards to the students' perception of the purpose of proactive circles. Forty percent of the participants believed the purpose of proactive circles were to build trust and get to know each other, which is related to the intended purpose of building relationships. Of those participants, there cultural background included Asian, Hispanic, and Caucasian. African American participants were more likely to indicate that the purpose of the circles was to "check-in" or vent.

Eighty-seven percent of students report being an active participant in proactive circles. Asian and Hispanic participants were the few that indicated not being active participants in the circles. These results imply that Asian and Hispanic students display some hesitation to participate in proactive circles. Their reasoning for not participating involved other classmates not taking the circles serious and the time the circles take away from class.

Eighty-seven percent of the students indicated that the proactive circles had helped their communication skills in some way. When asked how, they stated the circles helped by allowing them to be more vocal and less shy when in class or around groups. So, their responses revolved around the act of talking, not necessarily the ability to communicate

more effectively. Seventy-three percent of participants believe proactive circles have improved their social relationships. Of those participants, their reasons revolved around the relationships they have made in their class, not outside of the class. Participants shared how they are now friends with their classroom peers with whom they typically would not have been. However, they did not indicate if these friendships extended outside of the classroom.

Overall, students believe proactive circles are effective because they have been able to openly discuss difficult topics; however, participants seemed to struggle with identifying the underlying purpose of proactive circles outside of the classroom.

Limitations and Considerations for Future Research

There are some limitations that should be addressed in the future. First, the research was conducted in one school in one school district. Thus, this project is as much about a specific implementation of restorative practices as it is about restorative practices themselves.

Second, an interview with or observation of the facilitator would have allowed us to understand how the proactive circles were introduced to the class. Although the teacher had been facilitating proactive circles since the beginning of the school year, it seemed that either the students lost track of the original purpose or it was not sufficiently well defined initially. Students believed the purpose was for the teacher to check-in with students or for them to get advice on aspects of their lives. This may have hindered student's perception of the effectiveness of proactive circles.

Additionally, if a major focus of future study is on cultural/racial differences, it would be necessary to select the study group more deliberately for racial/cultural

characteristics and to include more individuals within each racial/cultural group.

Particularly, more care is needed in the Hispanic group. Individuals from different countries come with different educational and social expectations, and there are large differences among first, second, and third generations in the US. It is noted that several of the students in this study had difficulty identifying their ethnicity, suggesting that the traditional categories may not be what this generation of high school students are using.

Finally, this study was exploratory. While the number of participants ($N = 15$) was well within the traditions of qualitative data analysis, future research may consider administering a student survey to a large, multi-district sample to follow up on the leads developed in this study: What do adolescents understand “improving communications” to mean? What does it mean in the age of social media to “improve social relations?” What would make communications/social relations generalize outside the school? What are the reason students might be hesitant to participate in proactive circle? And is this hesitation limited to Hispanic students?

Appendix A

1. What ethnicity do you identify with?
2. Why does your class participate in proactive circles?
3. Are you an active participant in these circles? (i.e., do you pass or talk?)
4. What are some things you have learned in the proactive circles?
5. Is what you learned something you can use every day? Please give an example.
6. Since participating in proactive circles, has your view of your classmates changed?
How?
7. What do you like and/or dislike about proactive circles?
8. What do you believe to be the purpose of proactive circles?
9. Do you feel proactive circles are effective? How?
10. Do you think proactive circles have enhanced your communication skills? How?
11. Do you think proactive circles have improved your social relationships? How?
12. Do you think proactive circles have helped improve your relationship with your teacher? How?

Appendix B

Parent/Guardian Informed Consent

Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

Your child is being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Shana Little from James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to discover the impact and effectiveness of Restorative Practices, specifically proactive circles, from a student's perspective. Restorative Practices emphasize positive relationships as the focus to building community and relationships. Proactive circles purpose is to foster positivity and build relationships within the classroom. This study will contribute to the researcher's completion of her Ed.S thesis.

Research Procedures

Should you decide to allow your child to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This study consists of an interview that will be administered to individual participants in a private location in the school. Your child will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to Restorative Practices, specifically proactive circles. Responses will be written down verbatim by the researcher and audio recorded. If you do not wish for your child to be audio recorded, responses will just be written down verbatim by hand.

Time Required

Participation in this study will require approximately 10 minutes of your child's time.

Risks

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life).

Benefits

There may be no personal benefit from your child's participation in this study. However, potential benefits from participation in this study include a chance for the county to hear and understand the student's perspective of the effectiveness and impact of proactive circles in the classroom.

Confidentiality

The results of this research will be presented at James Madison University's Graduate Symposium and possible conferences. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answers (including audio recordings, if applicable) will be destroyed immediately after analysis.

There is one exception to confidentiality we need to make you aware of. In certain research studies, it is our ethical responsibility to report situations of child abuse, child neglect, or any life-threatening situation to appropriate authorities. However, we are not seeking this type of information in our study nor will you be asked questions about these issues.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your child's participation is entirely voluntary. He/she is free to choose not to participate. Should you and your child choose to participate, he/she can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Shana Little
Graduate Psychology
James Madison University
littl2sm@dukes.jmu.edu

Ashton Trice
Graduate Psychology
James Madison University
540-568-8189
tricead@jmu.edu

Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject

Dr. David Cockley
Chair, Institutional Review Board
James Madison University
(540) 568-2834
cocklede@jmu.edu

Giving of Consent

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of my child as a participant in this study. I freely consent for my child to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

I give consent for my child to be audio recorded during their interview. _____
(parent's initial)

Name of Child (Printed)

Name of Parent/Guardian (Signed)

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix C

YOUTH ASSENT FORM (Ages 13-17)

CIRCLE TIME

We are inviting you to participate in this study because we are interested in your participation in restorative circles. Do circles help build relationships with your peers and teacher? Do circles help you problem solve? Is there something that prevents you from participating? This interview will take about 10 minutes of your time.

After the interview is complete, you will be able to give the researcher feedback about your experience. The primary reason for doing this interview is get a student's perspective of restorative circles.

The interview will be kept confidential. No information that individually identifies you will be used in the final write-up of this research. Responses will be written down verbatim and audio recorded. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, responses will just be written down verbatim by hand.

We have asked your parents for their permission for you to do this study.

If you have any questions at any time, please ask the researcher.

If you check "yes," it means that you have decided to participate and have read everything that is on this form. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form to keep.

_____ Yes, I would like to participate in the study.

I give assent to being audio recorded during this interview. _____ (initial)

Signature of Subject

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Shana Little
Department of Graduate Psychology
James Madison University
Email: littl2sm@dukes.jmu.edu

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